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Honouring Mystery:
The Evolutionary Fiction of Wayland Drew

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*Honouring Mystery:
The Evolutionary Fiction of Wayland Drew*

by

Andy Belyea

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Ottawa
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by
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ABSTRACT

As the environmental crisis worsens, the time has never been more ripe for a scholarly reclamation of Ontario writer and environmental activist Wayland Drew (1932-1998), known only marginally by Canadian literary scholars for two novels: *The Wabeno Feast* (1973) and *Halfway Man* (1989). In addition to these works, Drew published a trilogy, *The Erthring Cycle* (1984-86), which explores environmental holocaust, and several ecological essays, travelogues, and other nonfictional works. Forming a unique genre of “evolutionary fiction” rooted in the sciences of ecology and evolution and in his intimate knowledge of traditional aboriginal land practices, Drew stands alone in the Canadian literary tradition for making the global environmental crisis the central focus of his writing. His fictional and nonfictional oeuvre launches an unremitting critique of the anthropocentric discourses of humanism and reductivist science, as well as the current debates about cultural identity politics, in the interest of highlighting the “mystery” of evolutionary and cosmological history and our responsibility, as the now-dominant species, to pursue homeostatic living in order to protect the planet for the future of all biotic life. Moreover, Drew recognizes the irony that our species is driven by instincts that, if left unchecked, ultimately may lead to biospheric ruin: human curiosity and an urge for “progress,” for instance, must be restrained if we are to safeguard the future of the planet. Drew argues with a voice unique in the tradition of Canadian Literature that humans must embrace their evolutionary inconsequentiality, and nurture their connections with other lifeforms (via a philosophy of “mutual aid”), as part of a broader survival strategy. His sustained argument is that not only Western nations but all of the Earth’s denizens need to undertake a radical epistemological shift if we are to survive.

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To Wayland, whose passion for environmental change, belief in human benevolence, hope for the future, and cosmological reflections have been infectious, thank you from the interstices of language, where reality, you taught me, is so often found. To Gwen, and the rest of the Drew family, I am indebted for your insights and for discussing what I know are still in many ways very sensitive memories. Finally, I would like to thank, in advance, anyone who should be curious enough to pluck this dissertation from a shadowy shelf or cyberspatial circuit; I hope it contributes to the debate now facing our species about choosing limitation and a responsibility to posterity.

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As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications.

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 1859



Watching those poignant images of sea and forest and taiga recur again and again, he wondered at the threads and pulses that linked all of life. How easy it would be to yield to these. To listen only to the messages from the cells, and to allow oneself to be wrapped gently in the nucleic strands of instinct. . . . Life is short, too short to be anything but beautiful.

Wayland Drew, *The Erthring Cycle*, 1986

Preface: Because We Can

The sixth great extinction spasm of geological time is upon us, grace of mankind. . . . If there is danger in the human trajectory, it is not so much in the survival of our own species as in the fulfillment of the ultimate irony of organic evolution: that in the instant of achieving self-understanding through the mind of man, life has doomed its most beautiful creations. And thus humanity closes its door to the past. (Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* 343-44)

We are, despite all our great technological advances, still very much a simple biological phenomenon. Despite our grandiose ideas and our lofty self-conceits, we are still humble animals, subject to all the basic laws of animal behavior. Long before our populations reach the levels envisaged above [10 billion by 2050] we shall have broken so many of the rules that govern our biological nature that we will have collapsed as a dominant species. We tend to suffer from a strange complacency that this can never happen, that there is something special about us, that we are somehow above biological control. But we are not. Many exciting species have become extinct in the past and we are no exception. (Morris, *The Naked Ape* 163)

I knew if I could answer the question--Why was it that this frail and hairless biped, man, after several million years as an integral part of his ecosystem, went suddenly pathological, killing indiscriminately and unable to stop even when he threatened his own survival?--if I could answer that question then we might begin therapy for the pathology. (Drew, *The Erthring Cycle* 251)

Frederic Jameson's famous maxim, "Always historicize!" has become a mantra in modern liberal-humanist studies; it has been invoked repeatedly in cultural and social contexts, but the time has now come to begin considering it in terms of our cosmological evolution. As complex, exciting, and successful a species as we have become in the four-million years since having biologically separated from our *Australopithecus africanus* ancestors--a wink, on a 4.5 billion-year-old planet in a 13.7-billion-year-old universe comprised of 100 billion *visible* galaxies--only recently have we developed the means to

ensure our own evolutionary failure. Though we have been “civilized” for 12 000 years, only now are we beginning to question whether “ecologically our civilization is as mindless as a cancer” and whether “it will destroy itself by destroying its host” (Drew, “Killing Wilderness” 22). In Rachel Carson’s “A Fable for Tomorrow” in *Silent Spring* (1962), often acknowledged among environmental activists and ecological literary scholars as the founding text of the modern environmental movement for its scathing critique of the impact of DDT and other chemicals on the land, a “shadow of death” sweeps across rural America (Garrard 1-2). Four decades later, this shadow has become a blinding blight now spreading exponentially across the fragile planet: it took millions of years for humans to reach a population of 1 billion and become industrialized, and in the two centuries since 1800, we have more than sextupled to 6.5 billion (we have doubled since 1960 alone) and are on track to reach 10 billion by 2050.¹ We have become the planet’s most dangerous virus, or what Scott Freeman and Jon C. Herron call a “new extinction agent” that will “grow in intensity unless human population growth declines rapidly” (517).

Since the 1960s, the environmental movement has struggled to have its messages of limitation keep pace with the technologies borne from our instincts for curiosity and knowledge and which have underwritten the phenomena of overpopulation and resource depletion that now plague us. Our global population is so huge, and our technologies so efficient, that we are literally consuming the planet at an unimaginably exponential rate (Field 18). Atmospheric, oceanic, and terrestrial toxicity and despoliation, radiation poisoning, urban sprawl, nuclear accidents, chemical warfare, industrial spills, global warming, deforestation, desertification, oceanic overharvesting, and dramatic extinctions

of species are all the direct result of our dominance.² We can add to this the intense industrialization of East Asia, a global population growth of “247 new Earthlings every minute,” and the spreading “tide of profit- and growth-driven globalization that overwhelms the principle of long term sustainability, our best hope for the future” (Love, *Practical Ecocriticism* 14-15). As Lynn White Jr. observes in “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” “with the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no other creature than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order” (5). Ironically, getting humans to see themselves ecologically as “creatures” occupying a “nest” lies at the heart of the problem.

We are but one of anywhere between 30 and 100 million species on the planet, 99% of all species have already come and gone in Earth’s cosmological history, and Canadians and Americans, for instance, will live on average for a mere 74 years.³ Increasingly accurate scientific measurements of our species’ ecological footprint--which is now 35% larger than the globe’s carrying capacity--warn us almost daily of the consequences to the planet because of what most humans today still venerate as “progress” and “civilization.”⁴ Moreover, advances in such evolutionary sciences as geology, paleontology, biogenetics, ecology, cosmology, quantum physics, and psychology increasingly emphasize the transient nature of our cosmological existence and challenge both theological and humanistic notions of our importance. Still, this “strange complacency” Morris suggests that we have--that we transcend biology and ecology and are neither frail nor complicit in threatening our own survival--endures. It is fueled in many cases by what many see as “insufficient science,” the subject of which,

for instance, forms the basis of Theodore Goldfarb's *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Environmental Issues*. And yet, our current patterns of ecological destruction and overpopulation are tangible enough to lead E.O. Wilson, John Livingston, Martin Reese, Ronald Wright, Niles Eldridge, George Sessions, Vandana Shiva, and many other ecological and evolutionary scholars to argue that our species is rapidly facilitating a mass extinction--the only one to ever be caused by a species--to rival the largest five in our geological history:

There is little doubt left in the minds of professional biologists that Earth is currently faced with a mounting loss of species that threatens to rival the five great mass extinctions of the geological past. As long ago as 1993, Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson estimated that Earth is currently losing something on the order of 30,000 species per year--which breaks down to the even more daunting statistic of some three species per hour. Some biologists have begun to feel that this biodiversity crisis--this "Sixth Extinction"--is even more severe, and more imminent, than Wilson had supposed. (Eldredge n. pag.)⁵

Oddly, several million years of evolution have led us to a point where we now remain perpetually distracted on a daily basis by what we tell ourselves are immediate and pressing concerns, while our species' ecological pathology slowly leads to our self-extermination.

And what of this institution we call "the Humanities"? It continues to focus on humans, to merely tolerate science, and to struggle for social justice in the name of eighteenth-century declarations on the universality of rights, while paying little attention to the place that allows the human condition to unfold in the first place. As Cheryll Glotfelty observes in her introduction to the groundbreaking 1996 *The Ecocriticism Reader*, "although scholarship claims to have 'responded to contemporary pressures'

[citing Greenblatt and Gunn, *Redrawing the Boundaries*], it has apparently ignored the most pressing contemporary issue of all, namely, the global environmental crisis” (xv). Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells speak for many in lamenting how environmental and ecological concerns have thus far been deemed not to “belong readily to the conventional domain of ‘literature,’ so much as to ‘science’ or ‘politics.’ Literature, like other arts, has been positioned in British education as one of the ‘humanities,’ a humanizing sphere, a refuge from the harsher, depersonalized cultures of technology and business” (6). Though they refer to Britain specifically, Kerridge’s and Sammells’ remarks pertain to the vast majority of current Western humanist academic practices and their absence of an ecological presence of mind. Norbert Platz agrees:

Apart from a few noteworthy exceptions, the Humanities at North American as well as European universities have been deplorably remiss in dealing with the environmental crisis and investigating its philosophical implications. Living in an ivory tower and being absorbed in their own fashionable propensities, the Humanities in academia tend not to pay specific attention to the problem of ecological issues. (n. pag.)

E.O. Wilson, the founder of sociobiology and, with Richard Dawkins, perhaps the most famous and respected evolutionary theorist in Western society today, offers a timely challenge: “every college student should be able to answer the following question: What is the relation between science and the Humanities?” (*Consilience* 13). Regrettably, “the Humanities” as an entity has yet to even begin seriously probing the impact of modern science on the study of art and culture (as is the case, too, perhaps, with “the Sciences”). In *Home Place*, Canadian ecocritic Stan Rowe argues, “After centuries of neglect and mistreatment, the global ecosystem is coming into its own, revealed as the highest value object we can know . . . Home Place is Earth Space” (5). The time is ripe for

Humanities' scholars to begin probing how the stories we tell ourselves influence our perceptions, understanding, and mistreatment of this object.

In fact, the study of humanity in all of its manifestations is poised for a radical reconfiguration in the 21st century, as ecological and evolutionary sciences force us to consider the planet less as grist for our economic or humanist mills and more as both the literal cause and extension of our being. The work of Canadian writer Wayland Drew (1932-1998) has never been more relevant than in this present-day context of environmental deterioration, for throughout his writing, he stresses the urgent need we have to begin thinking and acting *as* a species to begin changing our most fundamental assumptions about the human condition and its purposes, in order that we might come to finally accept that although "man's existence was insignificant; his responsibility was inestimable" (*The Erthring Cycle* 302). Throughout Drew's unique form of evolutionary fiction, he emphasizes the tensions borne from the need to accept our ecological responsibilities as the now-dominant species despite our cosmological evolutionary irrelevance. For Drew, we have become so obsessed with the details of daily life that we have lost all sense of the perspective that matters most: one that emphasizes the mystery that we are here at all, respects the utter fragility of our existence, and details our duty to protect all biotic and abiotic life on the planet simply because, as his writings repeatedly suggest, we *can*. Our success from hereon in will take nothing less than a Copernican transformation of thought.

Notes

¹ “Population Reference Bureau.” <<http://www.prb.org/Content/NavigationMenu/PRB/Educators/Human_Population/Population_Growth/Population_Growth.htm>>. Accessed 15 May 2006.

² Eldridge 152, 174 and Love 15. See also Arthur S. Boughey and Michael P. Branch. Statistical references to terrestrial and cosmological ages, species numbers, and population vary slightly among scholars, but unless stated otherwise will remain uncontested. Eldridge and Love, for instance, offer a contestable rate of 27 000 species’ extinctions annually, but whether complete despeciation of the planet, disappearance of rainforests, or deadly global warming occur in 100 or 500 years at current consumption rates is less the issue than that that they *are* happening, and quickly.

³ Most estimates suggest that there are 30 million species on Earth, predominantly insects and microbial forms of life. Wilson explains the species’ death paradox thus: “The life and death of species have been spread across more than three billion years. If most species last an average of, say, a million years, then it follows that most have expired across that vast stretch of geological time, in the same sense that almost all the people who ever lived during the past 10 000 years are dead even though the human population is larger than it has ever been” (*Diversity* 216). For the average Canadian age, see note 1 above.

⁴ See David Suzuki and Holly Dressel, *From Naked Ape to Superspecies* 38-50. The formula for determining an “ecological footprint” was first conceived by University of British Columbia population ecologists Bill Rees and Mathias Waskernaegel, who broadened the “carrying capacity” calculations of an ecosystem--the number of non-human organisms an ecosystem supports--to include the human presence (based on individual, group, community, city, or other scales of measurement) and its consumption of natural resources like fiber, paper, wood, food, and water. The average Canadian today has an ecological footprint of “7 hectares of biologically productive land of many, many different categories” (41). Comparatively, the average Canadian consumes 10-40 times an average Bangladeshi; for everyone on Earth to live a Canadian lifestyle would require *five* additional planets. Suzuki goes on to note that even though by virtue of our geography we do not even approach a full ecological capacity, those of us who are part of the 20% of earth’s middle-class citizens in whom 80% of the wealth is located are simply not doing our fair “Earth-share” part. To assess your own ecological footprint, take the quiz on the “Redefining Progress” website at <<<http://www.rprogress.org>>> Accessed 18 May 2006.

⁵ Details on the previous five extinctions, called the “Big Five,” that have occurred between the Ordovician (ca. 440 Ma) and Cretaceous (ca. 65 Ma) periods can be found in Eldridge’s biopaleontological essay or in Scott Freeman and Jon C. Herron’s *Evolutionary Analysis* Ch. 13, “Mass Extinctions and Their Consequences.”

CHAPTER 1

A Manifesto for Mystery: Wayland Drew, Ecocriticism, and Literary Darwinism

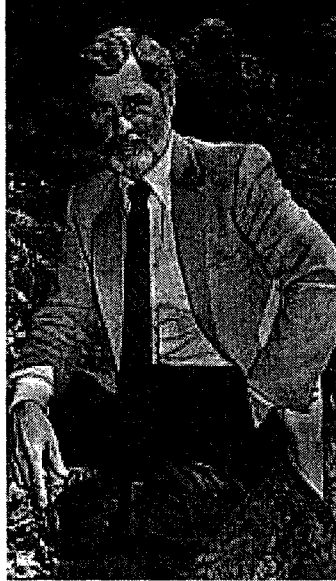


Figure 1

Our great success (and our great failure!) has been our extraordinary adaptability. But there are limits. Just to maintain a proper perspective, let's keep in mind that aboriginal peoples lived happy and successful lives around Thunder Bay for 10, 000 years or so before Europeans staggered in. And 400 years ago you wouldn't have hesitated to drink from the mouth of the Kam. Who was successful? Who has failed? . . . Environmental destruction will cease under one of two conditions: either humankind will start behaving sanely or nature will simply establish new ecological patterns which do not include humankind. (Drew, letter to Michelle Addison, 21 April 1990)¹

Cutler has no interest in what lies beyond Earth. . . . But for me there is comfort in viewing the stupendous accidents of those distant, manless worlds, beyond all responsibility. So that night I escaped out of time. I gazed at bodies gone for a million years, gazed at ghosts. . . . I moved out, out again, to M-104, across 40 million years of light. And so clear was the night, so pure the emptiness between that galaxy and me, that I caught glimpses of the dust it left behind. (Drew, *Halfway Man* 136-37)

Wayland Drew was active in the environmental movement from its start in the 1960s, and his writing always attempted to bridge the natural sciences and humanities. In a 1985 letter to philosopher Alan Drengson from the University of Victoria, regarding his request to reprint Drew's 1972 essay, "Killing Wilderness," Drew writes: "All my work is, I hope, informed to at least some degree by ecological concerns and the profound philosophical questions underlying them." As this thesis will reveal, Drew is indeed a profound philosopher, essayist, short story writer, and novelist, and his sustained emphasis on hope is refreshing in a world suffused with doubt and pessimism.

In his 1974 essay "Wilderness and Culture," Drew praises what was then still an infant environmental movement as a necessary "nostalgia for sanity" (11). His literary emphasis on environmental responsibility coincided at the time both with ecologist Aldo Leopold's 1970 "land ethic," a theme to which Drew returns repeatedly in his work, and with Norwegian Arne Naess's 1973 "deep ecology" ecosophical platform, whose three key arguments are: that "the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth, intrinsic value, inherent value). . . . independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes"; that the "richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves"; and that "the ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living" ("The Shallow and the Deep" 96). As will be seen, like Naess, Drew envisions sweeping reorientations in epistemological and ethical perspectives as the foundation to any meaningful ecological global change.

Drew's views on the interconnectivity of life on Earth also align with James Lovelock's 1979 "Gaia hypothesis," for Drew, like Lovelock, renders the planet a living, homeostatic superorganism that can, within reason, adjust to limited damage. Our species, however, is now pushing the boundaries of what it can tolerate.² Both writers avoid ascribing suprahuman causes to the Earth's formation, though neither outright denies the possibility. Still, a move toward a global ecological conscience, Drew realizes, will involve some of the most controversial and difficult debates our species has had to hold--including the one over intelligent design and evolution, with which ecology shares a discursive terrain. Drew's writing forces us, as a species, to contemplate our biological and ecological limitations and responsibilities in light of evolution, which is assuredly *not* rendered in terms of teleological or material progress but merely in terms of complexity and diversity--both of which can be celebrated. Instead of rejecting the notion of a supernatural First Cause outright, Drew seems to recognize an adaptive human need for some sort of spirituality in the same way that Matthew Arnold suggests, alluding to Darwin in *The Descent of Man*, that "'this hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits,' this good fellow carried hidden in his nature, apparently, something destined to develop into a necessity for humane letters" (500). Gillian Beer's observation that one of the most disturbing consequences of Darwinism for nineteenth-century inhabitants was that "evolutionary theory emphasizes extinction and annihilation equally with transformation" (12) is still lost on the modern world, the majority of whom still believe in some form of transcendental influence shaping human affairs and do not *act* as though our species' ultimate end is inevitable and, moreover, not necessarily "tragic" at all.

Drew, turning to quantum physics and both terrestrial and cosmological evolutionary theory, adopts what I call a “metaphysics of mystery” in response to the teleological assumptions that inform the world’s major religions. Drew is fascinated by ambivalences, paradoxes, and the infinite interconnections within the natural world-- which he variously refers to under the guise of *mystery*. Thinking in terms of evolutionary time and ecological space, he suggests, can engender “not a ceremonial mystery but one charged with dangers and difficulties, bearing the certainty of loss” (“Wilderness and Culture” 9). Accepting the “dangers” and “loss” he alludes to involves, at times, choosing to restrain ourselves from turning some of the knowledge that science gives us into technology (and teleology), even though we have proven throughout our species’ history that it is in our instincts as a species to want to do so:

Until we have accepted responsibility for the past, we have no right to speak or [sic] responsibility to the future, and it is knowledge which inhibits us, which may cheat us of the integrity we need for limitation, and cause us to settle for easy certainties. . . . we must know that we are capable of the worst that is imaginable, and we must understand that we are responsible for everything that has been done in our name, because only that way will we see how the delegation of power is the abdication of choice, and how inhumanity and stupidity stop with one person, making a necessary choice, making choices necessary. (11)

As a species, we can choose or choose not to attempt to unravel the natural world, and Drew’s ecological sensibility is such that choosing to accept “mystery” is to choose to step beyond a Western telos that has, for several centuries at least, rendered reductive science and its technological products both an ethical good and an inevitable part of the human experiment.

For Drew, espousing an ethos of mystery does not involve “any abdication of thought” (9) but rather demands making sound ecological choices and acting with responsibility for posterity: “my advice to those who would defend mystery in themselves or in wilderness is this: Don’t make walls; make doors. Make choices necessary” (11). Drew’s writing insists that not only Westerners but all humans replace the existential questions common to our species since civilization emerged about 12 000 years ago--Why are we here? Where do we come from? and What happens when I die?--with the question: *To what end* do we live here, now, given the current ecological condition of the biosphere, given evolutionary sciences which increasingly suggest our cosmic insignificance, and given that our ultimate origins and futures may remain forever unknowable? Distinctions between the two questions--the *why* and the *to what end*--are subtle but extremely important, for the latter identifies eternal unknowability, rather than faith or hope in something “else,” as the ontological starting point for ecological change. For Drew, our immediate focus needs to be on what we *do* know--that we are killing our home and need to begin radically limiting ourselves. I will expand on Drew’s metaphysics in Chapter Two.

Rejecting a global homogenization that threatens the very diversity upon which the planet’s health--and ours--rests, he queries how we might viably recover a workable ecological paradigm, lost since we stopped living as hunter-gatherers, and he asks challenging questions about whether and to what end our species must begin accounting for the whole range of biotic and abiotic forms on the planet. Drew’s claim that we are all native to the land--that, as a species, humans share among their diverse cultures and races a vested evolutionary interest in protecting the biosphere--renders questionable

many of the entrenched humanist assumptions through which we, in the West at any rate, live out our daily lives. We are used to “being” by identifying with each other largely through gender, race, ethnicity or culture and, more importantly, through such abstractions as “community” or “nation.” For Drew, we immediately need to begin identifying with each other primarily as a species with a common survival interest. Rather than continuing to exclusively emphasize human diversity issues--such as those raised by gender, Marxist, or cultural politics discourses focusing almost exclusively on human power differences--Humanities scholars need to begin including the discourses of biodiversity afforded by studies in ecology and evolution in all rights-based dialogues: “the most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world,” says Glen Love (“Revaluing Nature” 237). If humans want the biospheric process of evolution to continue, we must start thinking trans-culturally, trans-nationally, and trans-specially for the long term; to do so will involve nothing less than accepting drastically new ways of living not only materially but spiritually or metaphysically. Rowe argues that “neither philosophical liberalism championing liberty nor philosophical socialism championing equality will save us from ourselves. Human history will end in ecology, or nothing” (7). For Drew, similarly, social and cultural differences must be reconceptualized in light of our shared evolutionary homogeneity and our position within the web of living and non-living forms. His writing speaks both to the current study of Canadian literature, the conflation of literature, art, and science, and the adaptive functions that each may serve. Our modern technological Western culture, whose essential values of individual freedom, democracy, and liberty are, by virtue of its current position of affluence and influence,

increasingly envied throughout the world, promotes an ideology of consumption that make it also the most environmentally dangerous. Drew's ecosophical investigation, in both depth and range, is unlike anything in Canadian Literature to date.

Since ecocriticism and literary Darwinism are still relatively new fields, it will be helpful to elaborate in this chapter on the critical context within which Drew's work is best situated and to offer some literary-biographical context that informs all of his writing. In Chapter Two, I will elaborate on the political and philosophical traditions that Drew and many others see as underlying the current ecological crisis and, in the remaining three chapters, I will explore how Drew's ecological and evolutionary vision emerges in his novels through detailed close readings. *The Wabeno Feast* is Drew's first exploration of conflicting assumptions about the human place on Earth, and he accomplishes his ecological critique of the Western ideology of progress and civilization by exposing, through a haunting narrative, its doubly detrimental impact on First Nations' peoples and the environment. *Halfway Man*, his last novel, is an extension of the same critique told in a magic-realist style that interrogates whether our very desire for knowledge nurtures many of the problems--environmental, psychological, and spiritual--that our accumulation of it seems to cause us. *The Erthring Cycle* trilogy, which I have saved for the end, provides the most comprehensive platform for Drew's agenda of ecological transformation. As an ambiguously dystopian/utopian post-apocalyptic work that refuses to ascribe "race" to its primitive hunter-gatherer tribes, it inquires whether the human experiment has failed in the past 12 000 years, whether it is reparable, and how far we might have to go to ensure that the Earth is liveable for future generations of all varieties of life.

It is not environmentalist rhetoric but mathematical fact to assert that the planet's resources are finite and the human responsibility for its future great--should we so choose--and no other writer in Canadian Literature has so successfully brought the modern sciences of ecology and evolution to bear on fiction as Drew has. In responding to my 1997 question as to what constituted a "hero" for him, Drew replied, "the ordinary person who does what is clearly necessary--*that* has always moved me the most. I've taught many heroes, many kids for whom it is an act of heroism to get on the bus that morning, and I have *great* respect for that. Immense" (Drew, Belyea interview A24).³ The planet's future--for us, for non-human life, and for non-living forms--now rests in the ability of its ordinary *homo sapiens* to re-evaluate the very concept of necessity.

Part I - Stepping Into Drew's Shoes: A Brief Literary Biography

I like your writing; it is so sane, what a pleasure!
(Miriam Waddington, Letter to Drew, April 1973)

Wayland Drew was born in 1932 in Oshawa, Ontario. He graduated with a B.A. Honours in 1957 from Victoria College at the University of Toronto, where he had majored in English Language and Literature and had spent summers freelance-writing and guiding in Temagami and elsewhere in Northern Ontario, as he had done in the years preceding university. He married Gwendolyn Parrott in October 1957 and the couple eventually had four children: three daughters and a son. Drew raised his family first in Port Perry, Ontario, where he began teaching high-school English in 1961; he had earned his teaching certificate by taking summer courses at the Ontario College of Education.⁴ Drew also taught in Toronto and worked at the Ontario Ministry of Education and in

1975 moved to Bracebridge to begin teaching at the Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, where he remained until his retirement in 1994.

Although he had done some freelance work previously, he began writing seriously about the environment after having moved to Bracebridge, and he took regular leaves from high-school teaching in order to write. In addition to writing and teaching, Drew was active in the community, giving numerous guest lectures on ecology and facilitating environmental workshops. In 1991, he chaired the Ontario “Signs of Hope” conference, for which, with his other environmental work, he received an honorary Doctorate from Trent University and the Ontario Lieutenant-Governor’s Award for Conservation. Longtime friend and scholarly colleague, John Wadland, professor of Canadian Studies at Trent University, remarks that Drew was a pioneer for teaching “Native Studies” in the early 1970s when no one else was, and Drew’s archives contain a letter from the period thanking Randy Sawyer of the North Bay Indian Friendship Centre for visiting Drew’s class to discuss Native issues (Personal Interview, May 2004). Wadland also highlights Drew’s interest in George Woodcock, David Suzuki, M.T. Kelly, Stan Rowe, and especially John Livingston, with whom Drew had studied at the University of Toronto and had enjoyed many informal ecological discussions. The two men clearly informed each other’s work, and to read Livingston’s *One Cosmic Instant* or *Rogue Primate* is to come as close as is imaginable to a non-fictional rendering of Drew’s own deeply philosophical and scientifically informed assessment of human arrogance. Drew’s archives contain notes with fragments of ideas regarding these works and other Canadian texts that influenced his work: Peter Such’s *Riverrun*, M.T. Kelly’s *A Dream Like Mine* and *Out of the Whirlwind*, and Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*.

I interviewed Drew in the early spring of 1997 as part of a fourth-year self-directed English elective, after having read only *The Wabeno Feast* (1973) and *Halfway Man* (1989).⁵ I have included an abridged version of this interview as Appendix A. Sadly, Drew, then in the early stages of his illness, would pass away in 1998 as a result of the neurodegenerative Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. For a man as active and adventurous in practice long before he became so in writing and theorizing about the environment, no worse a fate could be imaginable; and yet Drew, who, by the time of our interview, had begun to feel the impact of his condition, not only agreed to the interview but remained utterly engaging and hearty with laughter during the six hours he so graciously entertained me in his home.

Drew began to write short stories and poetry in high school and university, and he seemed well on his way to becoming a successful writer with Anansi's publication of *The Wabeno Feast* in 1973. The novel received favorable reviews in the popular press, including the *Toronto Citizen* (May 8, 1973), *Ontario Naturalist Magazine* (Spring 1973), *Oshawa Star* (May 1973), *Montreal Gazette* (May 12, 1973), *Canadian Reader* 13 (April 1973), *Maclean's* (July 1973), *Ottawa Citizen* (June 1973), and *Edmonton Journal* (June 1973). Drew's critically unacknowledged post-apocalyptic trilogy, *The Erthring Cycle*--comprised of *The Memoirs of Alcheringia* (1984), *The Gaian Expedient* (1985), and *The Master of Norriya* (1986)--directly confronts the breakdown of technological civilization and the threat of totalitarianism because of a scarcity of resources borne from a departure from our hunter-gathering evolutionary past and our entry into civilization, agriculture, and domesticity 12 000 years ago. But, as Andrea Paradis, the editor of *Out of This World: Canadian Science Fiction & Fantasy*

Literature, argues, “a common assumption is that fantasy and science fiction are something we [Canadians] import for our less responsible amusement” (13). In the same collection, Robert Runté and Christine Kulyk suggest that “few Canadian SF readers were aware of the existence of Canadian SF since it was seldom marketed as such” (45). It is therefore not surprising that the reception of *Erthring* was terrible in Canada; the trilogy stands, however, to be reclaimed as a fundamental text for using science fiction to explore ecological and evolutionary science facts that are only now gradually becoming accepted by the general public.

Drew’s interest in science fiction and fantasy (routinely referred to by scholars in the field as “SF&F”) reflects his desire to have readers think beyond everyday human temporal and spatial frames of reference and investigate the world of the Other (ie. other peoples, cultures, times, planets, and species) including the biotic and abiotic world as a whole. His four movie novelizations, written throughout the 1970s and 80s (*Corvette Summer*, *Batteries Not Included*, *Dragonslayer*, and *Willow*), and the 1989 magic realist novel, *Halfway Man*, complete his novelistic repertoire and reveal his playful interest in this world of the Other: for instance, *Batteries Not Included* contains aliens who crash-land on Earth and must try to survive suburbia; *Dragonslayer* investigates human-dragon coexistence; *Willow*’s key characters are wizards and dwarfs; and *Halfway Man*, Drew’s final novel, employs a magic realist style that Angel Flores calls “the transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and unreal” (qtd. in Gerald Lynch). Drew wrote the novelizations largely at the request of his friend, Matthew Robbins, a screenplay writer and later director at MGM. Drew wrote two novelizations, *Batteries Not Included* and *Willow*, for director/producer George Lucas, and *Corvette Summer* had

as its lead actor none other than Mark Hamill, fresh off of the 1977 success of *Star Wars*. Movie novelizations as a genre are akin to something approaching pulp fiction and thus not usually deemed sufficiently “literary,” but the novelization process itself poses unique challenges that indubitably would have helped Drew nurture his creative potential. Consequently, this would later influence his writing of the trilogy and certainly that of his last novel, *Halfway Man*, which resonates with a magic realism familiar to a Canadian literary community that has produced such writers as Graeme Gibson, James Reaney, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, Jane Urquhart, Tomson Highway, and Thomas King, to furnish a very short list.

Drew’s non-fictional writing includes the environmental photo-expositions *Superior: The Haunted Shore* (1975), *Brown’s Weir* (1983), and *A Sea Within: The Gulf of St. Lawrence* (1984); children’s nature books (*The Nature of Fishes*, *The Nature of Mammals*); several scripts for CBC radio and one for a Ministry of Natural Resources film, *Places Out of Time* (1994); and several polemical essays for a variety of publications including *Ontario Naturalist*, *Alternatives*, *The Illustrated Natural History of Canada*, and *Green Teacher*. As the titles indicate, Drew’s non-fictional work is exclusively ecologically focused: his polemical essays include such works as “The Troubadours of Time,” “English and Anarchy,” “Killing Wilderness,” “Native Studies and Green Teaching,” “Toward an Ecological Conscience: Peter Kropotkin and Mutual Aid,” “Wilderness and Culture,” and “Wilderness and Limitation.” Both “English and Anarchy” and “Wilderness and Culture” form partial responses to Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, and the four themes of culture, wilderness, sociopolitical formations, and education recur throughout his fiction.⁶

Drew's work presses us to remember the distinction between *consciousness* and *conscience*. In Drew's view, society is merely conscious of the environmental problem. For instance, he rejects on anthropocentric grounds Arnold's lament for a dwindling of conscientiousness about achieving cultural greatness, but he then borrows from Arnold to argue for the need for "greatness" to be rediscovered and redefined in light of a modernized conscientiousness for ecology and evolution--that is, for all life as it is or might be. He would likely agree with Arnold's arguments in "Literature and Science" (1882) that "when I proposed knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world. . . . In that best I certainly include what in modern times has been thought and said by the great observers and knowers of nature" (491), or "while we shall all have to acquaint ourselves with the great results reached by modern science . . . the majority of men will always require humane letters" (497).⁷ Sharply critical of the blind pursuit of scientific knowledge and its transformation into technologies that are destroying Earth, Drew's fiction distinguishes between being human and acting humanely on behalf of the biosphere.

Peter Kropotkin, arguably the most eloquent and ecologically sensitive early twentieth-century Anarchist, had a lasting impact on Drew for his defiance of Huxley's bulldog social interpretation of Darwinist evolutionary theory as inherently antagonistic and more Hobbesian than Rousseauian in nature. "Toward an Ecological Conscience" contains Drew's argument for mutual-aid anarchism as a viable political alternative to a Western democracy that he sees as threatening to become as totalitarian as communism was at its worst in the 20th century. Subsequent chapters will explore Kropotkin's influence on Drew in more detail; a brief summary here reveals Miro Balch in *The*

Wabeno Feast contorting Kropotkin's teachings so badly that, in his desire to speak for the planet, he dies for his cause, dismissed by the public merely as a "terrorist" revolutionary and not as an evolutionary, ecologically conscious thinker with an important message. Travis Niskigwun, in *Halfway Man*, kidnaps the real-estate developer Michael Gardner and takes him deep into the Northern Ontario wilderness for his own good, as Drew presents it, raising questions about humanist versus ecological ethics and anarchic ecological action. And in the trilogy, a small band of individuals advocating mutual aid anarchy destroys the centralized government; their aim is to prevent the post-apocalyptic recurrence of agricultural enclosure and land ownership by controlling the ideologies of the masses. In doing so, they leave the future to random chance, a type of chaos endorsed by anarchists throughout the past century and one proven by history to be our most ecologically successful form of social organization to date. Each novel raises questions as to what degree similar radical actions made by groups such as *Greenpeace* or *EarthFirst!* are condemnable or *commendable*, and on what criteria such evaluations are and should be made.

Drew's writings force readers to question how best to achieve the ecological integration that Kropotkin and other ecological thinkers argue has sustained our species throughout most of human history. Through forced compliance? Moral coercion? Mandated anarchism? What if we run out of time for politely convincing the masses of the need for change? Moreover, Drew challenges us to query why our current sociopolitical organizational options have become so limited. He challenges us, that is, to ask in whose interest such limitations are created and sustained, and whether such

extreme actions as some of his characters perform are the only options available to raise awareness of the pressing need for change.

Drew's archives contain the fascinating correspondence concerning these and many other of his literary projects. Letters documenting disputes with father-son publishers Michael and Nicholas Macklem at Oberon Press over the title of what would eventually become *Halfway Man*--involving no fewer than 10 proposed titles including *The Spit*, *Neyashing*, *Shadowman*, *Many Arms*, and *Inviting the Guides*--provide illumination on the pragmatic aspects of Drew's literary career, as does, for instance, correspondence revealing his insistence on using Ojibway painter and glassblower Michael Robinson's "Winter Fishing" (*The Freedom of Silence* 1978) for its cover. In a Sept. 1987 letter to Michael Macklem, Drew comments on "the power of [Robinson's] work, work which moves me very deeply . . . Michael has read *The Spit*, likes it, and would do some designs for consideration." "Many Arms – A Story of Greed," a play adapted from one of the tales Drew creates in *Halfway Man*, was performed in 1989 by students at the Earl Haig Secondary School in Muskoka. A copy of the one-page audience program in the archives remarks that "Many Arms" is "a tale of a foolish man who cannot see that he already has more than he needs, and whose greed threatens the welfare of the whole community. His neighbours trust in nature to teach him a lesson, and they are not disappointed." The triple overlay of an innate childhood ecological sensibility, community spirit and neighbourliness, and nature as mediator are principal elements of Drew's vision.

Some of Drew's early short stories were published in *The Tamarack Review* and *Acta Victoriana*, and his later material was published in collections such as *New*

Canadian Short Stories, Anthology, Islands of Hope, and Once Upon a Time: A Treasury of Modern Fairy Tales. Based on archival research, my 1997 interview, and on subsequent interviews with his family members, it seems as though he published no poetry, though there are dozens of poems in the archives.⁸ Drew's earlier published and unpublished short stories and scripts intended for CBC Radio are stylistically exploratory and thematically varied, and many fit into his overall ecological paradigm. Among the best of these are a brilliant two-page story entitled "Never Quite the Same," in Bruce Litteljohn and Jon Pearce's 1973 anthology of Canadian wilderness stories, *Marked By the Wild*, which explores the male desire to hunt and the broader implications such a desire has on reinscribing male aggression and patriarchy. It also investigates how "returning to Nature" or to one's "real self," are but attempts to escape modern society and experience a wildness that has all but become foreign. Such reprieves are delusive, Drew suggests, in that they cultivate the repression of larger societal problems while creating ecological ones. They nurture the false impression that progress and civilization can proceed unhindered and that "Nature" will always be there "to get back to"--a theme he returns to in *Halfway Man*.

Part II - The Politics of Reception: Drew Who?

In our 1997 interview, I asked Drew whether he had read much by his Canadian contemporaries. His response? "No . . . no . . . very little, I'm ashamed to say, though I've read a fair amount of the older" (A2). The same seems true in reverse, for throughout his writing career and to the present, Drew has received only meager critical

attention and commentary. To frame Drew's reception, consider the tone and quality of the two following reviews. In his 1985 contribution to William Toye's *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, Sam Solecki acknowledged *The Wabeno Feast* as "complex and challenging," as "intricately organized and powerful," and as "among Canada's few truly neglected works of literature" (585). Solecki does not, however, elaborate as to *why* he feels Drew's text has been neglected; nor does he expound on what renders it "powerful." Similarly, nearly two decades later, in W.H. New's 2002 *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, New himself only loosely recognizes Drew as "the author of numerous works" who "was praised initially for *The Wabeno Feast*" and "won an enthusiastic following in the 1980's" for his trilogy and novelizations "in particular" (320). In the short paragraph devoted to Drew, New, like Solecki, makes no mention of *why* he might have merited praise or *who* was enthusiastic about his work.

In the interim between 1973 and 2002, Drew received several promising--albeit short--reviews about *The Wabeno Feast*. Bruce Litteljohn observed in *The Ontario Naturalist*, a magazine to which Drew himself had submitted various polemical ecological articles over the years, that it signified "a broadening and deepening concern for life," calling it "a compelling and important novel . . . a superior environmental tract" (45). On the dust-jacket of the 2001 Anansi second printing of the novel, M.T. Kelly praised it as "a great book . . . an astonishing accomplishment," and the *Victoria Times* called it "a powerful, skillfully (even beautifully) written book which suggests that Canada has produced yet another novelist of the first order." The Anansi publishers deem it "a classic in Canadian Literature . . . it belongs next to the *Temptations of Big Bear*, *Surfacing*, and *The Diviners* in the Canadian literary canon."⁹ Anansi's self-

interested marketing strategies aside, it seems as though Drew ought to have been among fairly good company with these other novelists “of the first order.” Yet, even though critics such as Leslie Monkman, Margaret Atwood, Terry Goldie, and Thomas King each refer to Drew’s *The Wabeno Feast* in their assessments of the literary construction of the Native and/or Nature in Canadian literature, none offers an extensive analysis. Nor has any scholar written extensively on any of his other works. Monkman’s examination of *Wabeno*, the longest available, amounts to only six pages, most of which consists of narrative contextualization to provide examples for his broader postcolonial interest in “images of the Indian’s decline and death” (88). Atwood cites it briefly to support her construction of the Canadian North as malevolent (*Strange Things*), and Goldie, in his groundbreaking 1989 postcolonial study, *Fear and Temptation*, echoes Monkman in providing only a synoptic view of the novel in support of a larger argument on semiotic Native-Nature pairings (37) and Western individuation (47), although he at least identifies the novel as an ecological text. King, whose polemics on postcolonialism and appropriation I will explore in Chapter 3, dismissed *The Wabeno Feast* outright as a stereotypical portrayal of Natives.

Drew also received accolades for *Halfway Man* but, again, they were cursory and led to no extensive critical investigation. Ojibway poet Wayne Keon noted its “haunting and captivating” writing and suggested that the novel “leads the reader to a spiritual awakening” (30), and several local and national book reviews also commented favorably, but cursorily, on its ecological messages.¹⁰ Pat Barclay’s 1989 *Books in Canada* review of the novel perhaps best underscores the peculiarity of Drew’s lack of critical reception. Barclay begins the review by noting that W.J. Keith suggests in his article on nature

writing in the 1985 first edition of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* that animal stories were “the one native Canadian art form” (28). Barclay then asserts that “a second native Canadian form has emerged in the writings of Wayland Drew . . . this art form is, I submit, the ‘environmental novel,’ a form in which the state of the character’s environment is the principle *raison d’être* of the story” (28). Barclay clearly recognizes something unique in Drew’s writing and goes on to say, ironically, that “the time is ripe for the emergence of the environmental novel; it also looks as though the time is ripe for Wayland Drew” (30). Moreover, *The Erthring Cycle* trilogy, according to Barclay, was to be “the Great Canadian Novel at last” (28). So what happened to Drew?

Four interrelated variables explain the failure of the critical community to adequately recognize Drew’s work. The first is that Drew, in publishing his first major work in 1973, was then part of the emerging and related phenomena of Canadian nationalism and the institutionalization of Canadian Literature; such an atmosphere was likely more receptive to historical Canadian authors or contemporaries of Drew’s having more publications--especially where those publications could be read in propagandistic terms. In “Wilderness and Culture,” first presented to students at Trent University in March 1974 as a lecture, Drew at once recognizes and refuses the staunch nationalism then dominating not only the literary but the cultural and political milieus:

at the moment in Canada we are exposed to a good deal of nationalistic pride and bluster, and I fear that we must brace ourselves for a good deal more. There will be all kinds of new Canadian things springing up, and much will become Canadian that never was before. . . . In the short run, we are going to have more Canadian propaganda, and I think the only thing to do is to laugh as circumspectly as possible and to endure, as if one were being hit by an ideological snowstorm or by a pocket of silt left by the nineteenth century.

What I fear in the long run is much more serious. I have suggested that what is possible for Canada is a cultural enterprise resembling an artistic quest. We contain a mystery and we sense that we should not pierce it with definitions, but should define ourselves so as to protect and perpetuate it . . . at a certain point in our divestment it will be necessary to reject the contemporary idea of nationhood itself, and to discard Canada like a chrysalis. (9)

Similarly, he applauds those whose efforts led to the institutionalization of Canada's national and provincial parks and reserves but not without adding the caveat that he hopes "our sense of wilderness will enable us to so deepen and extend our culture that we shall perceive this land without pride of ownership, and that our Canadian-ness will consist in outgrowing nationality" (9). The following excerpt from our interview is suggestive of how Drew's sense of ecological and evolutionary responsibility leads him to want to transcend both nationalism *and* the literary and cultural trends occupying "Canadian Literature" in the past three decades while simultaneously emphasizing the local and particular celebrated by postmodernists and ecocritics alike:

Do you consider yourself to be strongly "Canadian?"

Umm...no? If you mean nationalistic, then the answer is no.

Would it be fair to say "naturalistic," then?

Yes. Certainly that. I can't imagine myself living apart from these trees, from this snow, from these hills. So, in that sense--in terms of that strong sense of place--absolutely.

So it doesn't necessarily have to be on Canadian soil for you.

No. I don't feel that--in my innards--as other people obviously do, those who are active politically and feel the importance of belonging to a national entity. For me, it's always a sense of place, something below those political

turmoils, and something less complicated than that. For instance, I haven't belonged to the Writer's Union of Canada for many years; I was there when it started, and did belong for many years, but I found that I couldn't--I just couldn't, for the life of me--share many of the concerns of the other people. That became more and more true, and finally, I just slipped out.

What kind of problems, or concerns, would they have been perceiving themselves to have been having that you didn't feel you wanted to be a part of?

Well, to be fair, they were all valid. Often they were lobbying endeavours, organizational arrangements around political activities; in latter years, they became increasingly polarized, it seemed to me: questions of race, nationality, sex. They seemed to me to increasingly occupy the organization, and I listened intently, but I just couldn't maintain an interest in it. (A21)

Drew's waning interest in the politics of the Canadian literary scene doubtlessly coincided with his growing concern for global, species-wide ecological issues.

Second, Drew's decision, in his own words after our interview, to "let the work speak for itself" instead of embracing aggressive marketing strategies, in the end limited both public and academic exposure to his work. Although *Halfway Man*, significantly, has remained in publication since 1989, *The Wabeno Feast* has been reprinted only twice and *The Erthring Cycle* trilogy not at all, neither individually nor as a collection. Third, that the trilogy was published and marketed not as Canadian Literature but as science fiction/fantasy and by a prominent American (and not Canadian) science-fiction publisher, Del Rey/Ballantine, would also have had an adverse impact on its reception in the increasingly nationalistic Canadian literary scene. A quick internet survey of Canadian English Departments offering courses on Canadian science fiction or fantasy today speaks for itself, just as seeking a course on "Can Lit" would have done four

decades ago. As Judith Merrill notes in her introduction to the anthology, *Out of This World*, “up until fifteen years ago, professionally publishable genre writers in all forms of fantastic literature in this country could be counted on two hands” (11). And editor Andrea Paradis observes,

We do not perceive ourselves as a particularly imaginative or fanciful nation. A common assumption is that fantasy and science fiction are something we import for our less responsible amusement. . . . If any fantastic literature was to be generated north of the 49th parallel, it would be a deviation, insignificant, works commercially-motivated for crass American markets, and certainly not worthy of treatment by a major national institution. (13)

Drew, it seems, who wrote not only the trilogy but four movie novelizations, three of which fall into the science-fiction/fantasy category, was simply not academically trendy in a nation focused intensely on its differences from the U.S.A. and England. American William Kotzwinkle, by comparison, who wrote dozens of “serious” literary novels, is remembered only for his novelization of *E.T.*, which sold millions of copies world-wide. But at least he is remembered.

Finally, despite the 1970s and 80s trend to argue in favour of a coherent, unique body of Canadian literature--as does Margaret Atwood in *Survival*, for instance--there emerged the major shift in the academy away from generalization and toward postmodern and postcolonial theories of cultural difference and political dissidence. Such a shift made an author like Drew, who had created fictional Natives in *The Wabeno Feast* and *Halfway Man* in order to comment on the devastating cultural and environmental impacts of the European descent on Canada, an easy target for postcolonial critics. Thomas King, for instance, specifically condemns Drew in his introduction to *The Native in Literature* for Drew’s tendency “to do little more than turn old stereotypes at a different angle to the

eye” (8). As I will show, however, *The Wabeno Feast* encompasses a much larger scope than King gives him credit for.

Part III - Rights and Choices: Re-membering Ourselves

Over the past generation, the rights industry has grown faster than an Internet IPO in the late 1990s. (Fukuyama 106)

The single foremost challenge to the human race in the 21st century will be to attempt to mediate discourses of democracy and universal human rights with the practical limitations of our growing global ecological footprint. For us wondering animals to survive the cognitive and material products of our own evolved instincts for curiosity and knowledge, we now need to supplement racial, ethnic, cultural, gendered, and all other rights-based discourses of difference and diversity with an exploration into our shared humanity and into how best to address the cosmological irony that renders us irrelevant but responsible, here and now, for the planet. In other words, we need to re-member ourselves as a species. Though somewhat overstating its potential, Drew implies in “Wilderness and Limitation” the unique role that Canada could assume in such an ecological and evolutionary transformation by virtue of our vast geography and the larger, cosmic frames of reference our unique sense of place invokes:

Its immensity has offset the arrogance of power in us . . . have we not always known that we were limited? Beyond the towns and cities, beyond the highways and railroads and all the places where history seethes and flourishes, have we not always been resigned to our containment by the land? There is nothing new in the choice to be made, for although it has become the most modern of choices, it is also the most ancient. Correct and unanswerable, the wilderness that is part of us must be reaffirmed without fear, without apology. (27)

Drew's idea of an unpredictable wilderness within forms part of his broader argument that at some level, we always-already remember that we are animals with a shared evolutionary past and, therefore, can re-member ourselves with each other in light of the millions of years of history that bind us. His suggestion that we ontologically "know" at some level our containment by wilderness--and wilderness here means not just the large landscape of forests and lakes immediately evoked by its yoking with "North," but also the immense history of evolution underlying that landscape--is meant to invite us to imagine our own unique Canadian wilderness as connected to other forms of wilderness as experienced by humans across the globe. In other words, though the ecosystems our species occupy may vary, we all have an intuitive or innate potential to remember and respect that we are ultimately "contained" by much larger evolutionary forces.

By invoking the local, the "Canadian," Drew speaks well beyond it. His geographic subject position "places" him in the Great Lakes boreal forest ecosystem; his sociobiological subject position is as a middle-class white human male of European descent who spoke English and Ojibway. Moreover, my study of his work will focus on his reading of the human presence in his familiar locale--the Anishinabek Ojibway Nation in central-northern Ontario and their interaction over time with non-Native, predominantly European settler-descendant cultures--and I will analyze his work within the contexts of Anglo-Canadian postcolonial and ecological literature and theory more generally. Still, it is necessary to emphasize from the outset the global outlook the study of his work invites; his ecological and evolutionary themes are designed to make readers think about transcending human-manufactured boundaries, whose provisionality he often

comments on, to speak to a trait common to us all: our evolutionary past and the fragility of our existence.

Drew is neither simply a “Nature” nor an “environmental” but an *ecological* and *evolutionary* writer. The distinction between the first and the last two terms is important, because it highlights differences in how place and the human presence on and in it are routinely perceived in the West. Environmental activist discourses in the past decade have increasingly ceased using the term “environment” and instead prefer the term “ecology,” because as the sciences of ecology and evolution have grown, they have stressed complexity and interconnectivity among and between species and the habitats they inhabit (William M. Adams; Peter Atkins et al; Noel Boaz). “Environment,” as Drew himself insists, is fundamentally anthropocentric:

In your 1990 Pat Barclay interview (Books In Canada, Vol 19, June/July 1990, p21), she refers to you as an environmentalist writer. Are you content with this label?

Oh, dear. Well, no, I guess not, because of its implicit homocentricity. What an environment is--what it means--is from a Latin word meaning “that which surrounds man.” Man, then, is right at the centre of it all, and so his view of the world--from the eyes of humanity, at the centre looking outwards--is that the environment is just what is there for our use or our treatment. I find that to be really an inadequate view, though I don’t know what I’d call myself. We need a new vocabulary. At one time I began to make a list of words that we need--it’s still there, somewhere in my computer--and one of them is a word which suggests that we need a philosophy of vulnerability; we need to develop ourselves in such a way so that we are not so afraid of . . . of the deep, dark woods and of all its inhabitants. I’ll never get the vocabulary finished, but *environmentalism* is not it for me because it presumes that man is still there at the centre of things; it also presumes that there is still the management aspect--you know, that we can *count* the number of elk and *count* the number of polar bears--and that *we* can keep things in balance. It’s just another

disastrous attempt at a solution. We can't do it. We need a new vocabulary. (Drew, Belyea interview A20)

In many Canadian literary texts, the landscape, presented as a threat to its inhabitants, becomes an antagonist in a narrative designed to foreground what many see as a central theme in Canadian literature: human survival. Being afraid of “the deep, dark woods and of all its inhabitants” is common in Canadian literature about place, from Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush*, John Richardson’s *Wacousta*, D.C. Scott’s “Powassan’s Drum,” or Earle Birney’s “Bushed” and “David,” to writings by Gail Anderson-Dargatz, Margaret Atwood, Fred Bodsworth, Howard O’Hagan, M.T. Kelly, Robert Kroetsch, Eden Robinson, Jane Urquhart, and more.¹¹ This theme of surviving the natural world and/or forming individual and national identity by confronting an unfamiliar landscape has also emerged in the immense body of criticism about such literature by writers including Ian Angus, Margaret Atwood, D. M. R. Bentley, Michael Hurley, D.G. Jones, Northrop Frye, John Moss, W.H. New, Margot Northey, and Laurie Ricou.¹² As this critical tradition so overwhelmingly demonstrates, however, rarely have Canadian authors--with the exception of Atwood, perhaps--deviated from the theme of human interaction with the vast Canadian landscape to ask whether our presence there in the first place, as members of a species destroying it, merits closer scrutiny.

Though ecologically-minded writers such as Atwood, Bodsworth, or Farley Mowat, and such earlier nature writers like Ernest Thompson Seton, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Grey Owl, certainly include a conservationist critique as part of their writings and often allude to the fragility of the human presence in the Canadian landscape and among its creatures, few have made the state of the environment *as a whole* their central sustained theme or challenged the long-term implications of anthropocentricity on

complete ecosystems and the entire biosphere. Neither has anyone so successfully explored as Drew has--and with an expanded philosophical approach--the paradoxical nature of our ecological responsibilities and evolutionary irrelevance, or emphasized so fervidly the difficult choices we face as a species when it comes to global human limitation. Though Drew writes about people and places readers may readily identify with as "Canadian" or "Native" or "Northern," his ecological and evolutionary inquiry ultimately transcends such arbitrary constructs. He recontextualizes the survival theme by reminding us that human beings in their various natural surroundings are but one among millions of species struggling to postpone their inevitable end.

The "new vocabulary" Drew sought, ironically, was beginning to emerge in the 1990s in the field of *ecocriticism*, whose responses to apathy in the Humanities toward the connection between our animal selves and material Nature--toward what Henry David Thoreau, for instance, famously articulated in *The Maine Woods* as "the *solid* earth! the *actual* world!" (5)--have been superbly unsettling. Ecocriticism is both new and not new. It would be short-sighted to claim, for instance, that the Romantics were not ecocritics, that any pastoral poet reflecting on another pastoral poet in antiquity was not performing an ecocritical function, or that the notion of an ecological ethics itself is uniquely modern. In imagining continuity between old and new literatures addressing the human presence on the land, Norbert Platz argues that

Ecocriticism could acclimatize some as yet unfamiliar ecological ideas in order to make the study of literature a lively and vibrant discipline again, one that does not abstain from political involvement any longer and does not couch its insights in such a language that those who are outside academia cannot understand it. An ecologically enlightened form of literary criticism could dig out age-old verities about the human role in the universe, save them from

oblivion and use them for creating a body of shared beliefs.
(n. pag.)

Despite Platz's too easy dismissal of what he sees as the current apolitical nature of modern academia, he is right to imply that the notion of "age-old verities" has become foreign to much contemporary humanities scholarship, as has the influence of explorations in natural sciences like ecology and evolution that increasingly support them.

What makes contemporary ecocriticism new is that it is supported by rich scientific data and it marks a specific response to exponential increases in the rates of industrialization, exploitative technologies, and population that belong uniquely to the twentieth century. Ecocriticism today both responds to and benefits from science and technology not available to previous generations, and the scope of its message is typically biospheric, though it may also emphasize the national, regional, or local. Modern ecocriticism was motivated ideologically by the 1970s environmental movement and by the practical actions of groups like *EarthFirst!*, *The Sierra Club*, and *Greenpeace*, it was defined as a term by William Rueckert in 1978, and it reached its defining literary critical moment and functional scholarly incarnation in the 1992 birth of the *Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE)*, an American interdisciplinary society amalgamating the scientific study of the environment with literature and social and political action and whose membership quickly became international. Many informal and formal satellite groups, including those in England, Australia, Japan, Korea and, recently, Canada, have been launched in the past decade.¹³ The term *ecocritical* more generally connotes an ecological ethics applied critically to all elements of society, and to that end it has emerged among other ecological neologisms like *ecosophy*, *ecofeminism*,

ecopsychology, and *ecotheology*. Like postmodernism and postcolonial theory, ecocriticism emphasizes diversity and difference; unlike those two movements, however, its emphases are on *biological* and *ecological* diversity. Drew anticipated today's scholarly ecocritical moment by several decades; most of his non-fictional and fictional writing between 1960 and 1989, while thematically ecological, also includes ecocritical commentaries on *other* writers and philosophers emphasizing humans and place.

Ecocriticism has been defined variously. Lawrence Buell says ecocriticism is better understood as an aggregation “of semioverlapping [sic] projects than as a unitary approach or set of claims” (“Letter” 1091), and Love remarks on its multiplicity of approaches and subjects, including nature writing, the natural sciences (ecology and evolution specifically), bioregionalism, ecofeminism, and reinterpreting past works (*Practical Ecocriticism* 9-10). It can thus be viewed as an inroad to literature specifically as well as a tangential point of entry into non-literary discussions of ecology and ecological ethics. Ecocriticism explores the function of representation, metaphor, symbol, and rhetoric as well as history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology on our perceptions of the natural world and rural and urban spaces. Three representative definitions of ecocriticism are:

How is nature represented in this text? How is wilderness constructed? How is urban nature contrasted with rural or wild nature? . . . What role does science or natural history play in a text? What are the links between gender and landscape? Is landscape a metaphor? How does environmental ethics or deep ecology inform your reading? (Woods, qtd. in Cohen 17)

(1) consideration of the possibilities of certain forms of scientific inquiry (e.g., ecology and evolutionary biology) and social scientific inquiry (e.g., geography and social ecology) as models of literary reflection; (2) textual,

theoretical, and historical analysis of the palatial [sic] basis of human experience; (3) study of literature as a site of environmental-ethical reflection--for example, as a critique of anthropocentric assumptions; (4) re-theorization of mimesis and referentiality, especially as applied to literary representation of physical environment in literary texts; (5) study of the rhetoric (e.g., its ideological valences of gender, race, politics) of any and all modes of environmental discourse, including creative writing but extending across the academic disciplines and (indeed even more important) beyond them into the public sphere, especially the media, governmental institutions, corporate organizations, and environmental advocacy groups; and (6) inquiry into the relation of (environmental) writing to life and pedagogical practice. These and other ecocritical projects are being produced both separately and in combination, and by no means with one accord. (Buell, "Letter" 109)

All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. . . . [A]s a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (Glotfelty and Fromm xix)¹⁴

Drew is unique among Canadian novelists for his pervasive ecological emphasis, but even more unique is that he continually explores how an appreciation for both terrestrial and cosmic evolution might positively alter perspectives on time and space and thus give our species a new sense of awe and respect for our own existence--and the incentive to choose self-limitation for the sake of millions of others.

Like ecocriticism, evolutionary, adaptationist, or Darwinian literary theory (or "literary Darwinism," with either a lowercase or uppercase L), as it is variously called, is another fairly recent attempt to approach literature through science--in this case, through contemporary evolutionary theory and the wide range of sciences supporting it.¹⁵ Where ecocritics emphasize ecology and focus primarily on the human relationship to place for

reasons of long-term environmental sustainability, literary Darwinists emphasize how advancements in the human sciences—including evolutionary psychology (formerly sociobiology), neuroscience, molecular genetics, paleontology, ethology, zoology, quantum physics, and cosmology, to name a few--inform the stories we write. Or how, in other words, biological constraints shape the nature and types of stories we tell ourselves and “how fiction functions as an adaptation” (Dennett, *Breaking the Spell* 453).

The predominant advocate and virtual founder of literary Darwinism is Joseph Carroll, although his inaugural 1995 *Evolution and Literary Theory* contains ideas found in other contemporary evolutionary writings by such theorists as Richard Dawkins, Niles Eldridge, Stephen Jay Gould, Steven Pinker, E.O. Wilson, David Sloan Wilson, and others. Carroll’s central argument, reflective of the literary Darwinist position generally, is that the pervasive human love of narrative is not just culturally but biologically motivated, in Darwinian terms, by the evolutionary principles of inclusive fitness and adaptation. Even “the psyche has been produced by natural selection” (*Literary Darwinism* 87).

Literary Darwinists hope that understanding the evolutionary foundations of and constraints on human behavior, psychology, social organization, and common cultural patterns in biological terms will enable them to gain new insights into how and why storytelling functions so prominently among our species and, moreover, how narrative and representation function adaptively across the species, helping us relay important information to solve adaptive problems. Adaptationist literary scholars, as Carroll calls them,

make it their concern to identify the constituent elements of an evolved human nature: a universal, species-typical array

of behavioral and cognitive characteristics. They presuppose that all such characteristics are genetically constrained and that these constraints are mediated through anatomical features and physiological processes, including the neurological and hormonal systems that directly regulate perception, thought, and feeling. (*Literary Darwinism* vii).

Fiction has both functional and pleasurable purposes, literary Darwinists argue, and, for Carroll, the complex functional cognitive structures giving rise to narrative are “both prompted and constrained by an evolved human psychology” (qtd. in Dutton 454) that is universal, despite its cultural variations, and has as one of its fundamental purposes human reproductive success:

literature itself is only a special case of the cognitive activity aimed at orienting the [human] organism to its environment--an environment that is in the first place physical. . . . the peculiar cognitive, linguistic, and cultural developments of human beings have done nothing to liberate them from the elemental constraints of all animal life--the necessity of nourishment, of water and air, a certain range of temperature, of protection from physical harm, and of successful reproduction (“Organism, Environment, and Literary Representation” 153).

Michelle Sugiyama also argues that narrative is a universal human disposition, one “that takes the same basic form in all cultures--a form involving characters, goal-oriented action, and resolution” (qtd in Carroll xix), and, like Stephen Pinker on social interaction, David Buss on mating, or Bryan Boyd on cheater detection, she suggests that narrative serves to act as a kind of gaming strategy, something that allows us to imagine Other experiences in order to prepare ourselves for their potential emergence in reality. Such “cognitive mapping” enables us to imaginatively prepare for future situations demanding the flexibility and adaptability that have rendered us so successful as a species: “narrative is ultimately a product of the mind, which in turn is the product of a long

history of evolution by natural selection” (“Narrative Theory” 233). For writers like Carroll and Sugiyama, human nature--which Carroll calls a “structured hierarchy of motives (within which the motive of constructing imaginative representations holds a prominent place)”--has unfairly lost ground in the nature-nurture debate, especially since the advent of modern sociology, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, which are often placed under the “social constructivist” rubric by literary Darwinists (Carroll, “Human Nature and Literary Meaning” 77). I will elaborate on this debate in the next chapter.

Drew’s desire to initiate radical changes in perspective toward the human place in the environment is based on his belief in a biological human predisposition for mutual aid, which is made manifest in his writing through his allusions to Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Pierre Proudhon, George Woodcock, and other Anarchists, many of whom reject the “red in tooth and claw” reading of Darwinian natural selection that prompted social Darwinism. Contemplating our shared sense of place and responsibility through ecological and evolutionary contextualizations such as those provided by ecocriticism and literary Darwinism, and not merely through familiar humanist or social scientific models, Drew would agree, has the potential to remind us of our shared ancestry and genealogy which, he hopes, will facilitate the new Enlightenment now needed to shift our global attention to solving the environmental crisis.

As much as scientific research has for four centuries or more explored and exposed the origins and operations of our bodies, the biosphere, and the cosmos, Drew is aware that any answers that science offers are ultimately provisional truths and will not themselves effect the required changes in ecological attitudes:

we overlook the paradox at the heart of physical research,
for finally what is being examined with such scrupulous

objectivity will dissolve into the laughter of sub-atomic particles, which becomes what perception makes them, either waves or matter. . . . So here we are, doing so much worse with so much more, still full of pale faith in reason, quashing discomfoting questions, pathetically hoping that the Hydra of problems we have created will yield to scientific analysis and relatively painless solutions. Here we are at the end of our tether, perhaps the end of our tenure. We are trapped in a Pyrrhic process, losing more with every victory. (“Laughter in the Labyrinth” 12-16)

Drew is right to critique the contemporary deification of science and to argue that all of our scientific “advances” over the past few centuries need to be contextualized in broader temporal terms. Just as the Earth was still “surely” flat less than 500 years ago, it may well be that seven or 700 other temporal-spatial dimensions of reality exist whose discovery in the future may one day render our current understanding of the cosmos obsolete and laughable. At the same time, and despite the secular, atheistic, scientific nature of modern Western academia, it may well be that there is some kind of First Cause--with or without an interest in our planet and our species. Paradoxically, the only absolute truth, for Drew, is that we simply do not know: “So long as we remain merely rational we shall be maddened by paradoxes. We will tighten our stranglehold on nature only to discover our own hands on our throats. We will control death only to find that we must control life, only to lose the spontaneity in which life lives” (17). Accepting uncertainty, for him, is the first step toward acting responsibly on behalf of all life on Earth.

Neil Evernden argues that the basic premise of ecology--interconnectedness--is intrinsically subversive to Western epistemological and ontological perspectives, which are largely based in reductivist science, because it challenges the “causal connectedness” and “subject-object relationship upon which [reductivist] science rests. Ecology

undermines not only the growth addict and the chronic developer, but science itself” (“Beyond Ecology” 7). Although his position can be challenged on the grounds that reductivist science actually *supports* ecological activism by providing a better understanding of the building blocks of ecosystems and how they operate, his fundamental argument for ultimate unknowability accords with Drew’s fundamental emphasis on mystery. Ecology, like biogenetics or quantum physics in recent decades, has proven itself a fundamentally anarchic science in many ways; the more we understand each of their inner operations, the less we comprehend the totality of their complexities.

Drew thus often equivocates over reductivist science, an ambivalence I will explore in the next chapter. Though he is fascinated with how it has evolved from human creativity and imagination and the fundamental human desire to know, he is also aware that humans often do *not* want to know, and he is wary of how reductivism has too easily become deified in modernity as the only route to truth in a world where multiple social truths exist in multiple forms--many of them intuitive, instinctive, and beyond language. Moreover, by facilitating the incessant development and production of material goods and by thus contributing to confusion between wanting and needing, science and technology are automatically complicit in the culture of consumption and disposal, which has huge environmental implications; the only question is one of degree:

Civilizational elites, to promote their accumulation, urge non-elites to consume endlessly. But consume for what? . . . Consumption for the sake of consumption appears, upon just a moment’s reflection, to be absurd behaviour. Elites therefore have to give an answer, and the answer they give is: more comfort. The goods we consume, so elites promise, will make us more comfortable. But the civilized comfort-zone is a power cemetery. It means stability instead of

wandering, sameness instead of diversity, and boredom instead of adventure. Pursuing comfort is the quickest way to powerlessness. . . . non-elites who are comfortable as couch potatoes are not about to notice suicidal ecocide.
(Kowalewski 22-23)

Drew is aware that the ideology of consumption has always contained the threat of turning totalitarian--of becoming what Tocqueville called "soft despotism" (Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* 8)--by *a priori* repelling modes of social existence other than democratic capitalism, which proffers only the illusion of choice. In his unpublished essay, "The Troubadours of Time," Drew remarks that "industrial society, increasingly more frenetic in its attack on individual integrity, must become increasingly totalitarian. It would seem that to participate in it without negative thought and subversive action is to accept a fearful, repressed, and paltry view of life, and to acquiesce in all lines of hope" (6). Anarchism as a political movement, Drew argues, has been contained during this past century by Western democratic forms that threaten to turn "softly" despotic. Where anarchism began as a viable and attractive political choice less than a century ago, it was quickly aligned by democratic capitalists with totalitarian Communism and was distorted so as to appear as inherently violent, dangerous, and the worst "unpatriotic" evil one could commit. In "Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal," Kropotkin, using as a model Darwin's emphasis on adaptation and descent with modification, defends mutual aid anarchism on the grounds that it mirrors events in the natural world:

It seeks the most complete development of individuality combined with the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects, in all possible degrees, for all imaginable aims; ever changing, ever modified associations which carry in themselves the elements of their durability and constantly assume new forms, which answer best to the multiple aspirations of all. (n. pag.)

By the 1970s and the emergence of environmental activism, anarchism had come to be seen as little more than a “terrorist” movement espoused by “crazy” radicals, but its easy dismissal by democratic-capitalists became the focus of several works in the 1970s and 80s querying passive versus active environmental activism: Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, M.T. Kelly’s *A Dream Like Mine*, and Drew’s *Halfway Man* and *The Erthring Cycle*, for instance, are all attempts to keep the anarchist movement alive (which it very much is, as any web search will indicate). I will return to this subject in Chapter Four.

So, while many of the theoretical literary and cultural specializations borne from feminism, Marxism, and postmodernism are not unimportant, they now, in a time of increasing biospheric degradation, need to begin to question whether they nurture useful dialogues about our species’ place on this planet and in the cosmos. Drew’s fiction is unique in this regard, for it elicits questions like: What does the study of art mean or do--*not* for a culture, gender, race, income-bracket, nation, or any other limiting category of differentiation, but for an entire species that is only now awakening to its biogenetic and transcultural interconnectivity? What will literature look like in this new century of science, one that can look further back through time and out into space than ever before and that promises radical genetic manipulation, permanent species alterations and substantially elongated life-spans? And what of the *study* of literature: might Bakhtin’s dialogics, for instance, be informed by an analysis of neuroscience, as biologists and geneticists probe deeper into the brain? Will the idea of the Self ultimately become reducible to quantum physics and math, as reductivist thinkers like E.O. Wilson hypothesize--and, if so, what are the implications for those of us who study the politico-

semantic fluctuations of ideas, words, and representations over time? Literature, as life, is on the verge of a radical reorientation, and its study in the contexts of ecology and evolution has only just begun. Drew is among the pioneers trying to mediate the world of literature and evolutionary science.

In fact, Drew is among the progenitors of a genre best deemed *evolutionary fiction*. To read his work is to enter into fiction rooted in the ecocritical tradition but that differs by transcending those ecocritical writings that fail in many cases, despite their shared emphasis on human and non-human, living and non-living interconnectedness, to provide adequate responses to lingering questions of human purpose in light of evolution. Within the discourse of literary ecology, saving the planet “for the children” is important for Drew as for most scholars and human beings generally; however, where he differs is in his intimation that the best reason to do so is not merely to extend our species’ existence but to allow for the potential emergence of new species or forms not yet discovered by human science:

What did it matter, after all, whether one species, one questing bit of matter, had gone awry and vanished, folding in on itself? What did it matter if, in its final madness, like a lethal vacuum, it sucked others after it? What did it matter if in its convulsions that deranged animal consumed even the Earth? What was that one planet in the universal profundity but a grain of sand that swirled in a storm forever?

What did it matter?

“It matters because we *know*,” Asa said softly, no louder than the deliquescence surrounding him, “and because we know, we are responsible. . . . to what might have been . . . to what might be.” (Drew, *The Erthring Cycle* 591)

By focusing on evolutionary time, Drew makes a love of mystery his central ideological message, and without the romantic or religious overtones such a term usually implies. Drew notes, in one of his journeys to Lake Superior, “the humbling insignificance of the human record as the rocks of Lake Superior reveal it—ten restless millennia against three billion sombre years of endurance” (*Superior* iv). This is more an evolutionary than an ecological observation, although the two are intertwined, and it implies that despite scientific understanding and religious claims, there is much we simply do not and might never know. Ontological questions of universal origins or end-states are still a matter of speculation, and though much current ecocritical theory is limited to discussions of biospheric protection, Drew forces us to go one step further and ask *to what end* we might care.

Drew’s writings persistently suggest that we are to act as guardians of the planet simply because we can. We need to appreciate the mystery of our being here at all and of our having the minds we do, and to act with responsibility by accepting with awe that we may pass into cosmological history without ever having secured the answers we have been seeking for millions of years about our ultimate purpose and destiny, should they exist. Unlike twentieth-century existentialism, which labelled consciousness a burden, Drew’s evolutionary fiction revels in the utter wonder of our having emerged from stardust, in the sheer unlikelihood of our survival as a species, and in the infinite complexity not just of the universe but of each of its smallest elements. By foregrounding mystery as a universal element binding our species and, more specifically, underlying the marvellously ambiguous gestures to explore which we call *art*, Drew’s evolutionary fiction defies seeking knowledge for its own sake and instead foregrounds

ontological unknowability. Unlike Atwood's protagonist in "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," who ends up insane because of his failed attempts to impose order on nature and make it re-signify, Paul Henry in *The Wabeno Feast* accepts and marvels over the rich detail of the evolutionary and ecological niche of which he appreciates his ambiguous part:

. . . he thought about portages. How had they come to be? Who had made them? . . . to be here, to risk, to drag your clutch of cells blindly up, bug-eyed and gasping into the killing air, to endure, to persevere, somehow to penetrate to the other shore which you do not know exists or else to leave your oils and skin rotting softly among the ants . . . What had done it? Frogs, nymphs, snakes and salamanders. And others followed them, creatures of fur and hair, snouting along a faint scent, their pads flattening miniscule green life, stiffening the earth into small sterilities. And then others, heavier, padded, and ungulate, leaving their tracks, leaving their trace, until the path was made. Then the first feet, the first splayed toes of this swaying creature, man, greased and watchful. (267)

Evolutionary fiction emphasizes how contemplating our common amoebic ancestry can bind us anew to each other and to our home, but it also prompts us to contemplate our differences in bioevolutionary terms to create new areas of investigation into diversity that have hitherto been restricted to and by exclusively humanist discourses.

Evolutionary criticism has the potential to investigate and ingest other current critical literary trends--from Marxism to gender and ethnic studies, from science fiction to postcolonialism--in light of their relatively limiting critiques of mere strands of experience within our species. Most current literary and cultural studies are anti-essentialist and foreground diversity, but rarely in ecological terms. And in throwing out the baby of grand narratives, they have drained the bathwater of the real shared history of our species. As "mere gesticulating insects" (Drew, *Wabeno* 208), we must now stop

highlighting differences and begin swarming together to prevent what he ultimately fears us performing en masse: *specieside*. The genre of *evolutionary fiction* best captures the current zeitgeist of evolutionary discourse in which Drew's writing is best situated. His five novels, written between 1973 and 1989, his short stories, and his entire body of non-fictional writing form a remarkable corpus of work anticipating a potentially global historical, social, and cultural shift toward what one day may be recalled as the *Age of Evolution*, an age in which centuries of diverse mythological and humanist assumptions about human origin and purpose will finally be reconciled with the science we have developed for ourselves and that now demands a discourse that begins to revisit those assumptions.

Notes

¹ Drew's letter is a response to Michelle Addison's letter to him dated 19 April 1996, which is comprised of ten questions about the novel related to her OAC English independent study project on *Halfway Man*.

² In *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, Lovelock distinguishes "Gaia" from "biosphere" as follows: "The biosphere is the three dimensional geographic region where living organisms exist. Gaia is the superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, the oceans, and the surface rocks" (x). Following the footsteps of some ecocritics, I will use the terms "biosphere" and "ecosphere" as synonyms for his wider-ranging holistic theory of global life, which is premised on the idea that "regulation, as a state fit for life, is a property of the whole evolving system of life, air, ocean, and rocks. This could be called the Gaia Theory because it has a mathematical basis in the model Daisyworld and because it makes testable predictions" (144).

³ I have included an abridged version of my 1997 interview with Drew as Appendix A; for brevity and clarity, all further references to our interview will be prefaced as A1, A20, etc.

⁴ Notably, in Pat Barclay's interview with Drew in 1990, Drew mentions that one of the first books he taught was Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, because it made him aware of "a science that was saying sensible things: ecology, the interrelatedness of all things. This is what native peoples have been saying for . . . ever" (22).

⁵ The interview was originally published online at "Treeline.org." It can now be found through *Made in Canada: the Canadian Homepage for Science Fiction* at <<<http://130.179.92.25/treeline/oak/i970203a.htm>>>.

⁶ In "English and Anarchy" and "The Troubadours of Time," Drew confronts the Western educational system with being complicit in the ideology of consumption and ecological ruin.

⁷ "Literature and Science" was delivered as a lecture at Cambridge University, 1882, in reply to Thomas H. Huxley's "Science and Culture," delivered in Birmingham on October 1, 1880, at the opening of Sir Josiah Mason's Science College. Huxley had hinted at the increasing irrelevance of a classical education in literature--in a gesture supporting Mason's injunction against the college's teaching of "mere literary instruction and education" (527)--in a world becoming increasingly scientific.

⁸ The short poem "To Linda, Cathy, and Pat," loose and dated Nov 1965, is an excellent example of his early explorations of how language, form, and rhythm can merge to be put to eco-poetic ends. Notably, his vocabulary and allusions (here, to Kant) are extensive here as throughout his short stories and novels and frequently involve naturalist or

evolutionist diction (amorphous, inchoate, miasma). Drew demands a conscious aesthetic and intellectual effort from his readers designed to coincide with the ecological exertion he wishes to inspire.

“To Linda, Cathy, and Pat”

Remember,
All beginnings, opening to mystery, attract.

To perceive that the initial allure,
 all precisions,
 cogencies,
 All amorphous challenge,
 Is stark scaffold

Where mystery is dispensed but not dispelled,
 That is maturity.
 Further,
 to pierce disillusion,
 Pierce unchoked the bland miasma,
 And discern thereby, not framework merely,
 But imminent structure,
 That is courageous, --and strong.

But to proceed in the very teeth of irony,
 To recognize inchoate form,
 permanent immanence,
 inconceivable ideal,
 And *then* to begin,

That is the commencement of excellence.

⁹ See House of Anansi Press at http://www.anansi.ca/titles.cfm?pub_id=176. Accessed 30 Apr 2002.

¹⁰ Keon’s comments are from a one-page review entitled “Beside the Lake Called Superior” in the Drew Fond at Trent. There is no publication data listed on the photocopy.

¹¹ See: Anderson-Dargatz, *The Cure for Death by Lightning* (Toronto: Vintage, 1997); Atwood, *Surfacing* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972) and *Life Before Man* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979); Bodsworth, *The Strange One* (New York and Toronto: Dodd Mead, 1959); O’Hagan, *Tay John* (New York: Book Craftsmen, 1960); Kelly, *Out of The Whirlwind* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995); Kroetsch, *Gone Indian* (Toronto: New Press, 1973) and *Stone Hammer Poems* (Lantzville: Oolichan, 1976);

Robinson, *Monkey Beach* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); and Urquhart, *Away* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994).

¹² See: Angus's exploration of the border metaphor as a locus of national and regional identity and a key component to successful "we/us" (as opposed to "we/they") social and ecological relationships in *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality, and Wilderness* (Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 1997); Atwood's "survival" thesis in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) and *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Bentley's analysis of how many late-19th and early-20th century Canadian writers struggle to adapt to and connect themselves with new and unfamiliar (and often threatening) landscapes in an effort to bridge the Old and New Worlds in "Literary Sites and Cultural Properties in Canadian Poetry," *SCL* 23.1 (1998): 90-127 and *The Gay]Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690-1990* (Ottawa: U of O Press, 1992); Frye's "garrison mentality" argument in his conclusion to Carl F. Klinck's *A Literary History of Canada* (in Frye's *The Bush Garden* [Toronto: Anansi, 1971]); Hurley's exploration of Southern Ontario Gothic in *The Borders of Nightmare: The Fiction of John Richardson* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992); Jones's thesis that the garrison or fort image best symbolizes the rational and ordered mind trying to resist the onslaught of the violent and irrational (embodied in the wilderness and Native peoples) in *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1970); John Moss's exploration of uniquely Canadian "concepts of exile" or a "geophysical imagination" in *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); New's investigation of how different perceptions of place and space variously shape notions of territoriality, social assumptions, and ideologies in *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998); Northey's argument that Native primitivism presents "a terrifying alternative" to familiar European thinking and interpretations of landscape in *The Haunted Wilderness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976): 21; and Ricou's exploration of the psychological intimidation of the vast landscape of the Canadian prairies in *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (University of British Columbia Press, 1973). See also my investigation of the function of landscape in contributing to domestic repression in "Redefining the Real: Gothic Realism in Alice Munro's 'Friend of my Youth.'" *Master's Abstracts International* 37:1 (1998): 67. Available on-line at << www.collectionscanada.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp04/mq31181.pdf>>.

¹³ The Association's accompanying journal is entitled *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*. Its website includes a comprehensive bibliography and excellent primers for the various aspects of ecocritical discourse. Pamela Banting at the University of Calgary currently manages the listserv and an on-line bibliography for the Canadian equivalent of ASLE: the Association for Literature, the Environment and Culture in Canada (ALECC - formerly ASLE Canada). See <http://mailman.ucalgary.ca/mailman/listinfo/asle-canada-l>.

¹⁴ The Glotfelty and Fromm reader was written amid an early-1990s proliferation of ecocritical and ecofeminist literary and philosophical articles and texts. For general introductions and samplings of ecocritical concerns, see also Kerridge and Sammonds, Coupe, Love, and Armbruster and Wallace; as yet, no comparable Canadian ecocritical reader has been published, although the long history of the study of place in Canadian literature suggests that it will come soon. For ecofeminism, see Gaard, Roach, and Warren; for ecology and animal rights, see Singer, Warren, Clark, and Preece. Among Canadian ecocritics, I recommend, for starters, Rowe's collection, *Home Place*, Bentley's *Gay/Grey Moose* for poetry, and Hulan's ecofeminist *Northern Experience*. Finally, for a brief but interesting comparison of Canadian and American attitudes toward nature and wilderness, which indirectly raises the issue of (but does not explore in any detail) whether Canadian writers and scholars historically anticipated the ecocritical movement, see Morrison, *Canadians are not Americans*.

¹⁵ For an introduction to the field, see: Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (St. Louis: U of Missouri P, 1994) and *Literary Darwinism* (London: Routledge 2004); Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson, eds., *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005); and Robert Storey, *Mimesis and the Human Animal: On the Biogenetic Foundations of Literary Representation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1996).

CHAPTER 2

A Metaphysics of Mystery: Making Humanism Posthumous in the Age of Evolution

“I fear what you have brought among us MacKay. For although you are my guest I see that you are mad, and will strive to escape your death even for a little time, and that you will cause the death of others, and of the birds of the air and the creatures of the earth, and even of the earth itself, which you will lay waste to keep at bay your fear of death. You are all wabenos, you whites, maddened by fires. You flee the enemy within, and fleeing, burn the plains and woodlands. I fear you more than death itself. I fear for my land when you walk upon it and for the creatures when you cast your eyes upon them.” (Drew, *Wabeno* 218)

. . . the answer to an old question--how is society possible?--is suddenly at hand, thanks to the insights of evolutionary biology. Society was not invented by reasoning men. It evolved as part of our nature. It is as much a product of our genes as our bodies are. . . . the billion-year coagulation of our genes into cooperative teams, the million-year coagulation of our ancestors into cooperative societies, and the thousand-year coagulation of ideas about society and origins. (Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* 7)

Young or old, all living species are direct descendants of the organisms that lived 3.8 billion years ago. . . . Viewed from the perspective of evolutionary time, all other species are our distant kin because we share a remote ancestry. We still use a common vocabulary, the nucleic-acid code, even though it has been sorted into radically different hereditary languages. (Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* 345)

The revolution Drew hopes to be a part of as an artist and philosopher begins with his imagining “a non-anthropocentric social science” that offers “a fresh appreciation of what must be recognized and what must be refused” (“Wilderness and Limitation” 16)--namely, that our species reassess its most fundamental ontological and epistemic assumptions in light of ecology and evolution and then impose limitations on ourselves

accordingly. It also involves recognizing, in a purely ecological sense, that “no life or death is either more or less important” than another and that “sacrifices,” to use his term, will be necessary (16). Thinking beyond the species is difficult, Drew knows; in modernity, as always perhaps, it is hard enough to think beyond one’s own immediate circumstances, let alone to envision making sacrifices in the name of something other than the familiar abstract entities of family, nation, or god.

One of the most memorable phrases in Drew’s writing is that, as a species, we need to learn to “find the means, against all instinct, to honour mystery” (*Erthing* 254). The phrase “against all instinct” is central to his writing, as it emphasizes the fact that he understands the irony that we are both driven by biology and have always been attempting to transcend it. Drew recognizes that curiosity is instinctive--that, as animals, we need to exercise our unique talent for pursuing knowledge and explanation. Indeed, it has led to the scientific, religious, and philosophical complexities that define us. However, not placing constraints on our curiosity is now killing us: scientific and technological improvements since the Renaissance have allowed us to quadruple our population since the earlier part of this century alone; we have enough nuclear weapons to eradicate all future life on the planet; tampering with genetics poses a similar threat; and an increasingly global culture of consumption and disposal is exhausting finite natural resources. Honouring mystery, for Drew, equates to slowing down and giving ourselves time to assess how the industrial and technological advancements we claim as progress have become so destructive--and to adjust our global cultural evolution as a result.

Because his five major works of fiction are creative outlets for his metaphysics of mystery, it may be useful, before proceeding, to investigate in more detail how Western humanism and science inform Drew's thinking and shape his views of the proper human place on the planet and in the cosmos. Many of Drew's critiques of Western thought are tangential; for instance, he rarely attacks Judeo-Christianity directly but implies his discontent by allusion or through circumlocution in character development and narrative. In *The Wabeno Feast*, MacKay's condescension toward Natives as "corrupt beyond redemption" (19), "shameless" (21), and "cultish and superstitious" is designed to challenge the eighteenth-century's Judeo-Christian civilizing mission, its over-emphasis on reason and rationality, and its displacement of Native peoples. Teperman in *The Erthring Cycle* and Travis in *Halfway Man* are constructed similarly: "I know," says Travis in the latter, "how history and philosophy and pure reason can get such a shaganash [White] stranglehold on you that you start eating yourself like a wendigo, from the inside out" (26). Drew's essay, "Killing Wilderness," explores the devastating effects of modern technology, to be sure, but its linking of three twentieth-century dystopian novels--Zamiatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *1984*--exposes the social and hence environmental dangers of both technocratic totalitarianism and what Charles Taylor refers to as ethical "soft-relativism," which challenges any claim that any one way of being is more valid than another and promotes purely subjective morality (*The Ethics of Authenticity* 45). Likewise, Drew's "Wilderness and Limitation" investigates how nature has always placed limits on humanity but, circuitously, through Drew's exploration of nihilism in Camus' *The Rebel*, it becomes a critique of how humanism has built an ethos of consumption and disposal that engenders

attitudes that are environmentally “cancerous,” devoted to “spectacle and busyness,” and increasingly challenging nature’s ability to constrain human endeavours (17). Finally, by using phrases like “ecological conscience” and invoking “Hellenistic notions of non-transcendent man” (17), Drew takes his study of Ontario’s wilderness well beyond the confines of one particular ecosystem or nation and into much broader and deeper geographic and ecosophical domains. This tangential and expansive element of his critique, coupled with his dense and erudite style, make his writing demanding; nonetheless, it is exciting to observe his complex and unique metaphysics of mystery blossom from within those discourses of ecology and evolution that are only now coming to bear on the creation of literature and its study.

***Part I - I Think I Am (Here), I AM Here:
Challenging Humanism and Reductivist Science***

Our fanatical fixation on ideas (mind, intellect, reason, rationality--whatever you prefer) means that culturing has become more than just one useful aspect of being; it has become the human hyperspecialization. . . . a *prosthetic device*. . . . We will continue to need our supportive cultural prosthesis just as long as we persist in the denial of our animalness, our biological being. . . . what most offends the humanistic establishment is modern ecosophy’s challenge to ideology itself. (Livingston, *Rogue Primate* 10-11)

All tangible phenomena, from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics. . . . I know that such reductionism is not popular outside the natural sciences. To many scholars in the social sciences and humanities it is a vampire in the sacristy. (Wilson, *Consilience* 267-68)

In “What is Humanism?”, Frederick Edwords, the Executive Director of the *American Humanist Association*, identifies no fewer than eight different closely related forms of humanism.¹ Of these, *Modern Humanism* most closely describes what Drew opposes in his writing, characterized as it is “by one of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont, as ‘a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion.’ Modern Humanism has a dual origin, both secular and religious, and these constitute its sub-categories.” This said, it is important to note that Drew is patently not opposed to human compassion, but he does emphasize the need to always contextualize it within the broader rights of the rest of the natural world. The fundamental tenet of modern humanism, then, is the belief that humans, and not some transcendental force, determine our conditions of existence and that we are responsible for assessing and implementing the morality, ethics, laws, and sociopolitical structures that serve us best.

It is still common in the Humanities to view humanism as something opposed to science and technology and humanists as the guardians of “democracy and human compassion,” as Lamont argues. Matthew Arnold takes such a stance in “Literature and Science,” where he contrasts “this reality of natural knowledge. . . . as a knowledge of things” with “the humanist’s knowledge” (492), which, for him, involves taking the hard facts of science and relating “these pieces of knowledge to our sense for conduct, to our sense for beauty” (493). Drew, however, faults both science *and* humanism (as Arnold uses it) for their hubris and anthropocentricity.

Humanism in its contemporary form, embedded in a culture increasingly valuing positivism and the scientific acquisition of knowledge--and thriving on its technological

applications--is indeed slowly supplanting mainstream religions as determining the context for defining human perfectibility. In further defining the term, Neil Badmington cites Kate Soper, who suggests that humanism in the English-speaking world "is itself presented as a kind of religion--the progressive cult for today's broadminded rationalist" (2). David Ehrenfeld likewise argues in *The Arrogance of Humanism*, "humanism is one of the vital religions . . . it is the dominant religion of our time, a part of the lives of nearly everyone in the 'developed' world and of all others who want to participate in a similar development" (3). Desmond Morris, too, sees humanism as a modern religion:

As a species we are a predominantly intelligent and exploratory animal, and beliefs harnessed to this fact will be the most beneficial for us. A belief in the validity of the acquisition of knowledge and a scientific understanding of the world we live in, the creation and appreciation of aesthetic phenomena in all their many forms, and the broadening and deepening of our range of experiences in day-to-day living, is rapidly becoming the "religion" of our time. (123).

As far as Drew is concerned, humanism has led to the capitalist culture of consumption and disposal, a worshipping of science, and a dangerous faith in technology; it continues to perpetuate an ideological fantasy in the West that humans are at the centre of meaning and purpose. All have led to indifference toward the environment. Drew quotes Jacques Ellul, in support of his position:

"A choice is forced upon us. We must decide between the accumulation, perfection, and primacy of material things, and that ambiguous, doubt-ridden, and uncelebrated (except for his learning) creature known as man. For in fact . . . the two are irreconcilable. Yet the seemingly illogical choice I make is man with all his imperfections. I reject out of hand the notion of human backwardness measured against the brilliant achievements of science to which man ought to adapt. In making that wager, I am not quite certain whom I am acting for or what standards govern my choice.

Obviously, it is not traditional humanism, or the meaningless concept of making technology man's servant. It is a revolutionary attitude in that we are *wagering on uncertainty* against the overwhelming evidence of society's predictable course. It is our only alternative to that foreseeable development." ("Wilderness and Limitation" 17)

As Western ideals spread, Drew fears, so, too, will its new religion, and with it environmental destruction. He also argues in "Wilderness" that humanism in its Western form promotes a dangerous "growth ethic" (17) rooted in ethical relativism, where each member of society is free to pursue his or her own ends without the overarching restraint of an *ecological* ethic. Drew fears that this growth ethic threatens to turn democracy noiselessly into a form of totalitarianism that will only continue to propagate the culture of consumption and disposal:

no received ideology is adequate . . . no mere system of social engineering will work. Although the risk of totalitarian measures will surely increase as the ecological crisis deepens, the most entrenched of centralized governments could succeed only by restructuring man himself. Nor does the political left give any cause for optimism. The growth ethic prevails there as blithely as on the right, and an equally myopic faith is placed in "pollution control." The radical left failed dismally to recognize the subversive potential in the ecological movement during the height of both in 1968 and 1969, and there is scant evidence that it will rise from its demoralized state to do so now.
(17)

The ethic Drew attacks has serious environmental and social implications, since any argument for universal human freedoms is an argument for relativism: for the right to exercise choices as one sees fit concerning patterns of consumption, child-bearing, employment, and so on.

Whether such freedom of choice is ecologically legitimate is becoming increasingly doubtful. Though not talking about ecology, Charles Taylor claims, in his study about how choice itself as an ethical good has unfortunately taken precedence over the things available to be chosen *from* in the first place, that

in stressing the legitimacy of choice between certain options, we very often find ourselves depriving the options of their significance. . . . in some forms this discourse slides towards an affirmation of choice itself. All options are equally worthy, because they are freely chosen, and it is choice that confers worth. The subjectivist principle underlying soft relativism is at work here. (*The Ethics of Authenticity* 37-38)

Taylor goes on to say that “choice as an ideal makes sense only because some *issues* are more significant than others. . . . Otherwise put, I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter” (39-40). He classifies those things that matter as “horizons of significance”--where “horizon” connotes a long-term sensibility that seems to have become lost in modern Western society--and he sees underlying soft relativism the tendency to espouse a moral principle where “no one has a right to criticize another’s values” which, in turn, “threatens us with a loss of meaning and hence a trivialization of our predicament” (45). Taylor’s critique of how rational compromise and ethical relativism cause a moral predicament that can only be obviated through horizons of significance, though anthropocentric, can easily be extended to the ecological domain, where meaningful ecological horizons of significance might be found to define clear areas for restraint and adaptation.

Two important horizons of significance Drew foregrounds are ecological limitation and evolutionary education, and both urge humanity’s self-imposition of a *land ethic*, an idea made popular by Aldo Leopold, who argued that we need to change our

perception of “the role of *Homo Sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it” (204). Leopold suggests the following as a starting point: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (224-5). As trite as Leopold’s maxim first sounds, it makes perfect ecological sense. Since ecosystems cannot speak for themselves, they require human intervention. Patrick D. Murphy, for instance, argues that we need to begin to act as “‘I-for-another’ for the earth” (46), just as anti-speciesists like Peter Singer or the PETA (Persons for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) movement have argued for legislative and legal rights for those other non-human entities: animals. Clearly, some among our species are beginning to flex the traditional boundaries of law in society--and to challenge what constitutes “society” itself. Though a land ethic need not in principle oppose the premise of universal human rights and freedoms, it does force us to literally and figuratively “re-ground” such discourses to consider what is best for all biotic and abiotic forms on the planet.

The relationship between reductivist science and ecology also fascinates Drew, and at times it seems to pose a quandary for him. Part of the current ecological dilemma is that through reductivism, best defined perhaps as that outgrowth of humanism that attaches a moral value to pursuing successive reductions of what we do and can know through improvements in science and technology--that everything, in other words, can be reduced to empirical explanation--we have learned to epistemologically fragment the world in which we live without thinking through the ontological consequences of doing so. In other words, our relatively modern obsession with knowledge has disconnected us from the natural world as our hunter-gatherer ancestors experienced it for millions of

years. John Stuart Mill set the tone for the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake in the section on “nature” in his 1874 “Three Essays on Religion”: “To acquire knowledge of the properties of things, and make use of the knowledge for guidance, is a rule of prudence, for the adaptation of means to ends; for giving effect to our wishes and intentions whatever they may be” (320). Mill goes on to suggest that the epistemological inquiry into nature is not merely a prudent course of action but one involving an ethical dimension. It is the “right” thing to do and “natural” inasmuch as we have been given the faculty of inquiry and are responsible to use it as a means to an end: *our* end (but certainly not our *end!*). Drew argues that we urgently need to suspend our quest for more knowledge and start better using what we already know to alleviate our impact on the planet--in essence, to cease throwing more knowledge derived through technology at problems themselves caused by knowledge and technology.

Kowalewski argues that “severing a deep connection with nature enables its exploitation--it is easy to hurt what is not a part of you” (9). For instance, not knowing the intricate operations of an ecosystem one lives in makes it easier to avoid taking responsibility for safeguarding it. When Cheryl Glotfelty remarks that “the environmental crisis has been exacerbated by our fragmented, compartmentalized, and overly specialized way of knowing the world” (27), she is referring in part to the modern humanist obsession first, with accumulating knowledge, and second, with implementing it through the creation of new technologies. Illustrations from business and industry aside, radically increased specialization within all fields of academia in the past few decades alone testifies to the nature of Glotfelty’s concern. “Art for art’s sake” has

mutated into something weirdly technological, suggesting an unsettling (and environmentally dangerous) fetishization of knowledge and technology both.

Interestingly, though, Drew is often caught in a moment of cognitive dissonance when it comes to scientific reductivism. On one hand, like many, he questions why anyone would want to reduce all knowledge and being to a matrix of mathematics, physics, and biology; such an endeavour seems to threaten much of what we value in terms of human imagination, creativity, spontaneity, and purpose. Do we really want to have neuroscience map out the sequence of biochemical synaptic firings that constitute an emotive moment of “love” or a single thought? On the other hand, he also knows that the scientific process, especially in the last century, has revealed a tendency not toward simplicity but complexity that can, in fact, be used to support his idea of an ecological ethic--both in pragmatic and spiritual terms. Drew’s scepticism about scientific reductivism is evident throughout his writings:

A blinkered faith in reductionism stands in the way of real progress. . . . This is not to say that we should shutter up the house of intellect. On the contrary, we must enlarge it, build into it rooms for restraint, rooms for unrealizable possibilities, rooms for intuition, perhaps even rooms for forgetting. As William James said, “the art of becoming wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.” (“Laughter” 15)

In his photo-narrative exposition with Bruce Litteljohn, *A Sea Within: The Gulf of St Lawrence*, Drew poetically evokes images of evolutionary time and space to comment on how language itself--here, of geography and geology--tends to reduce and contain our experience of nature and give us only the illusion that we truly comprehend it:

Nothing in time and space corresponds to the neat configuration labelled “Gulf of St. Lawrence” on geographers’ maps. A gulf by definition is an emptiness. In

gulfs time stops, and no relationship survives. Shelley referred to death itself as a gulf. Tennyson's Ulysses foresaw himself and his men washed down in unknown gulfs, and St. Luke has Abraham say with eternal sadness to the rich man, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed."

But the mind cannot maintain the notion of a vacuum. Images rush to fill it. Journey into the centre of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and you will find not emptiness but soft kaleidoscopes of spindrift and phosphorescence; not an end, but myriad beginnings. . . . the real gulf lies in the interstices among them. (9)

Note, once again, Drew's emphasis on mystery. Meaning itself, like the Gulf he describes, exists in the interstices of language and experience.

Though Drew would not have us close down scientific laboratories, it is clear that he feels we have become too obsessed with the pursuit of knowledge and not concerned enough about whether what we are pursuing is relevant. Environmentally, now more than ever, we need to figure out why we are "doing so much worse with more" and "losing more with every victory" ("Laughter in the Labyrinth" 16) over the mysteries we perpetually seek to unlock. "Whether what we know is worth knowing is almost always assumed in the positive, at least by the intelligentsia" (87), says Preece, but as a species whose accumulation of knowledge now threatens the biosphere, we need to interrogate this most basic of assumptions.

Suggesting constraints on the pursuit of knowledge, let alone its applications, is akin to heresy today, so much has the scientific and technological enterprise been deified for at least two-hundred years. Expressions of humanism since the Enlightenment have increasingly deified the human ability to *improve* and *progress*--whether in areas of science, technology, medicine, economics, society, culture, politics, or art. Humanism has always concerned itself with improving individual and social lives by reifying and

quantifying human desires, needs, hopes, imaginations, memories, moralities, and perceptions of each other. Though the optimism of the Victorian period was shattered by events in the twentieth-century, it nonetheless holds that the humanist endeavour ideologically underwriting that optimism continues. It continues most problematically in how the eighteenth-century notions of universal human rights, freedoms, and democratic equality, coupled with technology, have now become the main causes of what Drew terms our “ecological cardiac arrest” (“Laughter” 3), for they sustain an ethos of unsustainable consumption and disposal.

The field of the Humanities today almost exclusively rationalizes its existence by concentrating on improving social conditions and extending rights to various raced, cultured, gendered, ethnic, social, and sexual “Others.” What these rights-based discourses overlook, rooted as they are in antiquated eighteenth-century humanist ideals, is that there are dire ecological consequences of actually achieving them. Universal human rights and democracy exist symbiotically, and with the laissez-faire capitalist economics underwriting both of them. “Our ecological crisis is the product of an emerging, entirely novel, democratic culture. The issue is whether a democratized world can survive its own implications. Presumably we cannot unless we rethink our axioms,” says Lynn White Jr. (6). Our biggest fear of the spread of democracy should be that it is accompanied by the delusion that we have unlimited resources: economic growth projections that drive the democratic-capitalist machine and its globalization are universally--and falsely--premised either on the infinite availability of material resources or the romantic idea that science will fill in when and where the planet becomes unable to provide them any longer.

Rewriting anti-globalization discourses in ecological terms, where humans are but one species among many, forces us to adopt an ethic that considers the impact on biodiversity first and cultural diversity only thereafter. As one of Drew's characters in *The Erthring Cycle* exclaims, "we had used our vaunted brain not to define what was required, not to control and limit our own evolution, but to prance ever faster in our macabre jigs of death" (250-51). Elsewhere, in *The Wabeno Feast*, the eco-anarchist Miro Balch sees "Individual rights. Free enterprise. Humanism. The Law itself" as symptomatic of madness, as "lobotomies . . . ways of inducing human acquiescence, of keeping the illusion of choice" (200). For Miro, all man-made systems, whether political, economic, or social, are but feeble attempts at imposing order on a chaotic, unpredictable, and indifferent world. Drew exaggerates Balch's militant anti-anthropocentrism to underscore the dangers of extremism, but Balch, who ultimately employs violence on behalf of the environment, is rendered "mad" by society, and dies, may, in a broader context of ecological ethics, be reckoned rather sane. Drew leaves it for us to choose.

***Part II - Think Big, Think Back: The Postmodern
Subject and Resituating Cultural/Identity Politics***

Enlightenment thinkers believe we can know everything, and radical postmodernists believe we can know nothing. . . . Reality, they propose, is a state constructed by the mind, not perceived by it. In the most extravagant version of this constructivism, there is no "real" reality, no objective truths external to mental activity, only prevailing versions disseminated by ruling social groups. Nor can ethics be grounded, given that each society creates its own codes for the benefit of the same oppressive forces. If these premises are correct, it follows that one culture is as good as any other in the expression of truth and morality. (Wilson, *Consilience* 40-41)

In the second decade of the twentieth century, an anti-Darwinian counter-revolution conquered the social sciences and from there spread out to become the dominant public ideology of the century. Social theorists such as Émile Durkheim, Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, and Robert Lowie propounded the doctrine that culture is an autonomous agency that produces all significant mental and emotional content in human experience. From this culturalist perspective, innate, evolved characteristics exercise no constraining influence on human motives or thoughts. Evolution produced the human brain, but that brain invented culture, and culture has succeeded in cutting itself loose from all direct biological influence. (Carroll, *Literary Darwinism*, ix)

It holds that there is a fundamental unity, an essential similarity in all human experience and thought, divergent cultures notwithstanding, which is ultimately of far greater significance than the immediately obvious but potentially deceiving differences. Cultures serve to mask the realities of homogeneity. . . . Today, the devotees of cultural distinctiveness are in the ascendant, but their inclination hides much from their understanding. (Preece, *Animals and Nature* xii)

Even though he never directly alludes to its founders or practitioners directly, Drew's fragmented narratives, complex gender characterizations, self-reflexive storytelling techniques, and unsettling, provisional endings belie a postmodern influence on his fiction. In fact, Drew's writing almost universally operates in the realm of "halfwayness," to borrow from his final novel, in order to destabilize the reading subject and to draw attention to the constructedness and arbitrariness of meaning, knowledge, identity, and power--particularly as they relate to our assumptions about human purpose in light of our relationship to place. However, in talking about *The Wabeno Feast* in our interview, Drew also alludes to "a core, some form of genetic programming which involves the practice of mutual aid. A core of sanity, maybe, or a core of goodness and trust in the future, in others" (A18). Drew's belief in such a core is increasingly being

empirically validated: Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, pioneers in bioevolutionary theory for their rejection of the Darwinian “survival of the fittest” notion, argue that the major breakthroughs in evolution have occurred primarily through biological co-operation: “Life did not take over the globe by combat, but by networking” (“Marvellous Microbes” 11). Drew’s curiosity about a “core” of some naturally occurring appreciation for symbiosis stems from his interest in evolution, and it appears later in *Halfway Man* and *The Erthring Cycle* as well, where a team of scientists and scholars work to “define a natural core in man” (488). Nearly synonymous with the word “core” are the phrases “human essence” and “human nature”--phrases that have caused no small amount of controversy in recent years.

In the past two decades or so, some evolutionary and ecologically-minded scholars and scientists, including Wilson, Dawkins, Ridley, Steven Pinker and, most vociferously, Carroll, have opposed themselves to what they see as an extreme form of what is routinely deemed “social constructivism,” which they see as opposed to the idea of human nature--and under whose umbrella they routinely include discourses of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and cultural/identity politics within the Humanities and social sciences. Carroll, in rejecting the Standard Social Scientific Model (SSSM), which has dominated social science discourse throughout most of the 20th century, suggests that “conventional social scientists and contemporary literary theorists would very largely concur in the general proposition that the affective and cognitive content of human experience is culturally ‘constructed’” (“Evolution and Literary Theory”).² He summarizes what it is the anti-constructivists oppose:

By totalizing language or culture, poststructuralists eliminate the concept of an antecedent reality that includes

living human beings and the world in which they live. Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes offer representative formulations. Derrida tells us, “There is nothing outside of the text. . . . [T]he absolute present, Nature, that which words like “real mother” name, have always already escaped, have never existed” (1976: 158-59). So also Barthes: “Man does not exist prior to language, either as a species or as an individual.” The individual is constituted by culture, and “culture, in all its aspects, is a language” (1972: 135). Fredric Jameson--currently one of the most prominent American critics and literary theorists--offers a representative formulation of the idea that all knowledge is incoherent or self-contradictory: “‘Poststructuralism,’ or, as I prefer, ‘theoretical discourse,’ is at one with the demonstration of the necessary incoherence and impossibility of all thinking” (1991: 218). (“Evolution and Literary Theory”)

The constructivist movement, reflecting decades of emphasis on human individuality and difference has, in the opinion of Carroll and others, unduly privileged the “nurture” half of the nature-nurture debate and ignored advancements in the natural sciences that point to adaptive constraints and influences on our species’ epistemological capabilities: “evolutionary processes involving speciation operate on time scales and on levels of biological organization far broader than those of human social interaction” (*Literary Darwinism* xiv). David Michelson opposes reading science as “just another text” and characterizes those who challenge constructivism as rejecting

the rather insular culture of anti-scientism and radical political posturing that is commonplace in most English and cultural studies departments today. Those English professors who use their lecture podium as a pulpit for radical [Leftist] political views have been remarkably effective at inculcating students in varying degrees of allegiance to social constructivism (commonly referred to as poststructuralism, postmodernism, or deconstruction but here collapsed for convenience sake into the term preferred by the authors in *The Literary Animal*: constructivism). In its most virulent form, constructivism regards the scientific method as no more truthful than any

other means for understanding human social life and artistic production. (“Reading *Homo Sapiens*”)³

Donna Haraway similarly argues,

recent social studies of science and technology have made available a very strong social constructionist argument for all forms of knowledge claims, most certainly and especially scientific ones. In these tempting views, no insider's perspective is privileged, because all drawings of inside-outside boundaries in knowledge are theorized as power moves, not moves towards truth. . . . The strong programme in the sociology of knowledge joins with the lovely and nasty tools of semiology and deconstruction to insist on the rhetorical nature of truth, including scientific truth. (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 184)

An ecocritical opposition to constructivism might decry the postmodern fragmentation of identity and the impossibility of meaning because generally, ecocritics would want all humans to think and act as a species with the common purposes of restraint and limitation.

Evolutionary theorists, on the other hand, might reject constructivism because scientific advances in evolutionary psychology, neurobiology, and biogenetics are, in their opinion, on the verge of defining (or already have defined) concrete biological adaptive constraints on human experience, emotion, thought, and action--which, in turn, collectively support the notion of a common “human nature” or “essential” humanity, despite the plasticity of the brain and the influence of environment. The entire field of evolutionary psychology, inaugurated by Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, is oriented to explore precisely such constraints.⁴ Though few from either an ecological or evolutionary camp would disavow the relationship of environment to genetics, the benefits of the postmodern deconstruction of grand narratives, or reducing the number of those socially marginalized by essentialist claims, many often reject outright a theoretical

position that seems to ignore evolutionary biology, advocate ethical relativism, disavow human nature, or reject science as merely one “discourse” among many.

Much of Carroll’s work, like that of Dawkins, Cosmides and Tooby, and others, is devoted to theorizing about “elemental motives and dispositions” common to “all known cultures” and that include “self-preservation, sexual desire, jealousy, maternal love, and the desire for social status. . . . marriage, rites of passage, social roles defined by age and sex, religious beliefs, public ceremonies, kin relations, sex taboos, medical practices, criminal codes, storytelling, jokes, and so on” (*Literary Darwinism* 203). According to E.O. Wilson, a preeminent evolutionary theorist, “the evidence to date leaves little room for doubt. Human nature exists, and it is both deep and highly structured” (216). Glen Love agrees: “the great blind spot of postmodernism is its dismissal of nature, especially human nature . . . it cannot be ignored that our constructions always occur within the overarching context of an autonomously existing system that we call nature” (26). Love summarizes one of the fundamental opposition points to constructivism in saying that it promotes a “narrow ego-consciousness” that belies and even contributes to “a deepening sense of the mind’s alienation from nature and of the world’s alienation from reality; an intensified experience of material randomness and temporal flux, of moral relativity and psychological alienation” (26). Richard Lewontin, in *Biology as Ideology*, argues that “this individualistic view . . . is simply a reflection of the ideologies of the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century that placed the individual at the centre of everything” (81). In fundamentally opposing universality and essences, opponents to constructivism agree, constructivists ignore our animal evolution, which, despite the linguistic or cultural or other differences

we may have manifested over millions of years, nonetheless still binds us in limited ways that we are only *now* beginning to be able to measure and understand.

Still, although culture/identity politics and postmodernism taken together indeed need to be challenged on the grounds that they do promote a degree of ethical relativism that is ecologically unsustainable in a global context--meaning that *all* future ethical discussions need to begin with an ecological and not anthropic grounding--opponents to constructivism do not do enough justice to the social benefits of a constructivist viewpoint. Derrida's rejection of transcendental signification, for instance, which is the cornerstone of his theory of the arbitrariness of sign systems and hence of meaning and truth, does not seem genuinely construed to disavow "real reality" or to argue that humans are merely social or cultural constructs. His interrogation of the power dynamics of language is specifically limited to the realm of the human *social* animal, and he focuses on how truth claims within and among societies and cultures are often premised on antiquated assumptions about the permanence and fixity of language and meaning.

In truth, much opposition to constructivism tends to unfairly exaggerate *how* it exposes the provisionality of meaning rather than *that* it helpfully accentuates the social and cultural benefits of its having done so. While, again, the entire humanistic endeavor needs to be reconceived with the environment in mind and as advancements in evolutionary science discover more about what drives the human animal to think and act the ways it does, this itself does not need to eradicate the need for a continuing emphasis on the role of culture and society in shaping what we often assume to be "true" or "real." There is a halfway position, and a universal human nature and the universality of

individual experience are easily capable of coexisting. This is precisely what Drew is exploring throughout his work. Despite the fact, for instance, that all humans may have adaptive constraints that limit their potential neurological production of thoughts or physiological production of emotions--and which renders the notion of the mind as a *tabula rasa* obsolete--no two sets of experiences are ever identical. The Modern Synthesis in evolutionary theory itself allows for random mutation *and* the influence of environment in determining adaptive success.

As an ecological thinker stressing not only fragments and localities but their integrative and broader possibilities, Drew would likely agree, to borrow from Haraway--even though she speaks from a distinctly feminist position here--that one of the challenges of postmodernism is to determine

how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own “semiotic technologies” for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a “real” world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness. . . . We also don't want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different--and power-differentiated--communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future. (187-88)

For Drew, those “bodies” include not just human but *all* biotic and abiotic bodies, without whose existence we will have no future in which to contemplate our own. On the whole, science and humanities scholars have more in common than they might at first recognize, and both sides need to remember, with Drew, that the “next evolutionary step

for man . . . [is] to develop and transmit restraints on his own activities” (*Erthring* 404). As Bill McKibben says on the dust cover of Harold W. Baillie’s *Is Human Nature Obsolete?: Genetics, Bioengineering, and the Future of the Human Condition*, “The conversation about what we want--literally--to make of ourselves is probably the most important conversation human beings will ever have.” Interestingly, “having moved inwards from the species to the gene,” argues Jonathon Bate, “biologists are now moving outwards from the species to the environment, considering how evolution operates at the level of the ecosystem. The key to the continuation of life is biodiversity” (53). In other words, though reductivist science strives to explain the biological systems and complex neurological networks that comprise “the essential human” or define “human nature,” and though the discoveries made by science promise benefits for human health, longevity, and comfort, what is more important is that we always contextualize these discoveries within a broader ecological paradigm.

Postmodernism shares with ecological and evolutionary theory a desire to explore the epistemological tensions between knowing and the difficulty of knowing in absolute terms. They all raise timely questions as the twenty-first century unfolds about links between the evolution of human consciousness and imagination and our shift in emphasis away from totalizing social narratives and toward the phenomena of the particular, the local, and interrelatedness. And all three challenge equally accepted norms and beliefs with the aim of improving the human lot, even as we rethink and reshape it in light of scientific advancements and improved communications. A more important question than whether human nature “really” exists or whether reality is better measured semiotically or scientifically, perhaps, is whether the longer lives that advancement in genetics promises

are wise, given that the ones we live now are consuming the planet at an unprecedented rate.

Stuart Hall's distinction between *particularistic* and *universalistic* modes of identification has a postmodern feel that transcends easy binaries, and though it is also anthropocentric, it can nonetheless be transformed to fit into the familiar environmental maxim, "Think globally, act locally." For Hall, particularistic ways of identifying mean attaching ourselves to familiar and "particular places, events, symbols, and histories; the latter [universalist] implies an attachment to broader material and abstracted identity constructs" ("Question" 623). Ecologically, we live in a multitude of particularistic places, from residential homes to communities to workplaces to nations, but as a species we share in globe-all and universe-all space made possible through abstraction and imagination. We are, as imaginative and highly social animals, by nature quite capable of being part of what Benedict Anderson calls, in analyzing the rise of the nation as a political entity, an "imagined community." Anderson's idea, like Hall's use of the term "universal," is meant to be taken in a human-only context, but either can easily be transcribed in broader ecological and even cosmological terms. Such a universal mode of species identification has until now perhaps been impossible to sustain by virtue of developed patterns of thinking, no less than by geographic and thus communicative and corporeal separation, both of which prohibit the development of an "I-as-another," "it-as-me" consciousness. However, simultaneous advances in global communications, ecology, and the evolutionary sciences are inviting us, for the first time, to develop new patterns of thinking and make abstract Others--biotic or abiotic--seem more particularistic

and closer to “home,” as it were. At the level of the gene and in an evolutionary context, it is easy to see how we *are* all one.

And just as Hall’s modes of cultural identification can easily be transplanted into an ecological and evolutionary discourse that challenges anthropocentric thought, so, too, can those envisaged by Kwame Dawes and Homi Bhabha. Dawes’ distinction between “exploitative” and “dialogic” modes of discourse (109) and Bhabha’s concept of a “third space”--as with Bakhtinian dialogics generally--have until now been used predominantly in human contexts. Bhabha’s observation, for instance, that the dominant Western culture must, in terms of its historical imperializing mission, “face a peculiarly displaced and decentred image of itself” as “at once a civilizing mission and a violent subjugating force” can easily be applied to Western--and increasingly global--attitudes toward the Nature we have been conquering for 12 000 years (*Location* 148). In *The Appropriation of Nature*, Ingold explores how “one organism--through its behavior--affects the state of one or more others or of inanimate objects in its environment,” and he emphasizes how the “intentional control of these [human/non-human, non-living] interactions by willful social subjects” has nurtured the human impression of having mastery over Nature (9-10). Drew sometimes argues (usually for rhetorical purposes) that the planet will long outlive our species, and he assumes in so arguing that even with events like global nuclear war or severe global warming, the Earth’s atmosphere would remain livable for some organisms. Such assumptions are questionable, but either way, we have nothing to lose from altering an attitude of mastery and utility. Reconfiguring our place in the natural world in non-anthropocentric terms requires an imaginative leap, and it is one based on the ecological reality that we are, literally, responsible for the entire globe.

Within the postmodern dialogic/social model, identity formation and exchange are seen as involving open, pluralistic, ongoing mediations between the subjective self and an Other, in which a series of utterances create only temporary moments of fixed meaning within mutating discursive spaces. The relational nature of these gaps in meaning and communication are in principle web-like or ecological, where an utterance can be imagined as a strand of the web and the invisible spaces between strands as the seemingly invisible realm of contexts that allow meaning to become visible. The fluid and dynamic discursive interplay between voices need not be constricted to human-to-human modes of communication. This is why setting, for Drew, is not merely a backdrop for human activity:

What makes a story interesting for you?

Oh, finally an easy one (laughter)--*ambivalence!* It has to be sufficiently moving on different levels, with a great deal of uncertainty that gets expressed in many ways. I don't know that that's true of my own books, but that's the kind of novel that engages me and my imagination. Not just an overt mystery, mind you: I always feel tricked by mystery writers. Something much more subtle grabs me, something like a book I'll recommend to you, *Snow Falling From Cedars*, an absolutely exquisite novel. There, too, the environment is a character, which, for me, has to be a part of it. (Belyea interview A24)

Arguably, as one species among many that is self-aware of its placement, we are always at least partially rendering the self in terms of "I-as-another" and "it-as-me" in natural terms. Imaging and imagining the environment as an equal character in his fiction is Drew's way of prompting us to identify ecologically with and beyond each other as members of the same species to attempt to transcend anthropocentricity. Michael J. McDowell, in "A Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Literacy," reminds us that our ability to

communicate is but one of many literal--and not merely metaphoric, as is often portrayed--voices in the biosphere:

An exploration of the dialogic voices in a landscape leads naturally to an analysis of the values a writer has recognized as inherent in a landscape, rather than imposed upon it . . . a self-reflexive stance in which the narrator admits his or her presence and participation in the landscape produces a very different narrative and suggests a closer understanding of the elements of the landscape. (386-87)

Such corporeal self-awareness permits dialogue to be initiated from the Other of the land itself, in that it recognizes that human language is only one of a polyphony of broader ecological voices constantly speaking in the natural world. One need only escape the city for a few hours to hear sounds that remind us that the physical environment both precedes our species and is the source of our *corporeality*: sounds not only from animals but from the moving water of a brook, wind blowing through branches of trees, or leaves hitting the ground in a near whisper. The ability of the physical world to be heard begins with the desire to listen. Beyond the human voice or ear--our unique tools of communication--there are countless equally unique intelligences always-already speaking to each other. These voices, according to Onno Oerlemans, best describe the “materiality of nature,” which is the title of his reclamatory study of how a Romantic poet like Wordsworth wrote not “merely” from a radically subjective interiorized position of spontaneous emotion but from a subject position intensely attuned to the visceral, tactile, and sensory elements of what he recognized as his meager place among a much larger and more powerful material natural world.

Drew’s love of ambivalence and fascination with the paradox that humans both are and are not at the centre of meaning shows how his metaphysics of mystery--

particularly at its most optimistic--resembles postmodern inquiry. As Drew says in our interview, responding to my question about whether we think too much in the West:

Of course, we *do* think too much: and worse is that we think dialectically--either or, either or, either or . . . I think that the process that *you're* talking about--the either or, but then maybe *this* and perhaps *that* and how about *this* as an alternative--is more like a spider's web and the web of *alternatives* is much larger. Now, what would happen if *everybody* began to think that way? The world would become an enormously better place to live and be. (A15-16)

Like Werner Heisenberg's quantum world, which Drew refers to in both *Erthring* and "Laughter," we alter what we see through the act of observation and thus experience not singular but multiple and subjective truths, all of them equally subject to mutation, to use an apt Darwinian term. Sue-ellen Campbell equates ecology and postmodernism thus:

Both theorists and ecologists (I'll use these terms for short) are at core revolutionary. They stand in opposition to traditional authority, which they question and then reject. All of them begin by criticizing the dominant structures of Western culture and the vast abuses they have spawned. What I once blithely have called The Establishment is now identified by such ornate epithets as "logocentrism," "phallogentrism," "patriarchy," "technocracy,"--those structures of interwoven thought and power, concepts and institution, in which humans matter more than other creatures, men more than women, Europeans more than Africans or Asians or Native Americans, logic more than emotion, reason more than dreams or madness. For both theory and ecology, it is axiomatic that knowledge and power, ideas and actions, are inseparable. (Both worlds, not surprisingly, are home to feminists). (qtd. in Glotfelty and Fromm 127)

Campbell's remarks ring familiar to any modern literary or cultural studies scholar; just as her yoking together of several specialist strands speaks to the growing tension in modern academia between further specialization and interdisciplinarity. But when she

specifically targets not just the abuses she perceives but the very notion of “traditional authority,” her argument loses much of its promising ecological efficacy. First, though postmodern theorists and ecological activists can in principle share revolutionary tendencies to critique dubious traditions, they do not have the same ends in mind--yet. Campbell overlooks that postmodernism and its offshoots are by definition anthropocentric and that they avoid addressing the potentially devastating ecological impact of actually achieving universal rights.

Moreover, she is overstating the case to assert that ecologists are opposed to traditional authority; in fact, many of them, like Drew, advocate it--just not in the terms she imagines, which is itself a surprising oversight from one of ecocriticism’s first and most respected voices. Kropotkin’s entire argument for anarchism in *Mutual Aid* and elsewhere, which Drew relies on extensively throughout his writing, begins not with a claim for the need to dismantle authority but that traditional forms of authority--like those employed by hunter-gatherer clans for millions of years--were inherently more ecologically sound and socially satisfying, despite the dangers posed to humans by a more unpredictable relationship with nature. While power abuse is certainly worthy of critique, not *all* forms of power and authority are abusive or abused. But should we not sensibly choose to limit ourselves, Drew imagines, we may end up relinquishing even *more* of our individual power to the state to achieve limitation in the decades ahead.

Unfortunately, as Ridley asserts, targeting his own complicity as a Humanities scholar, though we may be inclined to help each other, we frequently end up *talking* more than acting:

. . . [if] the human race is addicted to moralizing (though not necessarily acting) in favour of the greater good, for

evolutionarily sound reasons, then it is no surprise that we can seize upon powerful political issues to express this instinct whenever we can. One of the most powerful ways to do so is to express the conservation ethic, to lament the fate of the whales and rain forests, to disapprove of development, industry, and growth--and to paint a rosy picture of how our ancestors (and our more tribal contemporaries) were morally better in this regard than we are. This is, of course, hypocrisy. Just as we wish other people to turn the other cheek when hurt, but seek revenge on behalf of close relatives and friends, just as we urge morality far more than we act it, so environmentalism is something we prefer to preach than to practice. Everybody, it seems, wants a new road for themselves, but less road-building. Everybody wants another car, but wishes there were fewer on the road. Everybody wants two kids, but lower population. (215-16)

As rhetorical as Ridley resounds in the last three lines, he is closer to the truth than many would admit. Tsunami relief for East Asia or last year's *Live 8* concert for poverty relief in Africa, for instance, though admirable, reflect with sad irony the transient nature of the Western benevolence attention span. Drew specifically critiques Western anthropocentricity, but he also demands of all humans and cultures a thorough reevaluation of how their existing perceptions of life, death, and social equality impact the biosphere; for him, change must begin with the educated individual:

Technological momentum depends on the overriding of hesitancy, doubt, and question. Free individual thought is thus obstructionist in nature, and intellect not aligned to what Camus called the "horizontal religions of our times" works to impede progress. It insists on conjuring alternatives . . . as long as the thinking individual exists and is prepared to accept ultimate responsibilities, the conquest of nature cannot be completed, and the hungry symbiosis between technology and the mainstream of Western philosophy and religion can be broken. ("Limitation" 17)

Culture is always in flux, and herein lies a key part of Drew's reason for optimism. As his longtime friend and colleague, Livingston, argues, the term "culture" is best used as a

verb and not as a noun implying finality: “all cultures are series of events, frozen for our analytic convenience . . . cultures are never fixed, never locked in. They are ceaselessly changing, mutating, shifting to accommodate new circumstances. Cultures are plastic, adaptive, temporary emergences, even more ephemeral than the species who create them” (*Rogue Primate* 8). For Drew and Livingston alike, if we can quickly educate the entire species to see itself as a united culture--joined, despite our internal adaptations, variations, and mutations, by evolutionary history--there may be hope for us yet. The average duration of a species is presumed to be about eight million years and there are anywhere from five to a hundred million species on the planet, not counting those that have come and gone or who never quite made it into existence (Eldridge x). Put bluntly: none of us matters more than any other, and if all humans started reveling in the marvelous fluke--or even *potential* design, if we can leave it at that--of our having survived as a species and made it this far, it is easy to see how many problems we have created for and with each other might begin to wane. Though we have survived so *well* as a diverse species, discussions which warn us of the problems associated with overpopulation and ecological destruction, such as Drew’s, signal an awareness of the need for new survival strategies that re-conceive our differences in broader terms and remind us of our most important similarity.

***Part III - Posthuman Homo Sapiens:
Marveling in Our Existential Obscurity***

What do you hope that people will take away from your novels, and from you?

A sense of the importance of mystery. I feel that everything that I have done--the little that I have managed

to do, perhaps, which is of real importance--has to do with stressing the importance of mystery. I really think that we must somehow begin to accept the mystery that is within us and around us, to be content with it and not be afraid of it. (Drew, Belyea interview A25)

Our psyche is part of nature and its enigma is limitless. Thus we cannot define either the psyche or nature. (C.G. Jung, qtd. in Drew, "Laughter" 1)

We have kept little space on earth for labyrinths, sacred groves, and mysteries. Any Greek god waking from long slumber and rising from Olympus would be shocked to see the devastation wrought by humankind. He would conclude that during his sleep we had gone mad beyond all hubris and waged ruthless war on the rest of nature. . . . a sensible god would flee. Back to Olympus. Away to some other world. Anywhere apart from men and women. (Drew, "Laughter" 3)

That humans and a cooperative instinct emerged out of billions of years of complex biotic coevolution at the level of genes and nucleic acids, in which a near-infinite number of species never actualized but *we* somehow did, holds the potential to inspire such awe and wonder among us that we should relentlessly strive to ensure not only our own continuation but that of all other biotic and abiotic phenomena with whom and which our marvellous journey has thus far been shared. Since the Earth will pass into cosmological history with the eventual dissolution of the Sun or some other cosmic event, and since we cannot be certain of a Prime Mover or First Cause, now is clearly our time to revel in our very being, to cooperate to avoid an unnecessarily premature end to our existence, and to accept the environmental responsibilities evolutionary history has thrust upon us as the now dominant species. That evolutionary science suggests that our species will inevitably disappear need not educe existential angst or hedonistic abandon; instead of nihilistic pessimism, we can accept our finite, limited existence with wonder,

admiration, and a humble appreciation for the mystery of our having survived and evolved to where we can reflect on such matters in the first place.

This optimistic summary best encapsulates Drew's "metaphysics of mystery," and it reflects the persistent theme in his writing that contemporary explorations in ecology and evolution might yet empower our species to begin reconfiguring those ontological and epistemic notions of time and space, truth and belief, and life and death that continue to thwart an adequate response to the growing global environmental crisis. Like Heidegger's phenomenological concept of "*dasein*" or "being there"--"there" being an overwhelming presence of the present--Drew's metaphysics of mystery is predicated on making the human subject aware of the importance of celebrating the awe of our being in the here and now; however, he would also have us remember that our species is always-already on a path toward extinction, which hopefully will encourage change based on an intra- and inter-species fellow-feeling borne from our intertwined evolutionary history.

Drew's argument for Mystery as a metaphysical means of improving our ecological condition contains four interrelated parts. The first and most important is that both terrestrial and cosmic evolution, and our placement as one animal among many within its history, be treated as true, and that our role as the dominant species begins to include some measure of an ecological ethic:

Our power, that unlimited power to inflict death, distinguishes us like a gross disease. In urging us to reject it, ecologists rebel as much against the diminishment of man as against the debasement of the world in which he finds himself. In urging us to reject it, ethologists speak not only for integration but for integrity as well. ("Wilderness and Limitation" 16)

Second, Drew recognizes that the universe ultimately holds more mysteries than answers, that ontological truth claims are provisional, and--it should go without saying but rarely does--that our species will inevitably expire, as millions upon millions have before us in evolutionary history. In *Nature and Madness*, which Drew includes in a reading list for teachers he prepared for a "Wilderness in Literature" Senior English course he presented to the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1992, Paul Shepard invokes Freud and psychopathology to argue that the underlying cause of human destruction of the environment is an "irrationality beyond mistakenness, a kind of madness" (2).⁵ Our ecological *ontogeny*, or coming into being, Shepard suggests, was once critically determined by our childhood intuitive feelings for "the mystery of kinship, likeness but difference" (3). Such primordial impulses have been numbed in Western civilized cultures, he argues, because we have "largely abandoned the ceremonies of adolescent initiation that affirm the metaphoric, mysterious, and poetic quality of nature, reducing them to aesthetics and amenities" (4). Calling Westerners "childish adults" for attempting to eradicate mystery, Shepard concludes that we risk suffering "an epidemic of the psychopathic mutilation of ontogeny" and are now experiencing, as a result, "massive therapy, escapism, intoxicants, narcotics, fits of destruction and rage, enormous grief, subordination to hierarchies that exhibit this callow ineptitude at every level and, perhaps worst of all, a readiness to strike back at a natural world that we dimly perceive as having failed us" (9). For both Shepard and Drew, admitting this ecological "r s-sentiment," to borrow from Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*, may well be the first stage of therapy toward an ecosophical cosmology that heals.

Third, humans require some form of spirituality as much as they require water; we must maintain “an ironic appreciation for man’s need for the irrational” (*Erthring* 400). Drew’s metaphysics does not exclude the prospect of a First Cause but *does* reject the nature of the hold such an idea still has on most of the globe’s population, specifically as regards the negative ecological consequences that have resulted from believing in a world “better” than this one. Such beliefs tend to prohibit serious ecological stewardship in the present and presume from the outset that wilderness can be improved upon, which is “impossible by definition” (“Laughter” 8). If we need to believe in something, Drew offers, then why not believe in the web of infinite possibilities that postmodernism and science alike, for instance, suggest may be the closest to a Divine we will ever get?

Finally, Drew’s religion of mystery is premised on the human ability to radically alter the way we view time--in a sense, to kill our concept of time before it kills us by distracting us from bigger issues. As a concept, time exists paradoxically both beyond and within the human experience. Beyond us, the universe exists and is changing “over time.” But here--and only recently, as evolutionary time goes--we have turned our emphasis on time first from seasons into months and gradually toward ordering our lives by weeks, days, and hours. In the West, at any rate, we even let it control our daily affairs at the level of the minute in ways that would likely strike our prehistoric ancestors (could they even conceive of it) as absurd. We worry about time, claim that we never have enough of it, have created technologies to manipulate our desire to control it, and live almost paralyzed by temporal structures and strictures that are completely and utterly, we tend to forget, reified and affirmed only by our own imaginations and actions.

In the West, “where the pattern for ‘developing’ nations is set,” Drew argues, time is linear, time is progress, and time is money (“Wilderness” 18). He elsewhere calls time “the most ludicrous of man’s creations” (*Erthring* 446) for how we have deified it to the point that “it” dictates much of how we live and think. This quantum-like employment of time has become so internalized as “inevitable” or “just the way it is” in the developed world that its very status as an ideological construct is rarely questioned. But it needs to be, Drew feels, as altering our perceptions of time to account for broader evolutionary realities is an essential step to environmental wisdom. He returns over and over again in his writing to the idea of being “out of time” or “beyond time” to remind us of the relative newness of our compression of time; his CBC documentary, *Places Out of Time*, for instance, a geological exposition on pre-human evolutionary time, is meant to facilitate such thinking.

Since we first developed the faculty of self-reflection, the notion of time has shaped our perspectives by forcing us to ask what must surely be universally ontological questions: Is a deity the source of our origin? Is it active in human affairs? Does it shape our minds? Do we have souls? A collective unconscious? Is there an afterlife? Today, we also necessarily imagine a time and place *pre-God* or *pre-Big Bang* in the very instant of trying to consciously fix either one of them: “What started the Big Bang,” some instinct prompts us to inquire, “a deity?” “What exactly is this state of ‘timelessness’ or ‘nothingness’ or ‘eternity’ from whence a supernatural entity or chance made us emerge or emerged itself?” “How can something come from nothing in the first place?” “If the universe is expanding, then it must be expanding *into* something: but *what* something? Isn’t the universe, by definition, all there is?” At some distant point in

our evolutionary history, the human psyche began prodding for answers much more complex than where the next meal was coming from or why lightning descended from the skies and created warmth in the form of fire. The quest for answers since has been the cause of our most profound reflections and greatest spiritual and philosophical literature and art. It has also created our most dangerous religious and humanist assumptions.

If we cannot do without the spiritual life, Drew imagines, then perhaps we can merge the mythologies we have created for ourselves into something more ecologically focused. However, unlike a Gandhi, for instance, who would find Truth in the presence of many religions, Drew would have his readers imagine what the state of the world today might be if all humans honoured Mystery as a way of satisfying the religious impulse. Current egocentric concerns could be utterly recontextualized *ecocentrically* if subsequent generations of people entered a world where culture, ethnicity, religion, nation, gender, skin color, family, and community--whatever current categories we create to distinguish ourselves by--were re-contextualized within the paradoxical premise of what is best called "absolute uncertainty." Across the globe, they might be taught, for instance, about the inevitability of our planet's extinction and, as Drew puts it, that "We are one animal among many. We are not the centre, not the measure" ("Limitation" 16).

Or elsewhere:

Control of nature is an illusion which encourages all sorts of aberrant behaviour. You don't have to go very far into physics to have the fact of eternal mystery confirmed--just as far as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle or the very exciting work being done in chaos theory. Thank heavens we're at last putting Descartes and Newton and all those "externalities" behind us. (Drew, Letter to Addison)

A metaphysics of mystery and an ethics of ecology such as Drew's have the potential to satisfy our innate impulse for spirituality while fostering a better habitat for all manifestations of living and non-living nature.

By arguing that “no received ideology is adequate” (“Wilderness and Limitation” 17), Drew provides an ecologically focused alternative to both religion and humanism that is best rendered “posthumanist.” Posthumanism usually refers to one of two related fields of study: scholars like Haraway use it to describe how our bodily fusion with technology (genetic engineering, neural implants, life extension therapies, nanotechnology, and psychopharmacology) is altering our basic capacities, our understanding of the mind-body relationship, and thus what it means to be “human.” Others, like Neil Badmington, use it to describe a philosophical inquiry that challenges the “natural” supremacy of humans and explores humanism in its various guises as an ideological and social failure.

Posthumanism as Drew conceives it belongs to the latter category, but with the specific purpose of having the human subject embrace its evolutionary inconsequentiality for broader environmental purposes. Drew uses the term “postcivilized” in *Erthring* to describe the new nature of social relationships that must be formed to ensure species survival, and although he is directly alluding to the past twelve millennia of human civilization, he is also hinting at a need to transcend the humanist assumptions that have come out of it. Embracing such a postcivilized or posthuman ethic, with its origin in cosmological uncertainty, would satisfy our innate need for spirituality while foregrounding how, as the now-dominant species, we have an ethical choice to make about accepting the responsibilities that our being so entails.

Drew's geographic roots and love of the environmental complexities inherent to the Great Lakes ecosystem lead him to associate spirituality with mystery and with "wilderness," and I want to end this chapter and anticipate the close readings that follow by elaborating briefly on what wilderness means for Drew. For him, a particular, material, physical locale is a familiar means of reminding us of the infinite complexities underlying our biological origins and the ecological dependence we have as an adaptive species co-evolving with and within a specific region. This sense of "wilderness" is also common to all of our ancestors in different places across millions of years of human history. Wilderness serves a metaphysical and cognitive function for Drew by acting as an imaginative "mindscape" for ontological and epistemological reflection. In other words, Drew interrogates and deploys "wilderness" as both a concrete reality indicative of our animal ancestry and as an abstract concept through which our needs for imaginative and spiritual fulfillment can be met. Only science after Darwin has afforded us the opportunity to conceive of our species in the infinitely large and infinitely small terms we are increasingly--and sometimes reluctantly--coming to accept. One thing twentieth-century science has proven in concrete ways that pantheists since antiquity could only speculate about is that we both are the wilderness and think of or create it as a category for analysis and reflection. In other words, we now have a much more exhaustive understanding of the reciprocal and cyclical nature of the global food chain, of the functioning of ecosystems, and of the biological, geological, and palaeontological genealogy of the "wild" Earth itself. Drew thus argues that we have a latent desire to preserve wilderness

simply because we need it. We cling to it unreasonably, viscerally. We remain creatures of the wild, no matter what

compromises we have forced ourselves to make and what experiments we have attempted. Whenever possible we get as close to the wild as we can--a river bank, a shore, an island--and when we cannot go to the wilderness we bring bits of it to ourselves--pools and pets, plants and gardens, recorded birdsong and whalesong, all wistful mementoes of the sublime mystery beyond our reach. ("Laughter" 11)

Drew's suggestion that all humans have the potential to share in an appreciation for the wonders of evolution, and that such an appreciation is biologically latent but culturally anaesthetized, resurfaces continually in his emphasis on *hope*; for him, this shared genetic impulse for loving wilderness and life is the most important tool for binding our species together for the required ecological effort ahead. It may be latent and ultimately indefinable, as Jung hints at in my opening citation to this section, but for Drew it nonetheless has an immense power to induce change. Those who still interpret Darwinian evolution as "red in tooth and claw" competition forget that we also retain a powerful instinct for cooperation that can be, and in fact always has been, our most successful adaptive tool. Coevolution with other species would most certainly have been impossible without it, and our goal now must be to globally revive this cooperative strain in time to stall what can only be called our recently acquired patterns of destruction.

The contrast Drew makes between parks and wilderness underscores perfectly how wilderness is meant to function in his writing:

A park is a managerial unit definable in quantitative and pragmatic terms. Wilderness is unquantifiable. Its boundaries are vague or non-existent, its contents unknown, its inhabitants elusive. The purpose of parks is use; the earmark of wilderness is mystery. Because they serve technology, parks tend toward the predictable and static, but wilderness is infinitely burgeoning and changing because it is the matrix of life itself. ("Killing" 22)

The words “mystery” and “matrix of life” may sound familiarly religious at first glance; in evolutionary terms, however, they are anything but. As much as Newtonian physics and the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth century claimed to provide a clearer understanding of the orderly nature of the universe--which in turn had enormous implications for Western notions of teleological history and the inevitability of progress and civilization--the quantum world of the twentieth century has continually affirmed the opposite. Life, matter, and reality--all of which also connote “wilderness”--have been rendered as infinitely in flux and enigmatically juxtaposed. Moreover, since, as Drew argues, “for 99% of the 2,000,000 years on earth, cultural man has lived as a nomadic hunter-gatherer,” and since “that way of life [is] the most successful and enduring that man has ever achieved” (“Killing” 21), then at some collective level, perhaps, we contain the seeds--the innate capability and will, which may be defined in terms of genetic predisposition--to undertake a united and comprehensive re-evaluation of civilization, progress, and rights, and to place limits on ourselves.

Many among our species are still reluctant to accept that their lives may have no grand purpose, that abstractions like “identity” and “soul” may be neurological constructs having developed biologically to ensure species propagation and survival as our bodies themselves changed over time, or that they are but one of hundreds of millions of species to have existed throughout Earth history. As Blackmore writes, “Science does not need an inner self, but most people are sure they are one. And in addition, many people believe that doing away with the idea of the self would unleash chaos, undermine motivation, and destroy the moral order” (67). Blackmore also reveals that scientific progress since at least the 1950s that increasingly probes the “mysteries of

consciousness” has been unable to answer the question that “what remains a mystery is why we should be conscious at all” (17). For Drew, it is time to come to terms with evolution once and for all: it can no longer be categorized as a mere theory, however incomplete the pictures it gives us may currently be. Percy Shelley observes in his own evolutionary poem, “Ozymandias,” that all empires--and all humans--are traces. Empires and individuals rise and fall, leaving only traces of themselves in the sand over which others might muse. What he could not know at the time is how true this is for complete species as well. We can marvel in our existential obscurity but still accept the human “empire’s” responsibilities to the rest of the planet, for to ignore them threatens to eradicate the very sand upon which our future poems, and the myriad of other traces left by our evolutionary kin, might one day be read.

Notes

¹ Edwords classifies the eight forms of humanism as follows:

“Literary Humanism is a devotion to the humanities or literary culture. **Renaissance Humanism** is the spirit of learning that developed at the end of the middle ages with the revival of classical letters and a renewed confidence in the ability of human beings to determine for themselves truth and falsehood. **Cultural Humanism** is the rational and empirical tradition that originated largely in ancient Greece and Rome, evolved throughout European history, and now constitutes a basic part of the Western approach to science, political theory, ethics, and law. **Philosophical Humanism** is any outlook or way of life centered on human need and interest. Sub-categories of this type include Christian Humanism and Modern Humanism. **Christian Humanism** is defined by Webster’s Third New International Dictionary as “a philosophy advocating the self-fulfillment of man within the framework of Christian principles.” This more human-oriented faith is largely a product of the Renaissance and is a part of what made up Renaissance humanism. **Secular Humanism** is an outgrowth of 18th century enlightenment rationalism and 19th century free thought. Many secular groups, such as the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism and the American Rationalist Federation, and many otherwise unaffiliated academic philosophers and scientists, advocate this philosophy. **Religious Humanism** emerged out of Ethical Culture, Unitarianism, and Universalism. Today, many Unitarian-Universalist congregations and all Ethical Culture societies describe themselves as humanist in the modern sense. **Modern Humanism**, also called Naturalistic Humanism, Scientific Humanism, Ethical Humanism and Democratic Humanism is defined by one of its leading proponents, Corliss Lamont, as “a naturalistic philosophy that rejects all supernaturalism and relies primarily upon reason and science, democracy and human compassion.” Modern Humanism has a dual origin, both secular and religious, and these constitute its sub-categories.” (n. pag. my ital)

See “What is Humanism?” 1989. <<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/fred_edwords/humanism.html>>. Accessed 27 Mar 2005.

² Several of the essays comprising Carroll’s book, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (St. Louis: U of Missouri P, 1995), including his seminal essay by the same title, can be found at Carroll’s website: <<<http://www.umsl.edu/engjcar/>>>. Accessed 11 May 2005.

³ Michelson’s comments are part of his review of *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, eds. Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2005).

⁴ See Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) or visit their website, *The Centre for Evolutionary Psychology*, at << <http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/research/cep/>>>. See also Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002), and David Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). For a rebuttal of evolutionary psychology from a philosophical perspective, see David J. Buller, *Adapting Minds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

⁵ Drew's recommended reading for teachers contains a veritable "hit list" of ecological writers, philosophers, and critics who would only later be picked up by the ecocritical movement proper and whose works often appear in major ecocritical texts: Virgil, Shakespeare (specifically *The Tempest*), Rousseau, the Romantics (including Thoreau and the American Transcendentalists), Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Theodore Roszak, Lewis Mumford, Stan Rowe, Paul Shepard, Lynn White Jr., Gary Snyder, Neil Evernden, John Tallmadge, Roderick Nash, Farley Mowat, and Scott Momaday, to name a few.

CHAPTER 3

The Wabeno Feast: **Cultural Politics for Dinner; Madness for Dessert**

The dominant culture--the colonized mind--is at war with nature, and so by definition is at war with all peoples of nature . . . what is sacred to us all makes us a threat to the colonizers, with their deeply inculcated ideas of their exclusive "dominion" over nature and all other beings. . . . indigenous people now face corporate colonization, nuclear colonization, aesthetic colonization, and, most recently, genetic colonization. And in every case it is because of our connection to the natural world. The dominant culture, for all its "progress" in civilizing the world, wants most what it lacks . . . they now want everything we have: land, spirituality, stories, even our genetic material. (Akiwenzie-Damm 86-87)

If I tell you a story and you write it down and collect the royal coinage from this story, that's stealing--appropriation of culture. But if you imagine a character who is from my world, attempting to deconstruct the attitudes of yours, while you may not be stealing, you still leave yourself open to criticism unless you do it well. (Maracle, "Post-Colonial" 207-08)

When I began *The Wabeno Feast*, it grew out of a sense of tremendous disparity between the cultures and a sense that one of the cultures was getting something *much* more right, most of the time, than the other culture, and that that would be something that would behoove us to investigate. (Drew, Belyea interview A6)

Each of Drew's five major novels investigates indigenous life and culture and routinely employs indigenous characters, traditions, settings, symbols, imagery, voices, tales, customs, and even language as part of his overall strategy of drawing attention to ecological and evolutionary issues that impact the species as a whole. But because he is non-Native, according to writers like Lee Maracle, his writing must either be rejected altogether or at least seriously scrutinized as a form of cultural appropriation and

hegemony. To Maracle's remarks above can be added Lenore Keeshig-Tobias's comment that non-Natives have no entitlement to carry out what constitutes cultural plagiarism: "The issue is culture theft, the theft of voice. It's about power" (72). Jeannette Armstrong likewise highlights language itself as a means of continuing hegemony, whether employed by creative writers *or* scholars: "There are a lot of non-Indian people out there speaking on our behalf and I resent that very much . . . I don't feel that any non-Indian person could represent our point of view adequately" (qtd. in Hoy 17). Kimberly Blaeser expresses a similar view that refers not only to non-Native fiction about Native peoples but also to critical evaluations of it: "reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest" (qtd. in Seiler 61).

At the outset, I want to situate *The Wabeno Feast* (1973) within this cultural appropriation or "appropriation of voice" debate, which began in the 1980s and reached a zenith, though by no means a conclusion, in the 1994 *Writing Thru Race* conference in Vancouver, where Native peoples challenged the entire non-Native literary tradition in Canada for its ongoing use, or theft, of Native symbols, stories, and other cultural traditions.¹ At the centre of the debate is whether non-Native authors' use of Native material and subject matter infringes on the rights of Native peoples and constitutes an act of psychological colonization that sustains, in Diana Brydon's words, "the imperialist history of plunder and theft" ("The White Inuit Speaks" 99). Despite the fact that non-Native writers might be "borrowing" Native materials in order to expose inequalities, according to some, the very act of borrowing can be seen as a hegemonic performance re-

relegating Native peoples to the margins inasmuch as, among other things, it assumes that they cannot speak for themselves.

The politics of representation, identity, and culture are frequently proportional to meaningful political praxis; they have effectively come to dominate contemporary literary and cultural scholarship exploring centre-margin relations. For instance, Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao argue that “the construction of a strong cultural identity is paramount to staving off oppression,” and they borrow Charles Taylor’s idea that even “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (12). With Joseph Pivato, I am sensitive both to “the dangers of biological essentialism” and to “the power relations in the major languages and literatures that also belong to and were used as instruments by colonial powers” (“Representation of Ethnicity as Problem: Essence or Construction”). However, Drew’s creation of fictional Native peoples is undertaken from a species perspective rather than an ethnic or cultural one. He reveals imbalances of power between Native and non-Native cultures and, in the act of doing so, forces his readers to challenge the usefulness of categories like “race,” “ethnicity,” and “culture.” They are semiotic terms that humans have created in order to differentiate themselves from each other, and millions of years of a shared species genealogy increasingly renders the divisions such terms engender not just socially but ecologically unhelpful.

The Wabeno Feast provides Drew a forum to creatively challenge Western notions of progress and civilization that reveal its incessant desire for order and control over nature and uncertainty. To do so, he contrasts indigenous attitudes toward the human relationship to place not only with those of eighteenth-century European

colonizers, but also with the inheritors of that tradition, who still form the dominant culture in the West. In the process, he reveals the dominant culture's lack of revealed ecological wisdom despite the explosion of knowledge and technology--and the mastery over nature it represents--that have characterized "progress" in the West for over two centuries. Today's dominant culture can learn such wisdom from Native peoples, he suggests, however much their ability to pragmatically retain their traditions since First Contact has been challenged. The novel invites readers to imagine a discursive "halfway" space where Native peoples and non-Natives--and, by extension, peoples of all ethnicities and cultures--can meet and participate in the ongoing evolutionary process of ethnic mediation and cultural hybridity with the place that gave us all life as the locus of discussion. Drew also uses the term "halfway" negatively to connote environmental "half-measures" which, borne from today's democratic climate of compromise, are increasingly contributing to the environmental crisis.

Ultimately, Drew argues in *The Wabeno Feast*, the politics of difference and equality--whether manifested in discourses of identity, culture, politics, gender, or race--must begin to include an environmental component that stresses organic community, since *how* we live where we live is increasingly impacting all of Earth's citizens equally. Without radical change, we may have no place, literally, to discuss our differences. His message may be problematic for some who find themselves on an unequal footing in modern Western society, but because it urges a wide-ranging epistemological reconfiguration in thought and action, it actually contains the potential to inspire the tolerance and equity we all, as a species, ultimately desire. As Brydon reminds us, "all living cultures are constantly in flux and open to influences from elsewhere" ("The White

Inuit Speaks” 99), and this has been true on a large scale at least since our *Homo sapiens* ancestors left the nest of “Mitochondrial Eve” and began spreading out from Africa across the Earth upwards of a million years ago.² The now totalizing global movement of Western culture, with its ideology of mass consumption and disposal, is, arguably, the most profound instance of cross-cultural influence in human history. For Drew, as for many environmental advocates, it desperately needs to be tempered by voices, however faint, that still find value in a more traditional relationship with place. Identifying not through the usual categories of distinction but by an affiliation to an ecosystem, for instance, may prove a good first step. The time is now ripe for fusing messages of traditional ecological wisdom with those emerging from detailed ecological analyses that increasingly support a need for them.

Part I - Re-“Placing” Cultural Politics: Transcending Race and Authenticity

. . . at a banquet, I was sitting next to a man I respect enormously, Garry Potts, the ex-chief of the Temagami Band. Potts, as a very young man, was responsible for lifting that community up by its bootstraps and acting, forcefully and directly, by putting a land-freeze on all Temagami land, saying, “This is our land, and it’s up to you guys to prove that it isn’t. In the meantime, nothing can be sold, no exploitation can go ahead.” Potts was behind that, a very tough-minded, good leader, and anyway, we found ourselves sitting beside one another, and at one point in the evening he leaned over to me and he said, “You wrote that book, *Halfway Man*.” And I said, “Yes. . . . yes I did.” And he replied, very softly and very bluntly, “Good book.” After a long pause, he leaned back over and said, “You were a messenger.” And that, perhaps, is the biggest compliment I’ve ever received about the book, because that’s what I would like to feel happened, that there is and was a bridge made in a small way that assists with understanding. (Drew, Belyea Interview A6)

“I don't support that idea of censoring each other's voices. It gets too oppressive,” said [Beth] Cut Hand. “It's got to the point that a lot of good people won't talk to First Nations people. We've got to break down those barriers. The whole movement about appropriation made a lot of non-Native writers sensitive about what they were writing about. But I think there's a point if you push it too far, you push them away.” (Williams, n. pag.)

Canadian identity and cultural politics discourses, and especially Canadian postcolonial theory, routinely investigate Native/non-Native relations in terms of the lingering manifestations of European colonialism on First Nations and other ethnic minority groups (Kamboureli, Gunew, Miki, L. Moss, Sugars). In particular, much has been written on the hazards of non-Native writers homogenizing Native peoples and carelessly romanticizing and thus further alienating and marginalizing them (Ashcroft et al, Armstrong, Battiste, Bentley, Brydon, Fee, Goldie, Keeshig-Tobias, King, Monkman, Moses). When or under what conditions, then, can it be said to be acceptable for a non-Native writer to imagine Native peoples and Native cultures into fictional existence and, moreover, is there a singular, authentic “on behalf of” about whom a writer like Drew should not be writing?

The latter question poses difficulties that I believe lie at the heart of the appropriation debate and that promise to continue to create problems between Native peoples and non-Natives unless they can be subsumed by broader, shared ecological considerations that emphasize our common responsibility as the dominant species. Ashcroft et al suggest that concepts like authenticity are “myth” (9) and that “the conditions of post-colonial experience encouraged the dismantling of notions of essence and authenticity” (41).³ From this position, at least theoretically, Drew cannot be said to be speaking on behalf of Native peoples, since to do so admits if not a racial then

certainly an ethnic or cultural essentiality or authenticity called “Native.” According to one critic, postcolonial theory focusing on cultural appropriation is plagued by an inherent contradiction because it appears to both accept and reject notions of authenticity or essentialism:

“Appropriation of voice” depends for its legitimacy on the assumption that there exists an undiluted, “authentic” core to each culture, reflected in its traditional art. Yet most of this century’s literary criticism, from Bakhtinian polyglossia to New Criticism to Derridean deconstructionism to Cixous’s efforts to “write the body” to Bloom’s descriptions of the “anxiety of influence” to Marxist and Lacanian approaches, has developed, in different ways, from the notion that literary language is a hybrid, impure conglomeration of coded assumptions and shadows of half-absorbed past systems of writing. One of the most bizarre spectacles induced by the “appropriation of voice” carnival has been the sight of trendy fellow-travellers of literary fashion simultaneously proclaiming their allegiance to the mutually exclusive assumptions of contemporary literary theory and “appropriation of voice.”⁴

Unfortunately, this aspect of postcolonial theory cannot escape criticism for appearing inconsistent. It is difficult to reconcile a postcolonial discourse that espouses authenticity and essentialism--defined perhaps as a core or fixed set of attitudes, beliefs, traditions, shared histories, and other elements linked by ethnicity and culture--with other discourses that throughout the late twentieth century have sought to challenge the very semiotic and epistemological grounds upon which such essentialist claims have been made. So, despite his unhelpful rhetorical tone in using the terms “carnival” and “spectacle,” the author here rightly implies that it seems unfair that the dominant culture is so easily criticized for making “essentialist” claims while marginalized cultures or peoples are encouraged to think in precisely such terms.

The critical reception of *The Wabeno Feast* has been limited to brief expositorys by Thomas King and Les Monkman, who each challenge Drew for essentializing and romanticizing Native peoples but without sufficiently investigating the tendency of Native groups to essentialize themselves.⁵ In his introduction to *The Native in Literature*, King indicts Drew for what he calls Drew's tendency in *Wabeno* "to do little more than turn old stereotypes at a different angle to the eye" (8) and for not exploring,

to any great extent, the world he suggests. Like the majority of writers who attempt to make serious use of Indians either for themselves or as metaphors, Drew is content to approach and recognize this other world but to go little further in than the masks, the images, which mark the outer boundaries. . . . [he supposes] an organic unity for disparate peoples. (9)

King's rhetoric reflects his own desire for organic unity more than it usefully critiques Drew: Drew writes only about the Ojibway culture, whose language he spoke and within which he had many friends, but King feels that he is more racially and/or ethnically suited to speak for "Natives" as a whole than Drew is by virtue of his part-Cherokee heritage and his own desire for authenticity. King uses Drew as a straw man, and his pan-Indian arguments are, if not overly reliant on a concept of "race," then at least an attempt to hide behind the guise of a sweeping Native "ethnicity" or "culture" and claim a superior subject position. He would likely be the first to assert that his sense of Native authenticity derives less from "blood"--from the fact that he carries X percentage of a traceable Cherokee genetic code--than from his "feeling" a part of Native experiences, attitudes, and sensibilities.

If the anti-essentialist call is to be applied consistently, then it becomes problematic for King to suggest that he is essentially Native and Drew is not, for any

such claim becomes simply a claim for his right to *feel* authentic. In rejecting essentializing tendencies, we must also challenge those like King's or Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's: the former generalizes that "Native peoples have always loved to laugh" ("The Truth About Stories" 23) and the latter that "as Anishnaabe we understand that we are an *essential* part of the weave" of nature (my ital., 85). The only ground on which King can disavow Drew's right to write about Native peoples is that King imagines his own indigeneity to be more authentic than Drew's, and it is here that his argument against the novel collapses. Claims that Drew speaks "for Natives," or for all of the dominant culture for that matter, are red herrings: Drew most likely knows the Ojibway culture in Ontario better than King does, as is suggested in Garry Potts' description of Drew as a "messenger." A fair assessment by King might better account for the very provisionality and detail that so many Native writers themselves demand in rejecting homogenization; it might consider Drew's first-hand knowledge of the Ojibway language and how his understanding of the language provides a cultural context that truly "hybridizes" him in positive ways that destabilize the easy borders of race or ethnicity. Adrienne Clarkson's citation of Ojibway Chief John Kelly in her foreword to *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past* reminds us of the positive power of cross-cultural contamination: "As the years go by, the circle of the Ojibway gets bigger and bigger. Canadians of all colours and religions are entering that circle. You might feel that you have roots somewhere else, but in reality you are right here with us" (5).⁶ That the circle can, paradoxically, remain finite and infinite despite how large it grows makes it a perfect symbol both for cross-cultural dialogue and for an evolutionary and ecological sensibility; it speaks to how our

species is both finite and infinite in variation and to the importance of inclusion and cooperation in moving forward on environmental issues.

Monkman, in his seminal *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*, also challenges the novel for stereotyping Native peoples and for announcing their inevitable death as a race. Monkman, like King, criticizes as fatalistic Drew's disturbing characterization of Charlie Redbird, a modern Native cast off by society as a drunk and a failure and whose pride and longing to rediscover a connection to his ancestry prevent him from committing suicide. But Redbird's dilemma is not construed as an inevitable outcome of history; he is not a pathetic figure because he represents a "dying" Native race but because he foreshadows what might happen to the human race. Set against the eighteenth-century narrative involving Drummond MacKay and Miskobenesa, and within the larger environmental context of the novel, Redbird's plight is meant to challenge Western notions of teleology and attitudes toward nature by having us reflect on what might potentially happen to all of us should we continue to disconnect ourselves from the natural world that has sustained us for millions of years. His character certainly reveals how some Native peoples have become casualties of the industrialized world, such as when he observes the environmentally damaged world around him as containing "empty *white* buildings" (279; my ital)--but he is meant to foreshadow the devastation potentially affecting our whole species if the growth ethic of Western industrial imperialism and the epistemology underlying it are not contained.

Monkman's other central assertion--that "all the white Canadian writers who have written about the Indian approach Indian culture as outsiders" (162)--is also oversimplified. It reinforces unhelpful racial and ethnic binaries and fails to account for

the broader reality that we are all continually undergoing--and have been since prehistoric times--intercultural hybridization, creolization, and change that underlie adaptation and belie at least some level of mutual cooperation based on being able to *imagine* the “insider” subject position. Brydon, in desiring a “new globalism” that “seeks to cooperate without cooption” (99), observes that notions of authenticity or essentialism often work against integrating cultures on equal terms:

Although I can sympathize with such arguments as tactical strategies in insisting on self-definition and resisting appropriation, even tactically they prove self-defeating because they depend on a view of cultural authenticity that condemns them to a continued marginality and eventual death. Whose interests are served by this retreat into preserving an untainted authenticity? Not the native groups seeking land rights and political power. Ironically, such tactics encourage native peoples to isolate themselves from contemporary life and full citizenship. (“The White Inuit Speaks” 99)

Whether “Natives” want full citizenship in Western contemporary life is the subject of its own debate and beyond the scope of this study, but Brydon is wise to observe the irony in the fact that Native groups who find a need to bond together strategically for political purposes can end up perpetuating the essentialism they otherwise wish to eradicate.

Drew’s emphasis on the relational value of biodiversity and cultural diversity is the result of his knowledge as a naturalist and his personal experiences with Native peoples, to be sure, but it also speaks to his imaginative ability to Other himself in human and non-human terms for the benefit of both.

Neither King nor Monkman account adequately for the biographical context of Drew’s writing. Drew was profoundly influenced as an artist, philosopher, and teacher by Ojibway culture and customs he learned first-hand through Ojibway friends; he also

spoke Ojibway, and together, these influences complicate those notions of Native authenticity and essentialism that might underlie opposition to his having written from a dominant cultural position:

I became interested not only in what they said but in *how* they said it; I became interested in the Native language itself. In fact, I became fascinated by Ojibway, and so, as the years went on, I made a conscious effort to learn it. That brought me into contact with people who spoke it fluently, people from whom I could learn not only the language but also the attitudes--the cultural attitudes that were inherent in the language. . . . So, that process of just *listening*, a lot, which is important I think, was hugely beneficial to me. I was lucky in finding people, and friends, who could give me what they could of the language--and of the culture that went with it. (Drew, Belyea interview A6)

Drew's fictitious Native characterizations--including the Wabenos and Charlie Redbird--critique the ecological destruction engendered by religious fanaticism and capitalism; they are meant to legitimate biodiversity and cultural plurality alike. The novel does not further marginalize Native peoples but asks non-Natives to expand their circle of awareness to learn from them. However, whether Drew's inside knowledge of Ojibway culture legitimates his sharing that knowledge with others must beg questions of ownership: "Is it his prerogative to publish such stories?" "Who 'owns' them?" "Has he betrayed any trust placed in him by those who gave him stories or cultural insights as 'gifts'?" There are no easy answers to such questions, but thinking beyond issues of cultural ownership to questions of the survival of the biosphere might serve as a good starting point for finding them.

What makes *The Wabeno Feast* such a landmark novel is that it investigates how two groups within our species maintain remarkably conflicting ideologies about the *place*

of humans in nature, in both an ontological and practical sense, and it concludes that one group is “getting it right” more often than the other. Jeanette Armstrong contextualizes “all our people” in familiar cultural terms rather than ones that bring to mind a shared evolutionary history, but I do not think that she and Drew have substantially differing aims: “to examine the past and culturally affirm a new vision for all our people in the future, arising out of the powerful and positive support structures that are inherent in the principles of cooperation” (“Disempowerment” 210). And in Drew’s words in our interview,

I appreciate that there is a current political debate about non-Native people writing about Natives, but I think it’s important--*very* important--to be able to transcend all of that. I think that, surely, what is vital now for all of us is to be able to be bigger than both of our cultures, to learn what we can from one another, to build whatever bridges we can, and to risk making mistakes sometimes--to do the thing in good faith and to have regard for one another. (A7)

“Risk” and “good faith” speak to his refreshing optimism and desire for nurturing a halfway space of mediation and learning. His ecological emphasis in *Wabeno* transcends a simple Native/non-Native dichotomy to foreground the biosphere as a legacy we all inherit. Drew permits or makes “room for interventions on the part of those being represented” (Said, “In the Shadow” 95), and he invokes Native beliefs, customs, and cultures only in the interest of evoking a species’ environmental ethic designed to address the Sixth Extinction. In *The Erthring Cycle*, moreover, Drew brilliantly complicates the entire cultural appropriation debate by consciously choosing to leave the race or ethnicity of his tribal characters ambiguous in order to remind us that we are all closer to each other and a common animal descent than we often choose to remember. His writing

becomes an invocation to re-member ourselves as part of a species with one pressing aim: survival.

Part II – De-mystifying the Ecological Noble Savage

Nor does the tribal community of relatives end with human kin: the supernaturals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, fire, water, rock, and plants are perceived to be members of one's community. (Gunn Allen, "Introduction" 10-11)

We belong to this land. The land does not belong to us; we belong to this land. We believe that this land recognizes us and knows us . . . it is a birthright granted to us by the Creator. (Akiwenzie-Damm, "We Belong to This Land" 85)

Mysticism undoubtedly plays a large part in the life of tribal people. Some animals are thought to bring good luck; others bad luck. Complicated ceremonies may be performed before or after a hunt. Mountains are assumed to have feelings. Certain creatures are taboo, even if they appear to be edible. Sexual abstinence or fasting may precede an important hunt. True enough, all of this, but does any of it work? (Matt Ridley 221)

No shaman's spell or fast upon a sacred mountain can summon the electromagnetic spectrum. Prophets of the great religions were kept unaware of its [the nature of physical reality] existence, not because of a secretive god but because they lacked the hard-won knowledge of physics. (Wilson, *Consilience* 46-47)

Arguably, the chief problematic for the contemporary non-Native writer or scholar interested in the ecological ideology inherent to most Native traditions lies in the difficulty of trying to reconcile the mythical component of those traditions with a desire to demystify them in a world where science continues to fail to find any material evidence to support the notion of a supernatural entity. When Native peoples *self-*

mystify--as Akiwenzie-Damm does by saying that “this land recognizes us and knows us,” for instance--such reconciliation becomes doubly difficult. One of the most virulent forms of essentialism--nurtured within and without Native communities--is that Native peoples share a more spiritually holistic relationship to Nature in ways that non-Natives do not. As mentioned in Chapter One, many postcolonial and ecocritical writers and scholars, including Drew, have spoken out forcefully against the negative impact that Judeo-Christianity has had on the environment, but not enough has been said about whether the spiritual component common to many Native mythologies also needs to be challenged and, if it does, what impact this has on seeking from them the ecological wisdom writers like Drew seem to believe they can offer.

My desire to question Native myths as myths should not be reductively dismissed as cultural hegemony; with Wilson, I think that science can provide a mediating space for intercultural dialogue where it forces all humans to begin accepting that terrestrial and cosmic evolution can no longer be rejected as merely a theory: “today the greatest divide within humanity is not between races, or religions, or even, as widely believed, between the literate and the illiterate. It is the chasm that separates scientific from prescientific cultures” (*Consilience* 45). The social value of cultural pluralism aside, it will simply not do for us as a species to continue turning a blind eye to science. There is a significant opportunity for Native ecological leadership from those espousing attitudes toward integrated and harmonious living with and in the biosphere, and such leadership need not carry the supernatural burden that those like Gunn Allen and Akiwenzie-Damm espouse above--and that Drew himself seems to invoke at times.

Recently, the image of the “ecologically spiritual Native” has been challenged on the same grounds as have other grand narratives. Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. notes an inherent and troublesome irony in “the image of the Indian who respects nature and possesses an ingrained sense of ecology” (138). Such an image becomes part of “Native American leaders’ success in consolidating their own political influence . . . even as they do so, they must play upon the White image of Indian otherness to achieve their own ends for their followers in the larger society” (196). And as Ridley argues in his chapter in *The Origins of Virtue*, “Ecology as Religion,”

The conventional wisdom holds that Indians were at one with nature, respecting and forbearing towards it, magically attuned to it and resolute in practicing careful management so as not to damage the stock of their game. Archaeological sites throw doubt upon these comforting myths. Whereas wolves mostly kill old and very young animals, the elk killed by Indians were mostly in their prime. Cows were far more often killed than bulls, and very few elk lived to the same age as they do today. (216)

Ridley later cites ecologist Charles Kay, who remarks that ““religious respect for animals does not equal conservation,”” that there is “no evidence that native North Americans conserved big game,” and that “the idea that native Americans had an environmental ethic that prevented their over-exploitation of nature is a recent invention of Westerners” (216-17)--Westerners whose own abuse of the land, arguably, forces them to romanticize cultures having *any* semblance of a more respectful ecological tradition than their own.

Throughout history and prehistory, any mobile, hunter-gatherer society would have been more environmentally integrated by virtue of a population-space ratio much smaller than that available today. Ridley argues that whatever Native ecological “ethic” did exist prior to the arrival of Europeans derived more from tribal size, overall regional

population, and available space than from any intrinsic benevolence toward the environment. Ridley later refers to independent studies by Ray Hames, Michael Alvard, William Vickers, and Allyn MacLean Stearman which reveal that “there have now been four studies of Amazon Indians that have directly tested their conservation ethic, by trying to find evidence that they practice systematic restraint in their hunting patterns to prevent the overexploitation of game. All four rejected the hypothesis” (222). David Orton suggests that any argument that “Aboriginals in Canada ‘owned’ the country before the arrival of the European colonizers and therefore must be compensated” is highly problematic, for it nurtures the position that “ownership of non-human Nature becomes accepted” and leads to little more than disputes “over which classes or groups of humans, including indigenous peoples, should have ownership, and how the benefits should be distributed” (*Green Writing* #50).⁷ Imperialism and racism over the past few centuries have likely forced Native peoples to increasingly adopt an ecological political stance as a means of fighting for the retention of lands and the rights to perform those cultural practices that only land facilitates. But there are risks in sustaining the position, Orton points out, for it perpetuates the stereotype of the ecological noble savage.

Ridley agrees, suggesting that forcing Native peoples into an ecological paradigm “threatens to make Indian land rights contingent on their passing some test of ecological virtue, which is a test none should have to pass” (223), and he notes the irony in D.W. Posey’s remark that even if it is not true--of Amazon Indians in this case--that nature conservation is important, they should continue to say that it is because “any evidence of ecologically unsound activities by indigenous and traditional peoples undermines their basic rights to land, resources, and cultural practice” (217). Concluding that we can no

longer rightly deny “that the aboriginal view of history is human-centered,” Orton remarks,

Asserted ownership is ultimately a convenient social fiction deriving from human society, enforcing a claim of control over other creatures and the Earth itself. When we look at claims to ownership in a society, we need to look at how such claims protect the natural world and how they ensure social justice for the humans within the particular social world. If there are claims to ownership, then there needs to be acknowledged responsibilities and accountability to Nature and society . . . social justice issues must be resolved within an ecological context of justice for all species and the Earth itself. (*Green Writing* #67B)

Rod Preece’s chapter in *Animals and Nature* entitled “Aboriginal and Oriental Harmony with Nature” similarly explores whether Native cultures lived “in harmony with nature” or whether their naturalistic or animistic spiritual traditions were but means “to explain and control nature, rather than to be in harmony with it” (164). The chapter is meant to “warn us to treat the unabashed eulogies of Aboriginal relationships to nature with a degree of skepticism and circumspection . . . [for] increasing ‘at one with nature’ claims for Aboriginal societies are untrue at present, even if they were true of a rapidly disappearing, in many instances long-disappeared, past” (166-67). Orton concurs: “There is a bias against looking critically at aboriginal societies in the past or present. The focus becomes more on blaming non-aboriginal society, and while there is a lot to blame, this encourages a romanticization of the past and present” (*Green Writing* #67B).

Preece challenges claims like David Suzuki’s that “‘native peoples’ [have a] profound ecological wisdom” (165) as belonging less to the world of reality than of myth, as “pious aspiration rather than cultural description” (166), and though certainly *some* indigenous peoples are still able to sustain patterns and habits of traditional

ecological living, that such an overwhelming majority no longer live in spaces conducive to traditional ecological practices problematizes broad ecological claims made about “native peoples,” as Suzuki attempts to do. In fact, the 2001 “Aboriginal Peoples Survey” revealed that of the approximately one million aboriginal people in Canada, 70% live off-reserve, and 68% of those in urban areas (“Indepth: Aboriginal Canadians”). Preece thus argues that any “former conservationist ideology” that Native peoples might have held historically must be measured against more recent practices that have included gillnetting, steel-jawed leg-hold traps, and, in one instance, the mass slaughter of 162 wolves by a single Native hunter in the Northwest Territories (166-68).

Despite protestations against an innate Native land ethic, there is still much to be said for *any* culture advocating a closer relationship to Nature, however difficult its pragmatic implementation may be in modernity. A substantive but insightful excerpt from Kenneth M. Morrison begins to reveal how an ecological sensibility might be retrieved from the less-tenable mythical context such a sensibility is usually integrated with:

Native American cosmogonies (narratives about the beginning and nature of existence). . . . do not describe a radical shift from perfect to imperfect being. . . . *do not distinguish between nature, culture, and supernature, or between the spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the profane.* Beings certainly differ, particularly in terms of their relative knowledge and compassion for others, but prayer is more often than not a *mutual evocation of relationship rather than a supplicating act of worship.* In native American creation mythologies various spirits--including creators, culture heroes, tricksters, monsters, animals, plants, and even the Sun, moon, stars, and human persons--share the same nature: they are all intelligent and creative, have the ability to speak, and affect the well-being of others. . . . As a result their religious practice has always sought to overcome adversarial ways of feeling, thinking,

and being. (“Religions of Indians in North America,” my ital.)

Even though Morrison homogenizes and romanticizes Native peoples by imagining “their” religious practices to be inherently benevolent, he is correct to note that “spirituality” in many Native Peoples cultures involves “a mutual evocation of relationship” which itself imagines a human/non-human connection that at some level, at least, transcends anthropocentrism. Put otherwise, that many components of Native peoples’ mythologies may be anthropomorphic does not necessarily make them anthropocentric; in fact, the reverse is often true: quite often, those mythologies emphasize that there is little ontological difference between the human and animal world, as the three tales that Travis tells Maynard in *Halfway Man* suggest. As John Livingston reminds us, human integration with other creatures within the natural world is not ephemeral, wishful thinking but is fundamentally a biological phenomenon:

The glory and the grandeur are in the flux, the constant shifting which is made possible by the combination, decomposition and recombination of the basic building materials of life. Though I do not expect to be reborn as a crocus, I know that one day my atoms will inhabit a bacterium here, a diatom there, a nematode or a flagellate--even a crayfish or a sea cucumber. I will be here, in myriad forms, for as long as there are forms of life on Earth. I have always been here, and with a certain effort of will, *I can sometimes remember.* (*One Cosmic Instant* 227)

Although no shaman’s chant will summon the electromagnetic spectrum or “work” to deliver deer to a pack of hunters, as a species, we have clearly demonstrated our need for some form of spirituality. Preece’s powerful remark, “it is unfortunate that those who decry the West and laud others serve only to create the human divide once more. If we are to recognize a common human dignity, a fundamental shared humanity, we must also

recognize a common human being replete with common human wants” (xii), suggests the importance of thinking in pan-cultural or pan-ethnic evolutionary terms when it comes to environmental action. Any mythology or other cultural characteristic that promotes reverence and respect for the natural world that quite literally sustains us may “work” in more important ways than may at first be visible. It may just be that pantheism and animism, which for centuries in most Western nations have been repressed by a teleological, Judeo-Christian ideology, are now, in an era of quantum cosmology and biogenetics that increasingly supports interconnectivity, poised to become the most useful form of spirituality we have contrived. Learning from those Native peoples still able to nurture an awe and respect for the intricate workings of the natural world through hands-on practice--and who position the human subject among and not atop the natural world--could be one of the most important steps the dominant culture takes in the decades ahead. *The Wabeno Feast* explores what might happen if it does not.

Part III - MacKay Goes Mad; Malcolmson Acquiesces

Drew traces MacKay’s failure to reconcile his beliefs in reason and progress with establishment [sic] of a harmonious relationship with his environment; he also examines the collective failure of the white man in North America, from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, to function harmoniously either within himself or within his environment. . . . MacKay views Indian society as the embodiment of ultimate depravity; as the book ends, Drew increasingly emphasizes the depraved quality of the white society which destroyed the Indian culture. (Monkman 92-93)

Remnants of the once-powerful Seri Indians . . . renewed tonight their fantastic pact of tribal suicide. . . . Now numbering less than 100, the Seris, discouraged by disease and poverty, have sworn that the tribe shall die.

What frightened me was that we, all of us, the whole species might decide to do that without ever discussing it, without even really thinking about it. Maybe we had already *decided* on some level we knew nothing about. (Drew, *Halfway Man* 65)

By invoking the idea of “some level we knew nothing about,” Drew highlights the limitations of language and modern science alike in trying to find “truth.” He also reveals how “madness” and “sanity” are subjective terms requiring cross-examination in light of how “rational” Western (and increasingly Eastern) industrial practices have damaged the environment that sustains us. The Seri act of self-obliteration here might commonly be read as a radical and *public* gesture deemed “mad”--implying unnatural--but Drew complicates such a response by subtly reminding us that the current ecological crisis is a consequence of equally mad *private* actions and choices made daily and often in ignorance. If the Seri commit tribal suicide as a gesture of speaking back to the centre, in postcolonial terms, what are we to make of our global ecocide and specieside? Who are we speaking back to?

It should not be surprising that the quasi-historical *The Wabeno Feast* is itself ecologically structured, having equally weighted intertwined narrative sequences whose common thread is a manuscript comprising some, but not all, of the journals of the eighteenth-century Hudson’s Bay Company factor, Drummond MacKay. The incompleteness of the manuscript leaves history unfinished and open to fresh interpretation, and by interconnecting the three narratives outlined below, Drew creates a sense of continuous human presence within, and not just *on*, the land, foregrounding the choice we face as a species as to whether, how, and to what end we should accept responsibility for protecting the environment and all other forms of life.

The central sequence traces MacKay's arrival in Canada from Bristol with his subordinate, Elborn, and their travels into Northern Ontario where MacKay is to assume the Company's factorship position at the newly built Frog Lake (Lake Nibbeke Omuhkukke) post, where he will "trade with the Indian at all times in the Company's best interest" (55). Though MacKay's history prior to arriving is incomplete because of the incomplete manuscript--Drew also leaves the origin and full contents of the manuscript just obscure enough to blur the lines between history, story, and myth--we do learn that he is a consummate bourgeois rationalist who, having lost his love and Christian faith, abandons Britain for the New World with the hope of becoming materially successful and spiritually "chastened, purged, and refreshed" (18). Instead, he ends up becoming bushed, suicidal, and quite dead after being haunted by the spirit of Ontario's vast and "indifferent" (262) gothic Northern wild. The "salacious" and "indiscriminate, licentious" Voyageurs (51) he encounters, and the Ojibway "savages" he sees as "corrupt beyond redemption" (19) and "devoid of shame and reason" (265), symbolize, ironically, what he denies in himself: the evolutionary reality of his animality: "I shouted that I was not an animal. That I was a man" (84). Because the Voyageurs and Ojibway live in a closer physical relationship to the land and accept its ambiguities and dangers, MacKay, who thrives on order and control, rejects both them and it. Elborn, conversely, cautiously approaches the land and its peoples, painfully aware of his inability to "get out of history" and perpetually wary of the Company's ideology of progress. He fears the "spreading of our foolishness like a pestilence among them [the Native people]" (191). His end is left obscure because of the missing manuscript, but our last image in the MacKay narrative

involves Elborn sleeping in MacKay's garrisoned cabin while MacKay attempts to retrieve his sanity by confessing in his journal. Beside MacKay is a loaded pistol.

The second narrative sequence follows the mid-to-late 20th-century teenage and early adult experiences of the novel's second protagonist, Paul Henry, and three of his friends in Sable Creek on the northern Lake Superior shore: Franklin Hook, Gerry Rattray, and Miro Balch. A young Paul stumbles across the rotted remnants of MacKay's cabin while lost in the wilderness during a Scouting trip with his friends and Scoutmaster Fred Hale. Paul's discovery of the rusty pistol MacKay may have used to kill himself (Drew leaves the details of his death obscured) 150 years earlier parallels his grandfather's discovery of the MacKay manuscript in the cabin 50 years earlier, and later, the adult Paul ends up with the MacKay manuscript after a circuitous series of events that challenges the notion of the ownership of history as absurd. Hale, who sees nature merely as an obstacle to be overcome by humans and not something of which they are a part, has proposed the trip to teach the boys to "seize leisure manfully, to subdue the unknown and wrestle into submission whatever threatened them" (16). What threatens Hale, however, is the fear of losing face by becoming lost inside a massive boreal forest ecosystem. His fear comes true. Because of the Scouts, he knows how to navigate using maps, but when the land differs from what he expects, he gets the troop lost. His knowledge of and respect for the wild is revealed as superficial, and his failure as a Scout leader symbolizes the larger Western disconnection from nature. He is a modernized MacKay, who, if he wanted to, could embrace what the natural world has to offer and discover its intricacies and wonders. Instead, his superficiality and apprehension make him irrational and dangerous to those around him--and to the environment. Drew also

uses Hale to mock both power and gender constructions in having Hale comment on “seizing” nature and making it submit “manfully.”

As the sequence unfolds and the four teens mature and leave Sable Creek for Toronto, the consequences of the Scouting trip on their subsequent attitudes toward nature plays out variously among them. The highlight of the sequence occurs when a major industrial pollution accident claims the lives of 27 schoolchildren, including Paul’s and Franklin’s sons. Consequently, Gerry, who successfully legally defends the company responsible for the accident, commits suicide following an addiction to success that has left him morally bankrupt and ecologically disconnected from humans and nature alike; Miro, a disillusioned biologist turned ecoterrorist, is shot and killed during a standoff with police; and Franklin, a CBC nature cinematographer, is there to choreograph the recording of Miro’s final moments. Franklin’s detachment signifies the impersonality of modern Western cityscapes, the Western obsession with media and the images of death and carnage too often provided as the sole measure of reality, and a fixation on recording history that for Paul--like the museums his father once described as “tombs” that “keep alive the terror of dying and decay” (77)--is but a paltry attempt to sublimate fear of the immanence of death.

Following the industrial accident, Paul Henry eventually quits his successful career in the pulp and paper industry and leaves Toronto’s “civilization” with his wife, Liv; they elect to return to the unpredictable, dangerous, but otherwise relatively safe domain of the Northern Ontario wilderness, where they may die at any moment but will do so on terms that our species, until the advent of civilization, was more able to accept. The third and final narrative thus follows Paul and Liv journeying from a dead or dying

city into the obscure wilderness north of Sable Creek by canoe and portage. The industrial accident that claimed their son's life has either impacted all of southern Ontario or simply marks the beginning of more widespread ecological collapse. Drew chooses to leave the details ambiguous to craft a narrative climate of doubt. He also does so to critique the ideology of progress underlying ecological collapse at large rather than foregrounding a specific incident that might too easily be dismissed as an anomalous "accident," as is often the case in industrial, government, and media accounts of environmental disasters--witness the Exxon Valdez oil spill or Chernobyl meltdown, for instance.

At each stop during their journey, Paul reads aloud to Liv several pages of the MacKay manuscript he has inherited before committing them to flames. His gesture is at once a rejection of Miro's ecoterrorist fatalism and Western historical determinism, as well as an apologetic recognition of his complicity in the ideology of progress and civilization that caused his son's death. His page-burning also parallels MacKay's burning of his book of Antoninus' stoic maxims as his madness peaks and his suicide becomes inevitable, with the difference that Paul's action, unlike MacKay's, is presented as an act of sanity. Paul and Liv may reject civilization, "go North," and meet death, but they will do so under no pretences of controllability or illusions of human importance. Unlike Fred Hale, Paul and Liv face their uncertainty--the cosmological mystery that brought them into being and will be the cause of their removal--without rationalization or despair but with humility and respect.

The first-person MacKay narrative in *Wabeno* is the most important gauge of Drew's ecosophical sensibility, and the remaining Henry narratives serve to expose and

interrogate the long-term cultural and ecological consequences of the European imperialism MacKay represents and conveys to Canada in 1785. MacKay has left the Old World having suffered financial, spiritual, and personal losses. Drew leaves the details of his Old World life obscure to supplement the Northern Ontario gothic atmosphere that envelopes and eventually consumes MacKay in his quest for personal gain and wealth. His eventual death symbolizes a postcolonial rejection of Europe by the land and its aboriginal inhabitants--it remains limited, however, in that the Henry narratives expose the persevering and deadly aftermath of the European influence: "When you are in the belly of a great fish you go where the great fish swims," says Miskobenesa, or "Red Bird"--an Ojibway band chief opposed to trading with the Europeans because he foresees his peoples' exploitation and fears that they will become disconnected from nature (218). Despite the fact that the idea of "Canada" eventually reflects European values, customs, cultures, languages, and laws, Drew portrays the colonizing mission not as successful but as a terrible ecological failure in both human and environmental terms. By the time of the adult Henry narrative, the reduction of cultural and biological diversity has destroyed a significant portion of an entire ecosystem.

Drew develops MacKay gradually through MacKay's journal, which often teeters on self-abasing confessional and is riddled throughout with ambivalent quotations about nature from the 2nd-century Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161-180 CE). The confessional aspect of MacKay's journal underscores a Western obsession with death that radically differs from the Native views he encounters. It also speaks to the ontological inadequacy of Western philosophy, language, and literature in the New World. Before even arriving at his post or meeting the "cultish and

superstitious” Voyageurs (23) or the Ojibway, he prepares himself with Antoninus’ advice to “be vigilant in the detection of anything contrary to reason” and his Puritan-sounding dictum about “what revolting creatures men are in eating, sleeping, sexual intercourse, and all the other operations of nature” (21). For MacKay, “nature” is confusing: to be able to detect the unreasonable inherently implies a “natural” or innate ability, however refined by higher learning and contemplation; the “creatured” body, however, in its biologically natural form--naked or farting or eating or mating--is perceived by him as though *unnatural*. Like the body of landscape that will eventually be “clothed” by railways and factories, skyscrapers and suburbia, MacKay’s body must also be protectively shielded. But once stripped of the sanity he finds in Antoninus’ rationalist aphorisms--clothing ill-suited for the Northern Shield and its First Peoples--he withers.

The more optimistic of Antoninus’ *Meditations* remind us that the Stoics also imagined a circular, regenerating universe akin to that found in Buddhist, Hindu, and many indigenous peoples’ mythologies. The cyclical mythological beliefs MacKay is exposed to through Miskobenesa and the Ojibway ought to resonate with his understanding of Antoninus, but they do not because he is constrained by his bourgeois vision. Antoninus summons his readers to

Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul; and observe how all things have reference to one perception, the perception of this one living being; and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things which exist; observe too the continuous spinning of the thread and the contexture of the web. (*Wabeno* 147)

Antoninus' suggestion of "one living being" has pantheistic overtones and reminds us of Lovelock's *Gaia*, and that he ends the meditation by invoking an image of the web is a reminder once again that the modern ecocritical movement has an ancient heredity. For as much as Antoninus was an admirer of material nature, only his Stoic emphasis on order, reason, and rational thought as the foundations of human nature and right conduct resonate with the rationalist MacKay, psychically preventing him from being able to openly embrace the possibilities in his New World home. His second-hand reliance on Antoninus in a physical and cultural environment demanding originality and first-hand reflection are useless. He cannot see himself at home as one among many or as materially fused with place, and he appears as though all mind and no body: "Brush away all imagination,' Antoninus has said, 'restrain impulsiveness, dampen desire, and confirm the power of the mind!'" (190). Drew prefaces the novel with a quotation from the Stoic to show the more positive potential of Antoninus' sayings and with a wink of ironic foreshadowing: "Think of yourself as already dead . . . and live your remaining days in harmony with nature, as though they were but a sequel to your life." Elborn's accusation that MacKay's madness arises because he sees "only what it was expedient for you to see" (264) speaks to MacKay's monocultural vision and to Drew's extended condemnation of the contemporary ecological apathy such limited vision has nurtured.

The prospect of death at the hands of nature is the core element of Drew's dark Northern Ontario gothic, but it is set up by his characterization of MacKay as predisposed for madness by virtue of his Enlightenment values. Just before arriving in Quebec, while still aboard ship, MacKay reflects almost narcissistically on "the misfortunes of the past year" and allows himself to feel delusively and fatalistically "invigorated" by the

prospect of death brought on by having been temporarily lost in the “howling gloom” of the Atlantic off the Newfoundland coast (18). It is as though he almost senses his evolutionary oneness with nature but represses it. His being lost in the immensity of a void and left to nature’s fortunes here foreshadows his disorientation in the immensity of presence, later, in an overwhelming Northern Ontario forest whose trees create a Minotaur’s maze. It also prefigures Fred Hale getting his Scouting troop lost in the wilderness.

The concept of human exposure, or vulnerability, is central to Drew’s evolutionary fiction, and that MacKay experiences his new Northern Ontario home as terrifying--he fears venturing “unarmed and vulnerable into unknown country” (188)--speaks to Drew’s emphasis on the power of perception and imagination. For MacKay, everything is frighteningly Other, and his fear of the unknown symbolizes a wider obsession with control--of human Others as of nature--that foreshadows the environmental disaster in the Henry narrative and Charlie Redbird’s status as a societal outcast. MacKay’s fear leads him to live in a state of constant ambivalence, and allowing himself to fit into the New World would demand of him a terrifying gesture of reconciliation. Miskobenesa tells him that “you have gone apart from your people and their dream of reason, but you have not yet come to us. You are a man journeying in fog” (257). Miskobenesa also replies ecologically to MacKay’s suggestion that reason dictates that the tribe should cultivate wild rice to create surplus--yet another symbol of MacKay’s fear--by saying, “one should be grateful for the voice of the land wherever one heard it, and not seek to change it, for it sang equally to all creatures and all creatures make up the singing” (256). Miskobenesa experiences life as a holistic series of multiple

interconnectivities and possibilities--a posture of openness and invitation that prompted his initial contact with Europeans but from which he later withdrew because of their exploitation--but MacKay sees only simple dualities. He responds to Miskobenesa's call to leave nature alone by "quoting Aurelius to the effect that if a man were sane his every action would be in accord with both nature and reason," to which Miskobenesa can only reply: "If a man were sane . . . he would have no need to reconcile these two!" (257). Miskobenesa's ability to use reason to silence MacKay's supposed understanding of it suggests he has acquired a proper mind-body, human-nature balance.

Unable to imagine finding unity in Northern Ontario and "afraid to go into life" (264), MacKay dies after a presumably very brief self-imposed isolation--but not before becoming "bushed" in his wilderness cabin, "crouched by [his] miserable fire" (265) while burning pages of Antoninus' writings in a gesture foreshadowing Paul Henry's burning of MacKay's journal. The impudent, bourgeois MacKay has been unable to accept the multiple subjectivities his new habitat demands. His death, moreover, is left ambiguous: we do not know if he took his own life, if Elborn (if he exists) killed him, if he killed Elborn, or if both (or either) lived beyond the cabin scene and died some other way. Elborn, MacKay's foil, and whose name suggests "the born," is ambiguously either real or a part of MacKay's ego that split off at some point during the voyage from England. When Elborn prepares to risk entering the borderland of possibility, MacKay seems to kill him. Either way, MacKay asymptotically approaches the border zone of new (re)cognition in the New World but refuses to ever arrive.

Where MacKay's arrival in Canada marks the beginning of Old World exploitation and appropriation of nature and Native peoples alike, Elborn represents the

human desire to adjust to new surroundings on their own terms. Drew intentionally creates this alter-ego uncertainty to foster the gothic mood of the novel and to foreground the postmodern provisionality of meaning. Elborn wants to occupy the land as it is understood by Miskobenesa and his people; what MacKay sees as the rigid boundaries of culture and place are, to him, permeable and ambiguous zones of exploration, places to contemplate his emerging indigenous identity and the multiple subject positions he experiences: European, Voyageur, Ojibway, or part of the Northern Ontario landscape itself. He embraces his inbetweenness as an Old World emigrant/New World settler, replete with its subtexts of linguistic, cultural, and ecological incongruity. As the old and new collide, Elborn finds a source of new and exciting self-visibility; he sees and is in turn seen, or recognized and appreciated, by those he meets, despite the fact that he arrives with the same cultural trappings as MacKay. Elborn is as comfortable in the circle of shadowy safety around the Voyageur campfires, where local tales and past adventures are recalled and mythologized, as he is in the company of Ojibway strangers, whose language, like that of the land, he wants to learn in order to adapt more quickly to his new home.

Whether through the exploitation of otter, muskrat, marten, bear, fox, lynx, fisher, mink, wolf, or beaver, MacKay's single-minded purpose persists: "how I must grasp the country and extract from it the wealth" (160). "Grasping" the country for MacKay does not mean attempting an epistemological or ontological reorientation but gripping and squeezing its material benefits: "Let others talk of Providence, and see designs where none exist. I shall talk of beavers, and make the ways to get them. For *my* faith is in the Company to meet demand; and further, to maintain demand as long as supply exists"

(160). MacKay's faith in commerce and colonization denotes his religion of progress, and the "designs" MacKay disavows are the biotic and cultural communities that comprise his new place and enable trade in the first place. Elborn realizes his complicity and laments the paralyzing position his history has placed him in, and his uncertain fate in the novel nicely ties into the question facing Canadians today: Whose "here" is it, and does the question really matter anymore when the "here" demanding our attention is global and under threat?

Drew's characterization of Paul and Liv as having stronger instincts and intuition than other characters places them closer to nature and links them to Elborn. Their decision to abandon civilization for a wild that still exists in Northern Ontario symbolizes a triple denial of the humanist mission, historical determinism, and European attitudes that exploit nature for utility. Having them leave civilization exposes Drew to charges of escapism and of advocating a utopian primitivism that could never pragmatically work on a massive scale without dramatic population reductions. Nevertheless, in his remarks about *Wabeno* in our interview, he makes it clear that one need not necessarily choose escape to gain ecological wisdom:

It doesn't require a huge journey or a huge quest, but it does involve stepping out of the stream--out of this rush of time--and you suddenly find that you are not apart from the trees, you are not apart from the fish, or from anything else surrounding you: the stars, the earth, the sky. You are a part of it all. That sense of harmony--oneness--is what I would like to think they both feel. . . . More important than escape, for Paul and Liv, is that they are going back, back into something in the North, and what they are accepting is a huge vulnerability. There are no longer any protective shells, no more masks, and they are taking their chances. Maybe they are going to die, and maybe they're not, but they are open to what is there in the North and will accept it either way because it's pure. (A19)

Drew addresses the theme of escaping into “the North” more comprehensively in *Halfway Man*, where Travis, though tempted to flee like Paul and Liv, is persuaded to stay and fight the forces of development. This shift marks an evolution in Drew’s thinking between the publication of *Wabeno* in 1973 and *Halfway Man* in 1989. In the post-apocalyptic *Erthring*, escape is impossible: there is nowhere left to run.

Notably, Drew complicates images of “the Native” in *Wabeno* by offering two diametrically opposed responses to European arrival. Shongwashe, a member of Miskobenesa’s tribe wanting to take it into the future, is to MacKay as Miskobenesa/Red Bird is to Elborn: the former pair embrace imperialism as progress and the latter reject it (but only after having been exposed to its potential fruits). This is a theme Drew will return to in *Halfway Man*, where he ensures that Travis is exposed to imperialism firsthand before rejecting it. In both cases, Drew reminds us of our shared innate curiosity and, more importantly, he warns us of sustaining easy binaries instead of opening new discursive rifts for joint exploration. MacKay observes that Miskobenesa’s tribe “appeared indifferent to my descriptions of cities, ships and palaces” (220). Miskobenesa rejects MacKay’s gifts as “toboggans full of death” and refuses the factor’s solicitations (193-94). In turn, MacKay sees Miskobenesa’s band as primitive because they “lack the sense of order provided by a belief in progress, for they share a naïve and vague doctrine of repetition, linked to the regenerating earth: this prevents their acquiring a proper history, or forming more than the most simple expectations” (220). He cannot understand why anyone would choose a life without habitual expectation, and his philosophy that life is best measured by material success and best remembered through written history is terribly misplaced in a land where neither matter.

Drew is not so naïve as to suggest turning back the clock on European arrival, even though he foregrounds in *Wabeno* a return to simpler living--a return that he will later problematize in *The Erthring Trilogy* and *Halfway Man*--through his characterizations of Miskobenesa and his tribe, the Voyageurs, and the Henrys, who all, in a sense, choose limitation. Drew accomplishes something similar in his characterization of English professor Kenneth Malcolmson, who serves a double symbolic function. He is an incomplete father-figure to Paul, and his possession of the manuscript Paul's father once held provides a bridge to MacKay and Miskobenesa through history. Malcolmson's description of Paul's father as a "Half-way man. . . . only half a dreamer, reluctant to go the whole way" (121-22), is later manifested in the title and central theme of Drew's novel by the same name.

Malcolmson is also the voice of the increasingly marginalized realm of the Arts and Humanities in an overwhelmingly scientific and business-oriented world. Moreover, he represents the best and worst of the postmodern English professor. Malcolmson is fascinated with possibility but also paralyzed by it. As Drew states in our interview,

I think there's a certain wonky beauty about him--I hope--that I hope suggests that he's dealing with just too many possibilities. I love people who are overwhelmed by possibilities. I think you can see it happening all the time. In politics, for instance, there are some people that are too intelligent and too sensitive to hold out in politics for very long because they see too much, too many things. (A17)

Malcolmson echoes Drew's own postmodern predilections. Moreover, according to Drew, Malcolmson believes in "some form of genetic programming which involves the practice of mutual aid. A core of sanity, maybe, or a core of goodness and trust in the future, in others" (A18). Malcolmson's thematic pairing

with the biologist Miro Balch reveals that although both men desire radical change that involves reconfiguring the human place in nature, neither feels that he can achieve it within society. Where Miro reacts with violence, Malcolmson simply gives up. He has little hope for the future, has all but abandoned faith in human nature, and has become painfully overwhelmed by not finding “a core of sanity” around him. He, too, goes mad in a way. His last thought in the novel, the inane “*I shall have sausages for supper,*” exposes the degree of his intellectual disillusionment and spiritual paralysis (240). Though wanting to change his world, he can no more imagine where to start than where starting might lead him. He feels that he cannot *act*, that no action would suffice, and so he acquiesces to forces he feels are too powerful to overcome. Enter Miro Balch.

Part IV - The Sane Scientist?: Miro Balch and Mutual Aid

The word “anarchy,” as most anarchists use it, does not imply chaos, nihilism, or anomie, but rather a harmonious anti-authoritarian society. In place of what are regarded as authoritarian political structures and coercive economic institutions, anarchists advocate social relations based upon voluntary association of autonomous individuals, cooperation, mutual aid, and self-governance. (Wikipedia, “Anarchism”)

The tolerant idea of the middle way which lies at the heart of our bargaining process and informs both commerce and democratic government is of little help when we confront the rigid standards of nature. A river or lake is not clean if it is relatively unpolluted; an animal species is not safe if it is merely less threatened than some other; a forest is not intact if it has been timbered for white pine only. It is not surprising that compromise has been our first response to our ecological predicament, and that we have tried to rationalize ourselves into accepting compromised surroundings, compromised water, air and food, and a

compromised future for our children. All our training--our sense of fair play, of going half way, of seeing the other fellow's point of view, of coming to terms, and so on (together, of course, with our uncompromising material expectations)--has blinded us to the fact that finite resources will not be preserved by a slower rate of exploitation. There is a point where compromise becomes complicity and beyond that point the middle road is precisely where we do not want to go. (Drew, "Toward an Ecological Conscience" 30)

Miro Balch, the disillusioned ecoterrorist in *The Wabeno Feast*, is created specifically to assess the problem of environmental half-measures and to provide an inroad to Peter Kropotkin's sustained argument for "mutual aid" in such works as *The Conquest of Bread and Fields*, *Factories and Workshops*, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, and *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. His view, founded on his observations of mutual cooperation in nature, contradicted Darwin by suggesting that evolution is fundamentally not competitive but cooperative in nature.⁸ The description of Balch reminiscing on the scientific readings that move him reveals at once the range of Drew's interest in the natural sciences; it also shows how Kropotkin's idealism, which partially inspires Miro to act on behalf of the environment, is rooted as much in science as political philosophy:

Hunched at his desk, he had spent the morning reading Delevoryas on plant diversification, and Burnett and Eisner on adaptation. About ten, he had finished making notes from those books, but he did not push them aside until he had checked some dubious points against Odum's *Fundamentals of Ecology*. Satisfied at last, he glanced at the clock, saw that he had two hours, and with a sigh of anticipation drew down his frayed copy of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*. The old anarchist's stately prose surrounded him like a warm bath, and he sank gratefully into it. To Miro, Kropotkin's advice was like a father's calm voice beside the fire; Kropotkin's indomitable optimism assured him that all was well, that we need only trust ourselves to

find ourselves adequate to any challenge; the wealth of the old man's scholarship was like coming home to all that had never been and would never be, a gorgeous and unanswerable fantasy before which Darwin and Malthus and Thomas Huxley cringed and shuffled and hid their gloomy souls. "Don't compete!" he read. "Competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it. . . . That is the watchword that comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean. . . . That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral." (137-38)

As the child most distraught during Fred Hale's failed Scouting trip, we might expect Miro--who experienced the trip (and thus nature) as "a horror" (42)-- to find as an adult an ameliorative balm in Kropotkin. However, he has never learned to reconcile his experience while lost with the troop with the world beyond it:

For Miro especially the trip had been a horror, a monochromatic nightmare of mud, rock, endless waves, and cloud. He was surrounded by such terrors and grotesques, that sheer survival would be a triumph. His soul shriveled in greyness. Shuddering, feverish and exhausted, he spent hours watching insects in dead stumps, and envying the crispness and precision of their world. (42)

He remains a "small centre of misery" whose feelings of alienation as an adult are compounded by his never having had a nurturing home environment as a child: "he knew his present father would be furious if in any way the fact of Miro's existence were drawn to his attention" (43). As an adult, everywhere Balch looks, the fear of wilderness he developed during the trip is deleteriously made manifest in society: instead of seeing in his fellow citizens the potential or promise for meaningful change, he sees himself only as a "m-master of *monsters*"--his last utterance on Earth after having been shot in a standoff with police (246).

Balch has become incapable of focusing on Kropotkin's belief in beneficence and cooperation; he can only privilege violence as a necessary response to what he sees as environmental complacency in modern society--a stance the pacifist Kropotkin rejected on the grounds that it would only be duplicating the violence entrenched in and legitimized by the state as it already existed. Kropotkin discards as an "atrocious" and "vicious oversimplification" the social Darwinist reading of Darwin popularized by T.H. Huxley, who, in "The Struggle for Existence in Society" (1888), renders human relationships within the organization of the state a "continual free fight" and "Hobbesian war of each against all [as] the normal state of existence" (Drew, "Toward" 30). Kropotkin concluded that the opposite was true of human nature. Having spent six years with Cossacks and native hunters in Siberia in the late-nineteenth century, he journeyed over "fifty thousand miles of rough terrain . . . unarmed, trusting the people and having his trust repaid" (30). He based his mutual aid theory on "a wealth of personal observation and zoological literature" and examples of cooperation and symbiosis in non-human nature that "range from insects to elephants" (32). For Drew, as for Kropotkin, our core emotions--love, empathy, joy, and a desire to belong to something beyond the self--are not cultural but biological evolutionary phenomena that serve useful adaptive functions and have been with us since prehistory. They are primal instincts, Kropotkin argues, that take the form of an "unconscious recognition":

Love, sympathy and self-sacrifice certainly play an immense part in the progressive development of our moral feelings. But it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience--be it only at the stage of an instinct--of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of everyone's happiness upon the happiness of

all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own . . . Don't compete! ("Toward" 33)

Drew shares Kropotkin's concern that "the loss of a viable centre is leading to increased centralized authority" ("Toward" 33), and his ecological focus leads him to assert that even the most democratic of cultures stands to be radically totalitarianized, should it be given too much responsibility for fixing environmental problems that each of us, as individuals, have the power to correct through small acts of ecological restraint:

Sensing peril, we automatically take refuge in power and institutions. . . . If we continue in this direction we shall have other Stockholm Conferences as the environment sickens, and either the United Nations will be invigorated or replaced by a more efficient body. Agreements will be reached on the control of all potentially subversive variables, and man himself will be reduced to something malleable and utterly predictable. To bring this about, we need to do very little except consume, remain subservient to State education, drug ourselves on mass media, and leave decisions to our governments.

For concerned citizens the problem is to avoid an ingenious collusion in totalitarian solutions. Kropotkin's Anarchism may not provide an alternate in itself but it points the way toward an alternative--namely, what Aldo Leopold has called the *ecological conscience* . . . a fabric of individual restraint . . . [coupled] with the knowledge that individual responsibility is limitless. One glimpses its precursors in Zen, in Jainism, in Franciscan Christianity, and in men like Thoreau, Schweitzer, and Gandhi. (33)

The ideas of diversity--biological and cultural--and individual restraint are of course central to Drew's emphasis on a sound ecological praxis, but both are lost on Miro who, like Malcolmson and MacKay, has abandoned hope in the power of the individual to effect significant change. Mindful of the historical abuse of anarchic ideals--"its political adulteration has caused the violent deaths of thousands" ("English and Anarchy" 20)--Drew nonetheless retains optimism in its core principles of voluntary cooperation and the

“supreme law of general welfare,” principles that Miro becomes blind to in his resentment against humanity’s dominant place in nature. Miro, whose resentment against the world originates in his inability to meliorate the blurry borderlands between the personal and public, past and present, and childhood and adulthood, has lost faith in society and has adulterated Kropotkin’s anarchist teachings. His inflexibility prevents him from seeing beyond the institutions he feels contain and define him, and he cannot extend his “love” of the environment--on whose behalf he claims to be acting--to his own species. Instead, he fatalistically concedes that his only fate is one of hostility. His is precisely the disaffected anarchist stance least likely to generate public sympathy, raising interesting questions about the lengths to which individuals might go to try to speak on behalf of a nature that is incapable of speaking for itself--or, similarly, on behalf of a species that seems forgetful of its own interest in long-term survival.

Miro has grown up seeking a reconciliation with nature and a sense of shared humanity and humaneness that were lost to him in childhood, but he cannot find it in an industrialized society plagued by individualism, action without purpose, and ineffective environmental laws--a society characterized as coercive, robbing us of legitimate autonomy, and perpetuating the disavowal of personal responsibility for the environment. Balch believes that when Kropotkin says, “I am convinced . . . that whatever character such a movement may take in different countries, there will be displayed everywhere a far deeper comprehension of the required changes than has ever been displayed within the last six centuries,” he is issuing a call to arms (149). On one hand, Balch’s response can be perceived as a form of madness, as when he is described as though “happily and deeply troubled by glimpses of the gouged earth” that construction in the city symbolizes,

and which seem to feed his “visions of destruction” and provide him a “perverse excitement” (141). On the other hand, we are left to ponder, might such acts of extremism as Balch and his acolytes perform eventually become necessary should the environmental crisis deteriorate? Can they be seen not as mad but as the last vestiges of our species’ sanity and desire to survive the consequences of its own evolution? The portrayal of Miro Balch as a tortured soul who turns to ecoterrorism to act out an early childhood disconnect from the natural world and a nurturing society speaks to what can be taken as Drew’s ambivalence over when and how to best act on behalf of nature. This theme of radical activism anticipates *Halfway Man* and links both *Wabeno* and *Halfway Man* to M.T. Kelly’s *A Dream Like Mine*, Edward Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, and the entire eco-activist genre that grew out of the 1970s environmental movement.

The Wabeno Feast may not, at first glance, seem to contain as much of Drew’s optimism as do *Halfway Man* and the *Erthring* trilogy: MacKay and Elborn die through a murder-suicide (which may be one and the same if we accept that Elborn is MacKay’s alter-ego); Paul and Liv see promise only in an escape into the unpopulated wilderness; Gerry Rattray and Miro Balch die for two diametrically opposed but equally radical ideologies; and Charlie Redbird, whose image closes the novel, prays for a death his conscience prevents him from self-inflicting. This said, underneath the surface of discontent, the novel offers glimpses of hope, both through Paul and Liv’s choice to self-limit and through Miskobenesa’s reminder that we all have the power of choice when it comes to acting on behalf of the environment:

“Have you ever seen an amputated hand? A foot or head stricken off, lying apart from the trunk? That is the

condition to which a man reduces himself when he refuses to acquiesce to fate, cuts himself off from other creatures, and acts without respect for the world around him. You are cast aside, away from the natural unity. Nature made you a part, and you have cut yourself off. But there is a generous condition: you may unite yourself once more.” (235)

Throughout the narrative, it becomes evident that bourgeois notions of progress seem to be reflections of a fear of the unpredictability of nature, on a larger cosmic scale, and of death, fears whose repression and sublimation have since manifested themselves in the perpetual diversion, mass consumption, and neophilia that drives modern society and which is most dangerously reflected in our destruction of the natural world--in other words, in our ecocide and specieside. Progress in *Wabeno* is rendered in precisely such ethical, ecocentric terms that suggest that “civilization” today offers less genuine happiness and contentment than might be found in a more unpredictable and vulnerable relationship in and with the land--a relationship that until very recently, Drew reminds us, sustained our species for millions of years:

the Anarchist principles of self-restraint, cooperation, diversification and decentralization increasingly appear as the pre-conditions for survival. . . . We have biological limits and controls so subtle that we have not yet begun to understand them, and we have instincts which must be respected if we are to develop properly. For Kropotkin, these are liberating restraints, for they mean simply that we can rely on our subjective nature far more than we have long dared to do. We can trust ourselves. (“Toward” 35)

Where some might see danger in an idealist discourse that promotes trusting ourselves, especially given those events of the twentieth century that have demonstrated the worst of humankind, it is worth remembering that at no time in history have so many of our species also benefited from the best of humankind. From a much larger temporal and spatial perspective, we would not be here at all as a species were it not for the instincts of

cooperation, mutual aid, and benevolence that have seen us rise to the top of the food chain because of our ability to, quite simply, retain some measure of *faith* in ourselves:

The keynote in Rousseau is the word “liberty,” and he is careful to define it and to distinguish it from license by emphasizing the necessity of faith in the innate goodness of man. A society based on such a faith, a society in which the individual is self-disciplining for the benefit of the whole, and in which the whole exists to fulfil the best nature of the individual is, of course, a dream. But it is a strangely persistent dream. It is the core of the world’s major religions. It is a pillar on which are constructed the political philosophies which today control the world. It is, in fact, an Anarchist dream. . . . Those who believe in the possibility of its fulfilment assume the possibility of attaining the same degree of heightened conscience in all individuals. I would suggest that it is toward this reality, and not toward the satisfying of ephemeral social demands, that we should be working with all the power of our intellects. (“Toward” 20)

How long we survive as a species, Drew continuously reminds us, is, for the first time in history, in our own hands.

Notes

¹ For a complete discussion of the *Writing Thru Race* controversy, see Roy Miki, "Sliding the Scale of Elision: 'Race' Constructs/Cultural Praxis" in Sugars, *Unhomely* 301-22. See also E.F. Dyck, "The *Places* of Aboriginal Writing 2000 in Canada: The Novel." Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths' *The Book of Jessica*, both in content and in the controversy surrounding its performances and publication, also provides an excellent inroad to the emotional and political complexities lying at the heart of the appropriation debate.

² According to some biopaleontologists, mitochondrial DNA research "into modern human origins has produced two major findings. First, the entire amount of variation in mtDNA across human populations is small in comparison with that of other animal species. This means that all human mtDNA originated from a single ancestral lineage--specifically, a single mother--fairly recently and has been mutating ever since, producing the small diversity that exists throughout the human species. . . . The second major finding is that mtDNA of African populations is more diverse than of peoples of other continents. This suggests that African mtDNA has been changing for a longer time than elsewhere. Thus Africa is the likely source of the original mtDNA mother (sometimes called "Mitochondrial Eve"). See the section "Theories of Human Diversity" in the "The Human Origins Program," an online paleontological history of our species courtesy of the Smithsonian Museum at <<<http://www.mnh.si.edu/anthro/humanorigins/faq/Encarta/encarta.htm>>>. Accessed 2 Sep 06.

³ For an excellent analysis that leaves the topic unresolved and shifts the focus to accountability, see Sherene Razack, "To Essentialize or Not To Essentialize: Is This the Question?" in Sugars, *Unhomely* 323-31.

⁴ No author. "We Stole His What?" *Vestige*. 23 Feb 2003. <<<http://www.vestige.org/daily>>>. Accessed 27 Apr 2004.

⁵ Terry Goldie also briefly refers to *Wabeno* in *Fear and Temptation* in his semiotic argument that some non-Native writers unfairly romanticize indigenes when, in creating fictional indigenous characters, they ascribe to the oral tradition a "naturalness" that is deemed somehow more accurate or truthful an epistemology than that rendered by predominantly written cultures. Goldie suggests that such writings unfairly evoke "truth as a quality of indigenous language" (119).

⁶ Postcolonial "contamination," according to Diana Brydon in "The White Inuit Speaks: Contamination as Literary Strategy," involves an imaginative place for reconciliation and dialogue, a zone of contact between disparate cultures where homogenization is avoided but "local independence and global interdependencies" and cooperation "without cooption" are encouraged (99). Cross-cultural relations at the local level, she implies, are much more fluid and complicated than often gets implied in easy Native/non-Native binarizations.

⁷ Orton, who lives in Nova Scotia and is the founder of “The Green Web,” has written, with others on his site, several excellent articles from a deep ecological perspective in the form of numbered “Green Writing” bulletins. Many of these address differing Native and non-Native views on nature, but his focus, as a self-proclaimed “left biocentrist,” is the ecological future of the planet. See <<<http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/>>>.

⁸ Evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis posited a new concept in evolution in 1986 that, though still theoretical, has gained wide acceptance among the bioevolutionary community: *symbiogenesis*, the notion that complex life developed from the merging of microbial forms of life--that is, that the origin of new organs or life forms occurs via close-contact relationships (symbiosis) between otherwise independent organisms. If true, her theory affirms what Kropotkin could have observed only at a macro level at the turn of the 20th century. See: Margulis, *Symbiosis in Cell Evolution: Life and its Environment on the Early Earth* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981); Margulis and Dorian Sagan, *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986); and Margulis and Sagan, *Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1997). Notably, Margulis’ more recent work fuses symbiogenetic theory with Lovelock’s Gaia concept to argue that Earth, because comprised of a series of interconnected interactions among all living and non-living organisms, functions essentially as a giant cell and constitutes a vast self-regulating system. See Margulis, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look At Evolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), and Mary Midgley, *Gaia: The Next Big Idea* (London: Demos, 2001). The full text is available as a PDF file through open access at <<<http://www.demos.co.uk/catalogue/gaia/>>>. Accessed 15 June 2006.

CHAPTER 4

Halfway Man: Going All the Way with Nature

The quality of wildness remains within us. It is masked from our consciousness in multifarious ways, including our own conscious rejection. We are “different,” but not perhaps in the ways the humanists would prefer. We are different from Nature in that we are domesticated and culturally conditioned, and that we depend upon a fabricated prosthesis to function in an ideology-dependent universe we have ourselves created. But ideologies change. (Livingston, *Rogue Primate* 197)

The novel is not about Native land claims. It is about the preservation of a certain way of living. I think it is vital to understanding the book that Neyashing survives precisely because it is not culturally delimited. Native and non-Native residents share certain assumptions about what is important. They have chosen to live together in a certain way. For them, the Lake is important. Closeness to the land is important. Civility is important. Sharing is important. . . . The developers represent an outdated and failed experiment. . . . I hope it’s clear that we simply cannot afford their values in the future, and that a victory for Neyashing is a victory over greed, stupidity, and witless exploitation and bullying. (Drew, Letter to Addison)

Stephen Hawking, the widely-respected astrophysicist and famous author of *A Brief History of Time*, has recently argued that humanity needs to colonize either the moon or Mars within forty years because we are on the verge of killing our home: “Life on Earth is at the ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster, such as sudden global warming, nuclear war, a genetically engineered virus or other dangers we have not yet thought of” (qtd. in Lite, “Earth’s Days are Numbered”). Sadly, simply transplanting the ideology that is destroying this planet to another one seems a fatalistic gesture of abandonment, for Hawking fails to address the point that all we really need to abandon is our hubris and excess--two traits which, only recently by evolutionary standards, have caused us to become the ecological threat that we have. Drew condemns “the whole

notion that there is always something better: ‘We can make it better. We can take the wilderness and make it better, make it a garden.’ It is just an assumption of our society, and you can trace it back, if you want to, those thousands of years” (Belyea interview A15). Without addressing the evolutionary instincts that have ironically positioned us to destroy this home by trying to “make it better,” we may just be doomed no matter where we try to escape to.

Like the rest of his novels, Drew’s 1989 magic realist *Halfway Man* focuses on contrasts between city and rural life, past and present, and Native and non-Native cultural differences; unique to this novel, however, is that it focuses on the irony that our prehistoric human instincts to want to identify closely with the natural world have somehow come into conflict with others that have enabled us to build cities and develop the industrial and technological means--and evidently the willingness--to destroy it. Offering a possible remedy, *Halfway Man* explores how some contemporary indigenous peoples, though forced to occupy a halfway position between traditional rural cultures and urban societies, are able to succeed in occupying that halfway space. Their ability to retain an ecological sensibility despite pressures to “modernize” or become “progressive” provides a model for the rest of the “civilized,” and increasingly industrialized and urbanized, world, whose pursuit of material comforts and leisure are now so excessive that they are well beyond the planet’s means. “Awareness varies inversely with comfort,” says David Kowalewski, and it is clear that we have become far too comfortable in the West (23).

In the novel, a commercial developer, Michael Gardner, has plans to develop a tourist resort in a small, mostly-Ojibway Northern Ontario village he has never visited

called Neyashing--or, as it has been renamed by whites who create their own power and reality through the written word, "McDonnell's Depot": "That's the shaganash name, the map name. We never call it that. Nobody who lives there calls it that. Only people who come in cars or in big white boats, people who want to take something away" (8).

Something now barely perceptible in Gardner, but connected to his childhood experiences in the wilderness and, Drew would have us consider, further back into evolutionary history, prompts him to visit Neyashing prior to giving his final approval for the project's go-ahead. Shortly after he arrives, he is kidnapped and taken even further North, "deep into that labyrinth of lakes and rivers" (153) called wilderness, by the Ojibway protagonist and first-person narrator of the novel, Travis Niskigwun. Travis has been fortuitously "chosen" to act on behalf of the residents of Neyashing and, by extension, the environment, by an enigmatic female shaman-figure, Ajawac, or "Aja," who is characterized as living in an ambiguous border zone between the natural and supernatural, material and spiritual worlds. Over the course of a two-week canoe trip back to Neyashing, during which it seems the men get lost, Gardner is able to shed his civilized skin and the limited perspective on nature he has learned through too many years in the urban world. He rediscovers a sensitivity not only for a particular ecosystem but, by extension, a larger evolutionary and ecological consciousness the Canadian wilderness evokes. He convinces his company's Board of Directors to abandon the Neyashing project, quits his job, reconciles his relationship with a wife his working life had caused him to neglect, and the two move to Neyashing to live happily ever after.

What appears at first to be a pleasant magic-realist eco-romance is complicated, however, in three ways: first, by Drew's awareness that the scale of his tale is

realistically constrained by sheer population and geography; not everyone in the world can “go north.” Second, by realizing that Gardner’s final act is facilitated by his having experienced the wilderness firsthand as a child; Drew would have us think of Gardner’s impulse to want to return to Neyashing as a combination of nurture and genetics--he spent considerable time in the wilderness as a child--and experiencing the wilderness is an opportunity increasingly lost on most Canadian children and indeed North Americans generally by virtue of the rise of urban living and the destruction of nature. Finally, Gardner is one man in a world falling increasingly away from nature: he may act on an epiphany, but Drew is not so naïve as to fail to see that urbanity is expanding, industrialization spreading, and that the effort to facilitate global change is becoming increasingly difficult.

The novel’s first-person narrator and Ojibway protagonist, Travis Niskigwun, occupies a cultural halfway position. Born and raised in a small village but learned in the nuances of city life, including a university education, he embodies how a contemporary Canadian Native person might struggle to reconcile a desire to retain traditional cultural practices and beliefs within the pressures of an ever-expanding urban landscape, characterized by rampant development and urban sprawl, consumption, capitalism, individualism, inequity, and alienation. Moreover, the halfway position that Travis occupies is not uniquely “Native,” it should be noted, for as Drew suggests above, he intentionally created a setting where Native *and* non-Native residents “share certain assumptions about what is important.” When it comes to protecting and cherishing the environment, both diversity and consensus are important. Because he experiences city life in Toronto firsthand, Travis ultimately rejects much of what “civilization” has to

offer, since for him it exists in an irreconcilable tension with a meaningful relationship to nature.

Gardner, the novel's second and non-Native protagonist, from the city, also symbolizes a halfway position, but his is best described as lying somewhere between our evolutionary past and the technological and industrial present. He experienced wilderness firsthand as a child but lost his connection with it as he matured, became successful in business, and was lost in the pressures of the civilized world. As Drew constructs Gardner, however, we see that he retains at some primal level the instincts that motivate him to return to Neyashing one last time before proceeding with the Brightsands development.

The central tension running through the novel is that nature is both a tangible reality wholly indifferent to humanity *and* a cognitive construct that humans have forged through the power of abstraction. Modern civilization, characterized by cities, capitalism, individualism and selfishness, technology, consumption and disposal, and teleological notions of time, history, and progress, is criticized for turning nature into an abstraction and as itself an "abnormal" creation that has distanced us from the natural world. These two divergent ideas of nature--one real, the other a construct "out there" (or "up there" in Canada) available for cottage culture consumption and industrial exploitation--underlie, for Drew, the deeper epistemological crisis whose outcome is an indifference toward traditional Native cultures and the destruction of nature.

By evolutionary standards, cities are a new phenomenon, and the past two centuries have seen their emergence and exponential growth supplant millions of years of living together in significantly smaller and more homeostatic social formations. Statistics

Canada data reveals that Canada's urban population grew from 13% to 80% between 1851 and 2001 alone, and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), using GLOBIO (Global Methodology for Mapping Human Impacts on the Biosphere) computer modelling, estimates that Canada's current urban population of 81.1% is anticipated to reach 87.2% by 2030.¹ On average, in each of Canada's nine cities whose population exceeds 500 000, there are 1600 people living within one square kilometre.² Drew is concerned about the impact that the rapid growth of urban living has had and is having on our perceptions of and treatment of nature--despite such areas oxymoronically named "urban nature"--and especially on our youth. Today's children may spend most of their lives never experiencing first-hand the visceral, tactile complexity of the actual, real biosphere and the wilderness within it. Without such a literal connection, he fears, the vast and intricate natural world becomes merely an oversimplified abstraction or mere cognitive construct, taking the form of a televised nature show, a Disney movie, a city park or garden, or an object "out there" beyond the city limits for human development and exploitation.

Education and restorative healing are central themes in the novel, and many psychological studies have demonstrated how green areas within urban centers promote stress reduction and reduce both school aggression, violence, and domestic conflict (Gnomes and Kanner, Kaplan and Kaplan, Roszak, Wolf). Drew would have us imagine what might happen if we integrated ourselves much more comprehensively in the natural world, for despite the limited restorative function of urban parks or gardens, he nevertheless views them as half-measures within cities that remain, ultimately, "sores on the land, as expressions of corresponding illnesses within the collective soul, and of an

economics which is out of touch with the real world” (Letter to Addison). In the same letter, he argues that “cities will collapse because they are ecologically unsustainable” and his greatest concern is “whether we deconstruct them sanely or let nature do it for us.” Drew is wise to observe that it is hard to care for one’s home when it is increasingly defined in terms, merely, of city limits, but unlike Hawking, he is not so fatalistic as to suggest that it is simply too late for us to begin making those sane choices. *Halfway Man* is about making choices given the information we now have on hand about our ecological niche and evolutionary past, and both of its protagonists are forced to make tough choices as to whether to act in self interest or on behalf of the natural world and the future of the planet. In the end, both make wise decisions.

Halfway Man also addresses what can happen when the voice of environmental activism gets lost amid the cacophony of voices advocating social, and thus necessarily humanist, causes of other, and ultimately less pressing, kinds. Since the 1960s, some radical environmentalist groups and individuals have performed acts of ecosabotage and ecoterrorism meant to intimidate and shock the public into action, because they feel that mainstream society and the state are only enacting half-measures in addressing environmental collapse. In the tradition of other ecoterrorist novels like Edward Abbey’s *The Monkeywrench Gang* or M.T. Kelly’s *A Dream Like Mine*, *Halfway Man* considers what it means to go all the way, and it thus raises the explosive question of which acts performed on behalf of nature are, to a degree, right and just from the standpoint of a larger ecological ethic--regardless of whether they are deemed illegal by existing ethical and moral standards. Drew vacillates on the subject, leaving it to us to contemplate whether “terrorism” can be used in an environmental or ecological context and whether

existing laws, even environmental laws, are terribly insufficient for promoting meaningful ecological change.

Drew's use of magic realism, his investigation of eco-activism, and his thematic exploration of different types of education collectively nurture what Patrick Murphy calls, in contemplating a new way of conceiving of the human relationship to the natural world, "a *relational* model of 'anotherness' . . . the conceptualization of difference in terms of 'I' and 'another,' 'one' and 'another,' and I-as-another'" ("Rethinking the Relations" 311). Embracing a relational model of anotherness instead of one that cultivates individuality and difference is the foremost human task at hand if we are to meaningfully revise the patterns of thought and behaviour that have led us to the brink of ecocide. *Halfway Man* asks how far we are willing to go to prevent it.

Part I - Drew's Magic Realism: Nature as Construct, Nature as Reality

"Myth" and "fantasy" are loaded terms. My definition of a myth is an ancient story which bears a profound and inexpressible truth . . . consider the variety of myths which contain injunctions against the acquisition of knowledge, for example--Adam and Eve, Pandora, Lot's Wife, Orpheus and Eurydice, Bluebeard, etc. These are not tales for children, but rather deeply serious admonitions to restrain ourselves. . . . As for realism, that's a critical term that commentators (and OAC students) will define as they wish. As a novelist, I'm only interested in verisimilitude. The constant question is, "Is this situation believable?" (Drew, Letter to Addison)

Magical realism refers to the occurrence of [the] supernatural, or anything that is contrary to our conventional view of reality . . . [it is] not divorced from reality either, [and] the presence of the supernatural is often attributed to the primitive or "magical" Indian mentality, which coexists with European rationality. Floyd Merrel explains that "magical realism stems from the conflict between two pictures of the world." Magical realism is thus based on reality, or a world with

which the author is familiar, while expressing the myths and superstitions of the American Indians, [and it] allows us to see dimensions of reality of which we are not normally aware. (Chanady16)

Drew's use of the magic realist genre as a means of challenging contemporary Western civilization enables him to write a more playful, humorous, and enjoyable polemical novel than *The Wabeno Feast*, suggesting a growth in both his style and themes in the sixteen years between the two works. In keeping with Drew's very "real" concern about the environment, for instance, *Halfway Man* continues to juxtapose a rich variety of Native and non-Native symbols and images to reveal conflicting cultural assumptions about the human place in nature. His characters, settings, dialogues, and the events that drive the narrative are, for the most part, serious and plausible. These qualities are mediated, however, by Ajawac, or Aja, the female Ojibway shaman figure whose influence on both the natural world and human affairs is presented as magically ambiguous, and by several cosmological evolutionary descriptions in the narrative whose feel is surrealist or hyperrealist and which might in fact best be rendered as part of an "evolutionary magic realist" form of the genre.³ Stopping to contemplate the mystery of our species' emergence as one amid an infinite possibility of others, for instance, no less than contemplating the cosmos itself, naturally elicits a sensation of magic that borders the worlds of the known and the unknown. As Livingston reflects in *One Cosmic Instant*,

The realization that I was "one in a million" burst on my consciousness years ago on encountering the astonishing fact that one human ejaculation may contain a quarter of a billion male sex cells. On later reflection, considering the potential number of ejaculations in a father's lifetime, the number of female sex cells produced, and the infinite possibilities of their combinations, I became keenly aware of the "unique self." Even now my mind still boggles at the enormity of the odds against this particular individuality, and on the

extraordinary nature of chance. Speculating on the outcome of even one sexual union, much less thousands, is as futile as attempting to count the stars in the night sky, let alone the planets. (26)

Indeed, for as much as we “realistically” “know” about our cosmological and terrestrial origins, through science, much is left unanswered. Drew’s literary emphasis on mystery, in the context of evolution, seems inherently positioned to evoke a powerful magic realist sensation.

The magic realist style as Drew employs it serves several specific narrative and thematic functions. It enables Drew to straddle the Native and non-Native worlds and compare and contrast their attitudes toward nature and civilization, past and present. It also refracts a Western emphasis on rationalism, order, and environmental management and control through the more chaotic lens of wilderness, replete with its unpredictability, danger, and vitality. Referring to a specific postcolonial use of the genre, Stephen Slemon suggests that magic realism’s strength is that it encodes “a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems” and that its use can “signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems” (“Magic Realism” 12). In helping destabilize the us-them cultural binary, magic realism allows Drew to create a fictional atmosphere of mutual uncertainty and epistemological flux, a space for mutual negotiation that invites us, beyond the novel, to challenge our tendency to want to define reality through language, reason, logic, and rationality instead of both these things *and* the more inexpressible, subtle moments of reality that constitute the rest of our experiences and emotions--and, of course, which bind us across cultures and time as a common species.

Slemon further writes that “in the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a fictional world from the other” (11), and that “magic realist texts tend to display a preoccupation with images of borders and centres, and to work towards destabilizing their fixity” (13). Travis straddles the border between the Ojibway and dominant Eurocentric cultures, and Drew uses him to contrast “oppositional systems” as manifested in contrasting environmental values. Travis acts on behalf of his community and, ultimately, on behalf of nature itself, but we are never sure about to the degree to which he is subtly prompted, inspired, and guided to action by Ajawac, whose influence on events transpiring in and around Neyashing is left ambiguously uncertain. In a parallel vein--a bioevolutionary one, perhaps--Gardner, who is constructed not as an antagonist but simply as a man trapped in familiar Western patterns of thinking, also ends up acting for the benefit of nature and, perhaps, also as a result of influences operating in a realm beyond language and rationality: the evolutionary realm of adapted and inherited hominid instincts.

Drew’s use of magic realism invites us as readers to focus on the “magic” of science and on the elements of inclusion and interdependency that characterize both the author-reader relationship and our very existence as one species among many. By stretching the boundaries of what constitutes the “real,” and by complicating what we take for granted as the everydayness of everyday life, magic realism allows us, like science fiction and fantasy literature, to better imagine--and thus begin to cognitively accept on some level--the notion of an Other, whether that Other is human or non-human, biotic or abiotic, and despite the familiar categorizations of gender, colour, class, or some

other constructed category by which we routinely live “everyday” life. The magic realist style intrinsically promotes thinking in ecological and evolutionary terms, since both demand that we stretch what we normally think of as our everyday reality into a broader spatiotemporal domain that is fundamentally ambiguous, tentative, provisional, uncertain, and inexplicable because of its constitution as an infinite series of connections. Put otherwise, there is something “magically real” in contemplating that all living and non-living forms are joined at the most fundamental level by an infinitely complex and mysterious matrix of possibilities.

Four examples from the narrative demonstrate how Drew uses magic realism to encourage his readers to think in ecological and evolutionary terms that, in turn, should prompt us to consider our near-magical evolutionary place within the natural world: the parables that Travis tells Maynard McTavish; Michael Gardner’s surreal ice-fishing experience; the characterization of Aja as an ecologically wise shaman; and the way that the wilderness influences Gardner to accept the fragile existence of all living things and act accordingly. The three magic realist eco-parables in the section entitled “Given by the Winds” that Travis tells Maynard McTavish are, as Travis describes them, “little legends, Maynard. Tales for children” (112), but Drew intends them for his adult audience as well. In our interview, Drew remarks that he was “lucky in finding people, and friends, who could give me what they could of the [Ojibway] language--and of the culture that went with it--and I hope that I have, in *Halfway Man*, respected that” (A6). He later states, in response to my question about the origins of the tales, that “the frameworks of the stories themselves were passed on to me from some of my Native

friends, and I modified them a little bit to fit them thematically to what is going on in Travis's life and in the main stream of the novel" (A14).

Each of the three tales contrasts anthropocentric with ecological values and assumptions, and each censures greed, excess, human hubris, and an emphasis on competition instead of cooperation. The East Wind or "Narrow Eyes" tale, for instance, is about "knowing when to stop" (113). Travis's creation of a world where people can grow as large as they want to becomes a parable for how "having to make a choice about size gave everyone problems. There were housing problems, and marital problems and dietary problems, and many sanitation problems, as you can imagine. There were also problems caused by competition" (113). In the South Wind or "Many Arms" tale, which rejects materialist determinism, Many Arms, the "greediest person anyone has ever heard of"--and who symbolizes the West--"began to take things that he could not possibly use" (118). His excuse for his greed is that "it's the way I'm made. It's in my blood," to which Nokomis responds, "Rubbish! . . . Knock it off! You know as well as I do we're talking adaptation here. Either you adapt or you're finished" (120-21). Many Arms' response, "But I'm an *individual* . . . I'm just expressing my individuality" (120), reflects Drew's attack on the Western obsession with individual rights and the ethical relativism it spawns.

Finally, the West Wind or "White Bear and Pajak" tale is a direct critique of Judeo-Christianity that mocks the absurdity of God's arbitrary torture of Job in the Book of Job; simultaneously, it foregrounds our need to act on Earth's behalf to protect it while accepting the inevitability of death as part of the cycle of nature. White Bear, who "took no more than he needed from the land" (127), has his wife stolen by Pajak, a large

skeleton monster, his fellow villagers taken away by Wendigo, “the most fearsome of monsters” (128), and he sees the Earth itself turned into a “silent and sterile place” by the monster “Fear, Segisiwin,” who “twists and distorts” (129). Despite the despair that momentarily paralyzes him, he soon reflects, drawing on “a core within” him described as a “tiny sun,” on how “all that lives is connected to that same place in the heart of the Earth” (130). White Bear, that is, remembers at some instinctive level his biological link with the natural world, and its--and his--fragility, and so he begins to feel reconnected, despite his losses. He is encouraged by the wise Weesakayjak: “What’s the use of crying? You must act!” (131). Given a magic arrow--which we are to take, by analogy, as a symbol of courage to act on behalf of the planet--White Bear destroys the three monsters and regains everything he had lost--even though, he knows, it will only be “for a little time” (131). There is no deus-ex-machina God to descend from the Heavens and arbitrarily fix the dilemma He started; instead, the tale tells us, we are responsible for ourselves and for all biotic and abiotic forms whose fate now lies in our hands.

Michael Gardner’s ice-fishing experience is designed as a condemnation of the destruction that industry is having on ecosystems; it also serves a narrative function in that what he experiences motivates him to continue on to Neyashing despite his not being consciously certain why he is going there in the first place. When Gardner, while en route to Neyashing and having stopped at his parents’ old cottage, goes skating and arrives at a hut where a father and son are ice-fishing, he immediately observes, upon seeing their catch freezing in the snow:

They are wrong, these fish. For one thing, they are so *small*. He has no idea of legal limits, but he recalls the ample trout of his childhood, fish held out in both hands by grinning anglers, proud offerings to the camera. Sometimes, in fact, two men

were needed to hold a fish. But *these*, these are pathetic parodies of those real fish. Worse, some are grotesquely malformed, riddled with ulcerous swellings and lesions. Some have jaws twisted into hideous grins; some, tails stretched like weird fronds. The eyes of some are swollen almost shut with purplish growths.

“Goddam chemicals, what it is,” says the father.
 “Goddam stuff in the rain!” . . . He [Gardner] peers into its flat eye. He sees his miniature self reflected back, his miniature world. But through those reflections, beneath the spreading mist of death, he sees a look of profoundest hatred.
 (191)

Since fish cannot speak for themselves, Drew must have Gardner anthropomorphize them for our benefit; the hatred Gardner sees in their eyes targets humanity. As the head of a corporation whose developments have doubtlessly caused similar environmental destruction, Gardner feels guilty; beyond the novel, as members of a society that permits it, in reality, we are all complicit in his guilt. With Gardner, readers are also meant to reflect on our own “miniature world”: on the irony that we occupy only a miniscule part of the cosmos but nonetheless have vast responsibilities for life around us. Lawrence Buell argues that “Human denizens of the modernized world are most likely to move toward ecocentric ways of thinking when the sympathetic bond is activated” (*Environmental Imagination* 386), and Mary Midgley argues that “all human communities have involved animals,” which suggests “a direct capacity in man for attending to, and to some extent understanding, the moods and reactions of other species” (*Animals and Why They Matter* 112-14). In other words, our ability for sympathy for the non-human other is innate and a consequence of evolved instincts that recognize some value in symbiosis. Any guilt that we might feel, perhaps, also has an evolutionary basis.

The massive fish that Gardner and the father-son pair see symbolizes a more ecologically intact past and hope for the future. As he first spots the large fish circling

below the ice, Gardner realizes that “the creature will move at a pace indifferent to human traps and human strivings” (193). In a moment of lucid observation, Gardner sees that “the head of the fish, when it appears in the hole, is distorted by the convex lens of water that wells up above it, so that for an instant all three men share the dread of something truly monstrous rising upon them, something that will shatter the ice, shatter the hut, consume them. Some huge version, perhaps, of the diseased victims on the ice outside” (193-94). Gardner’s “diseased victims” has a double meaning: it refers to the disfigured catch on the ice, to be sure, but also, ironically, to the fishermen “on the ice” outside of the fish’s world and to society as a whole, for both are dis-eased victims of their own making. Evoking a sense of the evolutionary magic realism I referred to above, Gardner sees that the huge fish is not a monster,

But the head is unblemished. Silver, luminous in the pale light of the shack, it fills the hole. Immense eyes regard them. . . . Michael Gardner sits astonished, elated. In those seconds, in the appearance and disappearance of that creature, a world has been revealed that he thought gone for good, a world sublimely beyond the despoiled one he has come to know and accept, a world of promise and of hope, to which this fish is the summoner. (194)

The world that is revealed to Gardner has specific evolutionary connotations and promises of hope, for he is reminded at once of the long and sublime history of the diversity of life and that his own world--marked by destructive patterns of civilization, progress, and development--has, relatively speaking, only “appeared” very recently and, therefore, might be remedied.

Ajawac, or Aja, a pagan goddess figure and shaman, who at times seems to have a supernatural ability to communicate with and even manipulate the natural world, serves as a mentor to Travis by preparing him to accept the responsibility to act on behalf of

Neyashing and its residents. Hers is the most powerful voice of ecological wisdom in the novel. Drew creates the ambiguous story of Aja's arrival in Neyashing in order to contrast the fluid, dynamic Ojibway oral tradition that Travis grows up with against the straight lines of urban civilization and Western telos, represented by commercial development and the city:

No-one knew where she had come from, or exactly when she had arrived. The story of her appearance floats above time and logic as buoyantly as the little craft that brought her. I have heard it many times, and each time differently. Perhaps in the centre there is a kernel of fact. Perhaps not. Perhaps facts have long since been layered-over by the forgetfulness and invention vital to truth. Think of an agate. Think of those many-coloured bands that formed as the magma cooled. The beauty of the stone is there, in them, not in the core of fact. . . . Some claim that it was not the children who found her, but a fisherman setting out. Others say it was neither, but a young woman and her lover. Still others, a wise fool, a shaman chanting to the dawn. But in the version I prefer there are children playing among the boats. . . . (42)

Aja's origins are left unclear to foreground the fragility of "truth," to echo--much like the agate--the dim, barely retrievable "memories" of an evolutionary past, and to highlight how the fictions we invent are both a form of pleasure and serve an adaptive function of helping us make sense of the insensible, the unknown. Drew elsewhere uses powerful imagery to characterize Aja as straddling the natural and supernatural worlds:

No-one else was so indifferent to the separation between the land and Lake, was so careless of the cold water washing sometimes right over her leaky boots, almost to her knees. And no-one else stopped so often to rest, to wave a greeting to her companion birds, to look for omens in the patterns of the beach and hear news in the swirling foam. . . . Aja's journeys to the end of the spit were good omens; Aja moved when people needed her to move. (15)

We are never sure how far Aja's "powers" reach: whether she actually controls nature or whether the events that happen which seem to suggest that she does are coincidences--like the arrival of the swirling flocks of swans or the mysterious presence Travis feels while alone with Gardner up North--is left unclear, in order to help create the magic realist atmosphere in the novel. Her presence in the action of the narrative is perpetually curious. A constant overseer of Neyashing and its inhabitants, Aja is described as "everywhere, always. Having her there was like being watched by the sky, by the Lake, by four hundred million years of rock. She was a centre, Ajawac, a living centre" (42). Like the elements around her, Aja forms a part of the rich evolutionary history unique to her ecosystem; she also embodies, perhaps, an evolutionary ancestral memory inherent to us all.

Michael Gardner's kidnapping and his subsequent rebirth during the canoe trip back to Neyashing also takes on a magic realist feel, as Drew presents Gardner's transformation as occurring at an unconscious level somehow connected to our adaptive, mysterious, evolutionary past. The following excerpt shows precisely how Travis's thinking in terms of evolutionary time invites Gardner to think of transcending the particulars of culture or ethnicity and urges him to focus on interrelatedness. It also demonstrates how Drew avoids an easy romanticization of the past:

People had camped at that place for centuries, for millennia. I knew that even before I began to see chippings and pot fragments in the last of light, at the base of the eroding bank. I touched Gardner's arm and pointed. The bank was layered like a cake, dark strata going down into time. I brushed my fingers across it, and drew out a bit of pot rim decorated long ago. "Before the Bronze Age," I said, handing it to Gardner. "Before the Iron Age. Before the Smallpox Age. Before the reservation Age. . . . Cutler says I idealize those times. He says they were terrible to live in. When we were younger and

we'd find an arrowhead on a beach, Cutler would hold it up and say, 'Travis, imagine you're the poor sucker who made that. You're cold and wet and hungry, and so are your woman and your kids. You're 23 years old and you've got rheumatism and arthritis and you'll be dead at 30 from lung cancer or emphysema, or from gangrene or rotting teeth. Here you are, hacking a chunk of rock so you can go out and maybe get a rabbit or duck for supper. The noble savage!'"

Gardner closed his hand on the pot shard.

"'Or,' Cutler would say, 'maybe you're the woman of the noble savage, and you've just started to give birth when you drop that pot and break it. You know that if the child isn't stillborn it will likely be dead in a month or so, and a wolverine will be pawing it out of a little grave somewhere.'"

"And yet, here we are Michael. We've survived. You know, when I came back from the city, I learned how to do everything in the old way. I made stone knives and used them. I flaked stone scrapers and cleaned hides with them. I cut babiche, bent ash, made snowshoes. I made arrow-points, and a bark canoe, and baskets and makaks. And I learned enough about medicines so that I could help myself if I were sick and alone.

"Do you know why I did those things? So I would understand where my mother came from. Where I came from. There." I pointed to the lowest stratum. "And so I would know how humans lived with this land from there, to there." I spanned all the strata with the stretched fingers of both hands. "Seven thousand years." (183-84)

The healing that Gardner undergoes is naturopathic in its purest sense, and his malaise--the inexpressible discomfiture he feels while living in modern urban civilization--is curable only by a trip into the natural world. After only a few days, Travis observes that "Gardner had darkened to my colour. His beard and hair had bleached almost white. All his movements were surer, more feral, and on the outside he looked like a healthy man" (195). Kowalewski argues,

Civilization, in fact, is out of sync with our genes. Indeed, we know from humans' experiences in the wilderness that civilization is only about four days deep. After spending that

much time in the wild, humans start to feel relief from civilizational stress, refreshed in spirit, and at home in the flow of nature. The veneer of civilization is thin indeed, and wandering in the wild is our natural lifestyle--it's in our bones. (13)

For anyone who has camped in the wilderness, Kowalewski's observation rings true: time as we commonly conceive of it virtually disappears after a few days beyond the "veneer of civilization" and the pressures of routine. This is precisely what Drew implies when he refers to "places out of time" (his CBC documentary by the same name) or the "time before time" (*Erthring* 163). Drew's use of wilderness as a quasi-spiritual force acting on Gardner is yet another aspect of his evolutionary magic realism that creates a shadowy world where the seeming surrealism of daily life is exposed as real.

Angry at first over the ecoterrorist act that places him in a new--and yet familiar--reality, and utterly lost in the wilderness with his kidnapper, Gardner experiences moments of what might be called the "evolutionary sublime": a world "sublimely beyond the one he has come to know and accept" (194) that urges feelings of being overwhelmed by contemplating the wonder and fragility of all existence. Gardner begins to see himself as part of the "dark strata going down into time" (183) and "at the mercy of the wild, as we are, all of us, in our dreams of sleep and waking" (165). In the wild, he starts to experience spontaneous moments of "soft, private and incredulous laughter" (175) and eventually feels "fresh and vigorous, but oddly insubstantial, as if after a long illness" (188). Gardner slowly accepts his insignificance, signalling his recovery from the illness of ignoring one's place in the universe by living by the clock and dollar in a world of "acquisitions. . . . steadiness. Balance. Rationality. Clearly defined objectives" (200), a world symbolized by "his executive desk," where "he executes" (201) and "goes

on performing” (203). Gardner eventually returns to the city, but only long enough to cancel the development project and leave urbanity for good. In doing so, he rejects compromise and risks scaling back his material existence because, if he does not, “then *everything* gets compromised, doesn’t it. Betrayed.” (146). Where at one point he feels that there is “no event or stage to which he can point and say, ‘Here, exactly here is where things began to go wrong’” (200), he has learned that small steps are powerful enough to create hope for positive ecological change.

Part II - Ecoterrorism or Adaptation?: Placing an Ecological Ethics

I wanted Gardner to be representative of a flawed and failed experiment. In going beyond his childhood he also transcends capitalistic greed, anthropocentric Christianity, and the destructive, discredited notion of the technological fix. He goes beyond progress. He sees that there can be no halfway. He goes forward, and so, paradoxically, comes full circle returning to vulnerability, to life, to elemental sanity. (Drew, Letter to Addison)

That is where healing is, and sanity. When you go into the land you go into yourself also, in dreams, in memories, in talk with the spirits and the dead. Things get clarified in the wild. That is why wise people go back, go in, when they are troubled. . . . And that is why, if a person is calling for help, some friend, some guide prepared to be as close as self should take him back to the wilderness where the wendigos inside him can be freed. (*Halfway Man* 39)

It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. . . . Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. . . . A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men. (Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* 9-10)

Thoreau's powerful reminder of the value of the individual conscience and the tenuousness of the notions of "duty" and "law"--and of the difficulty in forging agreement about what constitutes the "natural" rights on which most modern democracies are based--raises tough questions about acting on behalf of a nature that cannot act for itself. While exploring the ecological inefficacy of modern ethics, Drew asks whether modern civilization can be seen as somehow an *unnatural* outgrowth of our evolution since the era of agriculture and large-scale domestication began in 12 000 BCE and, if so, whether many of our existing laws are likewise unnatural in that they fail to protect what is most important: our home. This inquiry, however, begs complex questions about what constitutes "natural" and "unnatural" thinking or behaviour, rights, and laws, about how the terms have been historically conceived, and about whether they can still usefully be employed in ongoing philosophical or social discussions about environmental issues.

On one hand, our evolution, in whatever combination of biological and cultural constituents it has manifested itself over time, is necessarily as "natural" as would be the case with any other species' evolution, even if it means that we are poised to destroy our shared habitat through ecocide. Conversely, if we accept the premise that we were successful as hunter-gatherers for millions of years, in terms of ecological integration, and only 12 000 years ago began developing the cognitive and material means to disconnect ourselves from and eventually be able to destroy the natural world, then it would seem to follow that we *have* somehow evolved unnaturally as a species. If, with Thoreau, we are to act on what is right and not on what is legal, and since we are in fact performing unconscionable acts against nature en masse, then there is a legitimate cause,

Drew suggests, for rejecting some of our existing laws. Eric Morrow's arrogance in dismissing any land claim that Neyashing's residents might have--"Of course, you're entitled to make such a claim in court, but I assure you that you will fail. You have no grounds, and the process would be long, and difficult, and expensive" (89)--underscores both the inefficacy of modern environmental laws as they exist in relation to Native peoples' land claims and the temptation for Native peoples and environmental activists alike to ignore them. It also raises, once again, the problematic nature of "owning" the land from a purely ecological perspective. As the pressure to act on behalf of nature mounts, and assuming that the political and legislative processes continue to lag behind the science warning us of a need for immediate change, the only remaining questions may be which laws get ignored and with what outcome.

Halfway Man shows Drew to be ambivalent about acting illegally on behalf of nature. Given his lifelong interest in environmental activism, Drew was undoubtedly aware of groups like EarthFirst! and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), which have a history of performing illegal acts on behalf of the environment. In *The Wabeno Feast*, Miro Balch is portrayed as only provisionally "mad," since his actions may, from a larger ecological perspective that accounts for the rights of the natural world and the whole of our species, be deemed morally acceptable. In *Halfway Man*, we are forced to assess two difficult cases of illegal activity and determine, from an ecological standpoint, whether either, neither, or some combination of both is morally acceptable. *Halfway Man* also asks whether there is a difference between an eco-activism that breaks some laws, an ecoterrorism that violates others, and how far we might go in performing acts that violate existing laws in the name of a nature that cannot defend itself.

The Shadow Man Society, which advocates violence against all whites simply out of principle--“Power is the one thing that whiteman understands, and until you use it, he’ll pay no attention” (107)--is rejected by Travis and most of Neyashing’s citizens as part of a dangerous fringe element of Native society, and Drew seems to want his readers to reject it too. Richard Gwinguish, Simon Littlewolf, and Jonas Manitouwaba seek out Red Cloud, the Shadowman, because they feel trapped by modern “white” laws and customs. However, the Society is as dangerously homogenizing, essentialist, and racist as has been the dominant non-Native culture in Western history:

For those of us in the Society there are no tribes anymore, no nations. We recognize only one division: between First Peoples and all others; between those who still live near the Earth and those who have turned their backs and built another world, an artificial world. We live in the shadow of that artificial world. We know that it is a huge and terrifying world, that it has almost ruined our people, and that it is devastating Earth. We know that it must be destroyed if our children are to live with dignity, and if the earth is to flourish again. . . . all your lives you have watched the whiteman abuse Earth. Here on the Lake. Everywhere. You have watched him damage Life, and sometimes, because you wanted to live in harmony with the whiteman, you have helped him. You have been respectful to him as you would be to a guest, gone along with his laws and his civilization. You have been taken in by his smiles, by his gifts and promises. . . . So you too have become shadow men. You have been pushed into the shadow world, out of the sun, by the whiteman. So you have suffered. So Earth has suffered because you have been collaborators, accomplices. (104-05)

Red Cloud has a valid point in reminding Travis that he can no longer seek refuge simply in the idea of moving North: “Always we’ve told ourselves, ‘Well, it’s not so bad yet. When things get really bad we can always move on, move north, back into the wilderness.’ But where *is* north now? Where’s the lake that’s not already poisoned?” (107). And though Jimmy Pagoosie rightly calls Red Cloud a “goddam racist” (109) for

claiming that all whites are the enemy, Red Cloud and his Society's perspective cannot lightly be dismissed. Drew rejects the kind of violence they espouse, but should the institutions that prop up the dominant--and still predominantly "white"--culture continue to wreak havoc on the environment, it becomes more likely that ecoterrorist groups of the Society's ilk--Native or trans-ethnic--will only increase in number as more and more citizens become disaffected by the structural nature of the environmental problem.

Dismissing the Society's behaviour as extreme, moreover, is complicated by the fact that we are never sure whether they are acting mostly out of an interest in protecting the natural world, because they want to protect their traditions, because they have a sense of injustice over land claims generally, or because they have exhausted diplomacy. Admittedly, this is a flaw in the narrative--we are never exactly sure what "rights" they are claiming to want to defend and to what degree they are acting on nature's behalf--although it remains, in the end, a fairly insubstantial one, since Drew's point is to reject outright the type of sweeping violence they represent and, from a narrative perspective, to use their extremism to make Travis's kidnapping of Gardner seem less harsh. Still, Drew would have been well served to develop more coherently and even expand the Shadow Warrior Society's role, if for no other reason than to force his readers to think about these issues in the way that many modern aboriginal groups might in debating the ownership of land or the degree to which acts of civil disobedience are acceptable. All of these issues, furthermore, raise sensitive but necessary questions about *any* ownership of land.

The second illegal act "on behalf of nature" is Travis's drugging and kidnapping of Gardner, which is complicated by the fact that Gardner does not actually seem to *feel*

as though he has been kidnapped. He came to Neyashing for reasons unknown even to him, so when he awakens to find himself in the wilderness with Travis, he does not seem surprised and is not really angered at what Travis has done. A key and interesting difference between Travis's action and the kind promised by the Shadow Man is not simply that one performs kidnapping and the other promises to carry out more sweeping violence, but that Travis targets one particular person because of one explicit project (Act locally, think globally!), and so his decision does not carry quite the same ideological baggage, as it were, as does the Society's. "Terrorism" typically refers to politically motivated acts of violence whose intention is the intimidation of the civilian public at large, and Travis's kidnapping of Gardner is meant to intimidate--if even that is not too strong a word--only him.

Where it might seem at first glance that Drew portrays Travis's action as just, even though illegal, by the way the novel ends, it seems that he equivocates somewhat. The ending is romantic and tidy, on the surface, but Drew is certainly not so naïve as to suggest that actions like Travis's--and he gets away with them without any negative consequences--are viable options in the real world. Nor does the ending presuppose that society as a whole will magically follow Gardner's lead. Drew emphasizes the power of individual acts to inspire and facilitate larger changes, but he is realistic about the difficulty in getting individuals to act in the first place. Travis, in other words, can be seen as the exception and not the norm.

***Part III - Getting Schooled: The Function of Evolutionary Literacy
at the Present Time***

Cutler has no interest in what lies beyond Earth. For a time after I came back from university I told him the things I had read about the planets and the stars. He listened, but then one night he said, “N’Sheemenh, it’s all interesting, it’s another way of knowing them. But I’m going to stay with the old way. I want to keep the old stories about the Bears, and the Fisher, and The Hole-in-the-Sky that other people call the Pleiades. I like those stories Mother told about the falling stars. I like the idea that the Northern Lights are the souls of warriors dancing. So please, don’t tell me more about space and time so huge that they are meaningless.”

But for me there is comfort in viewing the stupendous accidents of those distant, manless worlds, beyond all responsibility. So that night I escaped out of time. I gazed at bodies gone for a million years, gazed at ghosts. . . . I moved out, out again, to M-104, across 40 million years of light. And so clear was the night, so pure the emptiness between that galaxy and me, that I caught glimpses of the dust it left behind.

And then, time returned. . . . Time was morning, sunlight, space going flat. Time was misty breath on my hands and neck, and grey jays fluttering in the firs beneath the horizon, and a winged boat sliding through phantoms between Lake and sky, and a serpent lifting its crested head toward the dawn. (*Halfway Man* 136-37)

As a polemical novelist with an ecological agenda, and given that Drew was first and foremost an educator, it is not surprising to find that the theme of learning dominates *Halfway Man* and that there are several interrelated types of learning that happen between all of the major characters; it is also not a coincidence that Travis’s characterization closely parallels Drew’s experiences as a university student, wilderness guide, philosopher, and storyteller. Travis is the most important educator, student, and leader in the novel, and as such, Drew does not construct him as an idealist-primitivist whose naïveté prompts him to want to escape civilization for the innocent bliss of an empty

wilderness but instead as a wise, educated, intelligent, and, above all, *patient* leader. He gains an ecological wisdom and sense of hope for the future from Aja and from his community, whose members are both Native and non-Native, and which he in turn later imparts to Maynard, Jenny, and Gardner. For instance, he has learned his ability as a ecosophical storyteller, which he practices on all three of these characters at some point, from his grandfather's tales about the role of place in Ojibway traditions and values.

Each of his stories, Travis reminisces, was "like a river" that

passed over me and through me on its way to the Lake. Like a river it meandered and ebbed, meandered and flooded, always altering the land . . . as his tale swirled and rose behind some dam in memory or imagination the topography mysteriously changed and what he told me became narrative and landscape both.

I think I now know what he was doing. He was telling both the land and me into being, teaching me that the real world is not only substance but story, that tales contain the only world we'll ever really have. He was saying that around the haven of our tales lies a great mystery. . . . my story will not be the same as Grandfather's. It will change again and again. Each time it is told the story will change, and the land with it, and the children who listen; and so, growing, they will be part of the land, at peace with mystery. They will not be afraid any more than the land is afraid, and will never want to reduce that mystery to something measurable, weighable, or countable. They will know the spirits of the land; they will know that the land is Spirit. (25)

Jenny did not yet understand that, although she wanted to. It is probably harder for teachers than for others, because they feel they must cherish history, must keep it roaring along like some crazy train they haul students into. I used to tell her to do what we do--draw back, fade, absorb things the way an amoeba absorbs food, or Shield wetlands absorb misbegotten expeditions. (25-26)

And he imparts to Jenny, his non-Native girlfriend from Toronto who visits him on weekends, the power of nature to heal, following the Shadow Man's first disturbing visit:

We found a quiet place and just waited. I let the wilderness work. I watched the lake open to the stars and moon, heard spirits and animals moving home to Earth in November evenings, listened to songs older than all sanity. I kept still, watching and listening, taking health from Earth. I don't know how long we were gone--perhaps two weeks, perhaps longer, until there was no hatred and no anger anymore. (103)

Embracing his Ojibway traditions, and spending a great deal of time learning about the wilderness, helps Travis guide Gardner's own process of self-realization following his kidnapping and the flight north.

Travis learns from his experiences as a guide about diametrically opposed attitudes toward nature, which also influence his ecological leadership:

I have guided people who only wanted to be taken as fast as possible to where they could kill as much as possible. Pigs, Cutler called them. Fishing pigs, hunting pigs . . . I hated taking their money. I felt like a pimp, and it wasn't long before I stopped accepting every job that came along. . . . People like that were closed up tight against everything, closed to all chance, to all mystery and spirit. Guiding them into the bush was like trying to drive a truck in a garden without hurting anything. And it wasn't just the damage they did that made me sick and sad; it was what made them do it--the emptiness, and the dread.

But there is another kind of guiding, a good kind. It happens when you take people into the wilderness who are alive and vulnerable, who sense the mystery, know that the spirits are moving in the winds and currents, watching from the shadows. Sometimes such people keep silent to listen, and sometimes they brim over with questions. But when they ask these questions it is not to dispel the mystery but to reaffirm it. (156-57)

He also learns from the summers he spends cleaning up road-kill about the fragility of existence, the dangers of the human technological animal, and the circle of life: "The only part of the job I hated was cleaning up the bodies of dead animals. It was such an empty way to die, alone there on the road, blinded by lights; I used to take the corpses

into the bush so they'd fertilize something, go back into life again" (33). Travis's interest in astronomy broadens his cosmological knowledge and eventually prepares him to feel as though he must act on nature's behalf when Gardner arrives, for in conjunction with his learned ecological wisdom, it develops in him a sense of both terrestrial and cosmological connectivity. At the same time, it reveals to him the paradox of his insignificance and importance as a member of the dominant species.

Travis must experience the urban world before he can justifiably reject it, and he learns by living in the city how urban living deadens the primal senses. He is critical of those facets of a university education that perpetuate the ideology underlying the environmental crisis--the modern emphasis on "pragmatic" programs that lead into careers in business and industry, for example--and, at a more philosophical level, how teleological conceptions of history, for instance, create barriers to an ecological ethic. As Cutler remarks to Travis, "What you said about history. That we're supposed to remember, and not make the same mistakes. If it worked, there'd be less bad stuff, not more" (50-51).

Travis is also educated in several important ways by Jenny, a cultural anthropologist and environmental activist whom Drew constructs as having equal power with Travis. In fact, the two characters represent two halves of a healthy functioning whole. Jenny's scientific perspective, and her strength, conviction, and passion for the world at large inspire him to act; she, in turn, learns important lessons from him about accepting mystery and embracing hope instead of living with despair. Jenny teaches Travis that the ecological ethic he seeks is also sought by others, such as the Haida, who protest against logging and are "right in a way that had nothing to do with law. They

were right in the way bedrock is right” (67). And during one of their exchanges, when Travis seems frustrated about the state of the world, Jenny reminds him that he always has a choice either to opt out or to act:

“If you know about a crime and you don’t do anything, you’re an accomplice, right? Until you start to fix it you’re part of the problem.”

“There are too many crimes, Jenny. Too many problems.”

“But you can at least *start*, can’t you?”

She called me indifferent, smug. She told me to do something. She waved brochures, letters, magazines. . . .

I told her once about something I had read, how to imagine the age of Earth: spread your arms wide and clip one fingernail, and you have just snipped away the whole record of human life. “So,” I asked her, “does it really matter so much?”

Or at night I’d take my telescope out and escape in space. I’d find a dying star, or a whole solar system blowing away like cotton in a candle flame, and I’d say, “Jenny, I could’ve worked two million light years and not made the slightest difference to what’s happening there.”

“But we’re *here*,” she’d say. “And we have a choice.” (62-63)

Jenny’s passion for the entire planet complements Travis’s concern for the specific locale of Neyashing. She is able to inspire him, broaden his environmental perspective, and indirectly motivate him, when the time is right, to act:

She belonged to groups concerned about beluga whales and grey whales and fin whales; about seals and dolphins and other sea creatures suffering terrible deaths; about eagles and gyrfalcons; about bears and wolves, rhinoceroses, hippopotami and tigers; about spills and wastes and toxins; about corporate greed and political connivance. They knew about many, many, horrors--nuclear fallout and acid rain; lakes lethal with chemicals; dwindling gene banks; rainforests cut away; freaky holes opening in the ozone; blue whales roaming in a futile search for mates. . . . I knew about these things but Jenny *felt* them. For her they were personal insults that had to be redressed. (59-60)

Once again, Drew uses irony to show how the range and scope of modern science exposes the very effects that its technological products are having on the planet.

Though an activist, Jenny has moments of “profound doubts and dreads about the Earth” --especially about bringing children into it--and she sometimes feels that “anything we do is so *trivial*” (37). Travis finds her on occasion “curled into a shivering little ball, knees pressed against the bridge of her nose, saying, ‘We’re not going to make it. It’s too late,’” and he reassures her that even the smallest steps are “not trivial, just small. The way all life begins” (37), once again invoking the “Act locally, think globally!” maxim. When necessary, he takes her into the wilderness to be healed: “During the days we travelled; during the nights we listened to wolves, or to moose trumpeting in the marshes, or to rain drifting across the roof of our tent. And all of that for Jenny was like coming home, a confirmation that Earth was healthy still, in spite of everything, and that there was a place for her at the heart of it” (39). By having Jenny and Travis tend to each other’s metaphysical needs for hope and inspiration, Drew counters the potential for nihilism such environmental awareness provokes. One of Travis’s prime fears is that he will succumb to despair: “I’ve been frightened by lots of things,” says Travis, “but what scared me more than anything was the chance that I might listen to her and not want babies anymore, and that other people might be feeling the same way, all over the world, and that *they* might stop having babies too, because things just seemed too much. What would it be called if mankind gave up? Not suicide. Not even genocide. Anthropocide?” (64).

With Jenny, Travis can compare Native and Eurocentric epistemologies, discuss varying attitudes toward the human place in nature, and debate whether logic, reason, and

rationality--characteristics by which cities are planned and that in some way must therefore influence how urban dwellers conceive of the world--are by themselves limited and limiting forms of knowing and being in it:

Jenny knows I have trouble with beginnings because I have trouble with logic. I know the more you move around something the more of it you see. I know thinking like that takes time, and that logic wants to speed up, straighten out, simplify, line things up and count them. Logic is what builds roads or draws lines on maps with no care about hunting lands, or water paths, or burial grounds, or anything else. (10)

And elsewhere,

I love Jenny, but she is very nervous in the presence of mystery. Many white people are like that. Mystery is either an emptiness that they must fill or a cloud they must disperse, and if they can't destroy it they'll hide it, pretend it isn't there, give it another name. (24)

Indigenous mythologies and evolutionary theory share common ground in being rooted in indeterminacy--and embracing it. At bottom, most Native mythologies seem to demonstrate an acceptance of death more readily than do the world's dominant religions; it is part of their heritage of ecological integration. In his letter to Michelle Addison, Drew remarks, "I wanted to celebrate the ancient and elegant ways of viewing Earth that live still in the Native heritage and will be very helpful to all of us (if we have enough sense to understand) in surviving the ecological crises that will cause such upheaval in the upcoming decades." Again, by emphasizing how looking back can change the future, Drew's message attempts to foreground the biosphere as our most pressing common concern. And in order to care for our home, he implies, our first step must be to do a much better job of educating ourselves about it.

Gardner, whose name suggests gardening, tends not only to his own lost soul but also to Travis's. He exposes Travis to his own unique perspective on the natural world as he experienced it as a youth, and he also indoctrinates Travis into the world of big-money and industry. In so doing, Travis is able to challenge Gardner to think about the difference between need and want, which is one of Drew's key themes in the novel. Contrasting views between needs and wants is a central cause of ideological conflict between traditional indigenous and contemporary dominant non-Native cultures in the novel, and it is also an underlying cause of the environmental crisis. Travis does not "want money. I want space. I need to be able to go down to the shore. I need to go back into the bush, sometimes for a few days, a few weeks" (5). Travis uses the terms interchangeably in this passage, but its undertone is that Travis's "needs" are fundamentally non-materialistic. When Travis first looks at Gardner, who has made a fortune in business converting space into a playground for the bourgeoisie, he sees that "wreckage was strewn all over in there, as if buildings had collapsed and the pieces hadn't fallen out yet" (9). The buildings Travis imagines represent the modern Western world's materialism and the persistent, but anachronistic, view that progress is necessarily defined by urbanization, development, and the expansion of business and industry. Gardner, and the society he represents, has lost sight of the distinction between "want" and "need," begging questions about whether we really "need" the hundreds or thousands of choices for material purchases, for instance, that we face every time by merely walking into a superstore or mall.

Since all forms of democracy are yoked to capitalism to some degree, they promote a culture of consumption and disposal whose global spread is in principle simply

no longer tenable for Travis. When he reflects on the Seri Indians' "fantastic pact of tribal suicide" through their "oath to remain childless," he gleans the full impact of modern civilization on traditional ways of living: "What frightened me is that we, all of us, the whole species might decide to do that without ever discussing it, without ever really thinking about it. Maybe we had already decided on some level we knew nothing about" (65). This is why Travis disregards existing laws and acts as he does: he senses that the line between *legitimate* needs and wants has become obscured--especially inasmuch as a damaged global environment has become a state-sponsored consequence of allowing individuals to define "needs" at will and without limitation. Drew challenges readers to ask whether we really need hundreds of types of cereal or underwear or cars, as the range of consumables that sustains Western economies (and that underwrites the globalization movement) is proving to be deadly from an ecological perspective. So, too, are developments that continue to plough over nature in the name of creating a temporary respite from the contemporary pressures of urban life for those wealthy enough to afford them.

For Drew, as both activist and teacher, it is not too late for the dominant culture to re-educate itself about its biological roots in the natural world, a connection that seems to have become severed only in the past few centuries by, among other things, the spreading notion of *owning* wilderness. As W.H. New recounts,

In English, the very word *wilderness* derives its understood meaning from an overlay between conventional usage and, loosely speaking, "reportorial" meaning. The *wilder*-ness was the place of the *wild deer*, and hence, by tacit understanding, the territory beyond the reach of authority of English common law. The basis for this distinction lay in an attitude to land. Land was, or could be, property, that is, privately owned. Such ownership declared authority; it also expressed

participation in a system of civil order or organization, or a shared notion of “cultivation.” Hence the (cultivated) *garden* was civil, but *wilderness* was “untractable”: unruled, hence unruly. European explorers consequently moved through the world with a sense of their potential authority over it. (*Land Sliding* 29)

By having us look back, into evolutionary time and ecological history, as happens to Gardner, Drew hopes to educate us to look ahead, to remind us that we do not own the Earth but are merely one of its random creations. In the novel, Travis remarks that surveyors “seem so harmless, with their neat little instruments and funny signals, waving to each other. They’re usually lean, too. Trim. Smiling boyishly. But they plant evil seeds. They plant numbers. More numbers grow behind them. Behind them people say, ‘I own this.’ Behind them cities come, and fights” (72). Elsewhere, Travis confronts the power of the written word to create arbitrary authority when it comes to land ownership; note how the naming of “McDonnell’s Depot” employs the possessive to subjugate both the land and its First Peoples:

The problem was that Neyashing did not exist. Not legally. There was no *Neyashing* on any map. There was no sign on the highway. . . . The map name for Neyashing is McDonnell’s Depot, and the spit is McDonnell’s Point; but those names are just masks. Neyashing is behind. . . . down the shore and into our memory. Into our guts. Into our blood. It’s all illegal. It’s always been illegal. Indians didn’t need anyone’s permission to live there for all those hundreds of summers. The first trader didn’t have a deed when he built his post up behind the dunes. No lumberman owned that land. McDonnell just squatted there while his boats mined the Lake. No one ever owned Neyashing.

At least, that’s what we thought. But we were wrong. Sometime, someone bought it. Then it was sold again and again, many times. Once owned, it got ownable. (74)

Given the power of writing to make ontological claims about whether a place even exists, let alone who “owns” it or who is squatting, it is not surprising that Travis ends up taking

the radical action he does--or that the Shadow Warrior Society is willing to go even further.

Halfway Man highlights how Western civilization, at any rate, has undergone a damaging shift in perceiving nature as a concrete, particular place within which humanity lives and on which it depends for survival, to a vast abstract space--an Otherness "out there," beyond cities, to be used for human exploitation. When it comes to its treatment of the environment, "civilization" is revealing itself to be not so civilized at all, and "progress," characterized in the novel by urban life, industrial and technological growth, the modern educational system, and the mainstream culture of consumption and disposal, is criticized as containing an ecocidal ideology that has led to the abuse of First Nations peoples and nature alike. "Only a four is whole," says Travis at the beginning of the novel, just after having watched three massive flocks of birds descend on Neyashing and Aja at the end of the spit (14). The fourth sign does not come immediately for him but later, immediately following a conversation with Jenny where she admits she is terrified to bring a child into the modern world but he feels optimistic about the power of small but meaningful changes: "Earth was good and there was hope for children in it" (39). Just as the fourth flock of swans signals to Travis to begin acting on behalf of Neyashing and its residents, the story Drew tells us--symbolizing the fourth of Travis's tales to Maynard, perhaps--becomes our sign to act on Drew's convictions about the healing power of wilderness and our need to protect it.

Notes

¹ “Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851 - 2001.” 9 Jan 2005. <<<http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/demo62a.htm?sdi=urban%20population>>>. Accessed 14 July 2006.; “Canada: Urban Population.” <<http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu/indicator_detail.cfm?IndicatorID=30&Country=CA>>. Accessed 21 June 2006. *GLOBIO*, a consortium including most of the world’s major global environmental assessment programmes, provides modeling projections of the future human impact on the planet. See <<<http://www.globio.info/>>>. See also the Global Rural Urban Mapping Project (*GRUMP*) at <<<http://www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu>>>.

² “Demographia: World Urban Areas.” Table 2. 2005. *Urban Affairs E-Library, Centre for Urban and Community Studies*. University of Toronto. <<<http://www.urbancenter.utoronto.ca/pdfs/elibrary/2005WorldUrbanAreasRanking.pdf>>>. Accessed 12 July 2006.

³ Jodey Castricano challenges what she sees as a modern Western trend toward demystification as a “colonial proscription of Indigenous languages and spirituality” (811) of the Haisla community who form the subject of Robinson’s novel. Castricano argues for the transformative social and cultural potential of “the recollection as well as the reintegration of a spiritual dimension of Haisla culture in spite of its negation in the wake of European contact” (802). With Aja’s help, Travis is able not only to sustain his spiritually-informed ecological sensibility while subjected to similar external pressures to demystify, but he is also able to convince Michael Gardner of the environmental (and personally comforting) merits of thinking in the mystical terms invoked by cosmological and quantum reflection. See Castricano, “Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*,” *UTQ* 75.2 (2006): 801-13.

CHAPTER 5

The Erthring Cycle: The Power of Choice

The current ecocrisis began with agriculture. . . . anthrarchy, or domination of the wild by humans, was the Great Transformation. The hubris of dominating nature replaced the humility of connection to it. . . . Agriculture brought a whole new view of the wild. Nature lost its numinosity; from sacred, it became mundane. The essence of civilization is the domination of nature to accumulate a surplus. (Kowalewski 8)

“. . . the Old Ones . . . were interested in power. In ways of destroying. They even had a word, *holocaust*, the destruction of everything. They believed that they had reached a point where they could do that--destroy the entire world in which they lived. At the same time, they believed they had reached the highest point in their culture.”
“Mad,” Asa said. . . . “in their madness they must have hated themselves very much.”

“A few,” Shem continued . . . “a few recognized that madness for what it was and knew it could not be cured in time. Knew,” he said more softly, “that perhaps it could never be cured, that it might be part of humankind.” (*The Erthring Cycle* 165)¹

Getting billions of human beings to think of themselves as part of a common species with a shared interest in survival will be the foremost challenge of the 21st century. Getting them to accept that millions of years of evolution have culminated in ecocidal and speciesidal patterns of behavior requiring immediate constraints will be the second. I have deferred exploration of Drew’s most overlooked work--his post-apocalyptic, science fiction trilogy, *The Erthring Cycle (Erthring)*, comprised of *The Memoirs of Alcheringia* (1984), *The Gaian Expedient* (1985), and *The Master of Norriya* (1986)--until the end of my analysis of his fiction because, as a collective work of 657 pages, and despite its sometimes too didactic tone, it provides the most comprehensive

and profound analysis of the root causes of the current environmental crisis that Drew offers.²

Erthring differs from *The Wabeno Feast* and *Halfway Man* in its overwhelming emphasis on terrestrial and cosmic evolution. By looking deep into science, space, and our evolutionary past, Drew explores the implications of our transition from a hunter-gathering way of life into civilization 12 000 years ago and whether it marked the beginning of our ecocidal tendencies. Connected to our ancestors by what has set us “off against all the rest--the questing spark of *mind*” (571), Drew contrasts what is often perceived as a much more violent, diseased, and anarchic way of living that sustained us for millions of years against the recent advent of civilization and how it has led us to increase exponentially our capacity for violence and destruction. Cheryl Gottlieb asserts that “although evolution rationalizes time, thus making possible a linear narrative of progress toward a goal, it makes equally possible the inversion of this narrative, decline instead of progress” (238), and inverting the familiar Western telos that presupposes we are moving toward a purposive end is precisely Drew’s objective in writing the trilogy. Although our species was guided into agriculture, domesticity, routine, and civilization 12 000 years ago because of adapted instincts for knowledge and complexity, those instincts are still adapting and have always remained in tension with others that make us seek simplicity and stasis. Knowing what we now know, however incompletely, about our destruction of the environment, our own evolutionary past, and that of the cosmos, Drew argues, we have positioned ourselves to choose, for the first time in our civilized history--which one character in the trilogy dryly calls “where chaos and insecurity end” (619)--to constrain our instincts for knowledge and complexity in order “to protect what

cannot protect itself . . . life. All life. Even the feeblest. Life unborn. Life not human” (619).

Erthring is informed throughout by evolutionary biology--beginning with Asa's, the protagonist's, fascination with biology, “the meandering lives of cells” and the “awesome complexity of life, mystery opening into mystery” (303). His fascination, like Drew's, extends well into those sciences that since Darwin and Einstein have increasingly suggested indeterminacy as the fundamental state of the universe. “Unknowing is eternal,” says another character in *Erthring* (11). Drew's working knowledge of quantum physics, ecology, neurology, and biology is exceptional, and it enriches the narrative by adding several layers of scientific realism that blur the boundaries of science fiction and science fact.³ Teperman, the designer of the *Erthring*, wonders whether our departure from a hunter-gatherer state and the possibility of an informed movement “back” toward simplicity now, in the name of survival, might derive from “nucleic strands of instinct” or “messages from the cells” (486). If so, he believes, our species' best chance for survival may be to complete the cycle of civilization by abandoning it: hence the title. However, he is also afraid that should this happen, the cycle of human evolutionary history just might repeat itself because of the inexorable human craving to not just amass but apply the knowledge we discover.

In the interview with Barclay, and citing George Steiner's *Bluebeard's Castle*, Drew discloses his ambivalence about the future. He argues that we are programmed for curiosity ““even if we know we are going to be destroyed . . . I fear Steiner may be right, although I behave as if he is wrong”” (22). As will be seen, like Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, *Erthring* is rife with ambivalence--especially its

ending. And as is the case with his other work, Drew extends to the reader an invitation to engage more fully in the ideas he explores--especially the scientific ones--in order to continue the ecological and evolutionary dialogue he is trying to begin by asking whether *Homo sapiens*, as the protagonist, Asa, comes to realize, are “not so much a flawed species as one that had made a small misstep in evolution” (304)--namely, a misstep into civilization and the application of knowledge without restraint. Whether we can right ourselves in time Drew leaves for us to ponder. An ecocritical reading of *Erthring*'s plot and major events will help contextualize the thematic and theoretical analysis that follows. I will then assess Drew's choice of science fiction to fuel his ecological and evolutionary themes, show how he uses several scientific principles of indeterminacy to promote anarchism as a viable sociopolitical formation, and conclude by exploring how those same scientific principles, by suggesting our cosmic irrelevance, can threaten to promote an unhealthy and isolationist form of Epicureanism, symbolized in the novel by the Xtaplacians.

As always, Drew emphasizes first, that we start thinking of ourselves as a species, and second, that as one body, we face profound choices in the immediate decades ahead. By insisting on “joy in the face of the incomprehensible, in the infinity of the universe, in the ineluctable mystery of the simplest human soul” (*Erthring* 60), Drew expands the scope of his metaphysical inquiry far beyond that of his other works to wonder how, given the awe of our having come into existence in the cosmos in the first place, we could possibly *not* do whatever is necessary to prolong it for as long as we can. More unsettling, however, is that *Erthring* continues to raise difficult questions about how far we might have to go to spread the messages that our survival depends upon: when Drew

writes that “a god should not interfere unless some difficulty arises that warrants his intervention” (29), he invites us to wonder, ultimately, who those gods should be.

Part I - Synopsis: Living With(in) Gaia

Nuclear conflagration in the northern hemisphere would kill hundreds of millions of human beings. But it would not be the end of life on Earth, and, as heartless as it sounds, a human Armageddon might prepare the biosphere for less self-centered forms of life. As different from us as we are from dinosaurs, such future beings may have evolved through matter, life, and consciousness to a new superordinate stage of organization, and in doing so, consider human beings as impressive as we do iguanas. (Margulis and Sagan, *Slanted Truths* 7)

At the macro scale, Gaia is a magnificent symbiotic network viewable from space, the result of aeons of symbiogenesis. (Margulis and Sagan, *What Is Life* 156)

An instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things. (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 43)

Of the many paradoxes that the trilogy explores, none is more telling than that which shows how our innate curiosity as a species has determined the best and worst we have achieved: “If we destroy ourselves,” the designer of the Erthring, Teperman, reflects, “it will be because we persisted in asking that question, Why? If we save ourselves it will be for the same reason” (259). In having his designer of the Erthring utter these words, Drew echoes what many before him have observed, among them the authors of Genesis, Ecclesiastes, the Pandora myth, and two more recent literary figures: Alexander Pope, who sagaciously remarked that “a little learning is a dangerous thing” (44), and Thomas Gray, who mused, “Alas, regardless of their Doom/The little Victims play” (941).⁴ Had Gray but known how right he was.

In the novel, global environmental catastrophe and limited nuclear warfare, known as the Entropies, have wiped out most of human civilization and “whole species of emotions” (277). Only a few “pockets of humanity” have “survived in ecological niches sufficiently complex and integrated to be homeostatic” (40). Before the end occurs, however, one man, a 75-year-old who reveals himself only as Teperman, has amassed a great deal of material wealth but, as death approaches, he realizes its meaninglessness and the selfishness he exercised in obtaining it. Convinced, based on global indicators, that a largely environmental “synergistic entwining of horrors” (39) constituting a holocaust is inevitable in his lifetime, Teperman secretly assembles a handful of the world’s brightest minds to help him plan how small groups of survivors, if adequately controlled and protected from a knowledge of human history, might give the human species a second chance in a post-apocalyptic world.

Secretly, Teperman and his team purchase an archipelago, which they stock with enough supplies, material resources, and technology to allow a select group of 6000 men, women, and children to survive for two centuries; they are led by “Keepers,” who oversee all operations on the islands. The islands, “shaped like a question mark” (56), consist of Jotunheim, Asgard, and Neffeileim; collectively, they are called “Yggdrasil,” named after the giant ash tree that links the nine universes in Norse/Teutonic cosmology. Mainland survivors, including mutants called “aborrs” (they have been genetically altered by nuclear fallout), are scattered throughout several coastal and inland districts. Teperman had mapped out five such districts before he died in the Entropies to form the geographical terrain for his experiment: Norriya, Esterholme, Merone, and two zones called Outer Wylds, which contain the deadly and decaying radioactive urban centers into

which no members of the surviving tribes must venture. Yggdrasil and the mainland regions together constitute the “Erthring,” the overall setting of the novel. We learn through Teperman that other pockets of humans may have survived across the globe, but no one in the Erthring has seen or heard from them.

Teperman’s team devises a post-apocalyptic plan containing two overlapping parts: the Gaian Expedient and the Project. The first involves “keeping surviving populations in carrying types of hunter-gatherer existence until the research task, the Project, could be completed” (40). Teperman describes the tribal unit as “the most successful of man’s adaptations to date” (285), and the Gaian Expedient will allow members working on the Project “time to study all the peoples and all the adaptations occurring throughout the Erthring” (507), to which I will return. The Gaian Expedient is related to J.E. Lovelock’s now famous “Gaia hypothesis”--named after the Greek Earth goddess Ge or Gaia--which is based on “a holistic model of the outcome of global evolution and ecology considered together” (Simmons 31). It involves Lovelock’s study of the Earth’s self-regulating processes and the tendency of global and local ecosystems to acquire a state of equilibrium, known in ecology as *homeostasis*. Lovelock defines Gaia “as a complex entity involving the Earth’s biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil; the totality constituting a feedback or cybernetic system which seeks an optimal physical and chemical environment for life on this planet” (2). Within reason, of course, Earth can sustain damage to some of its parts and eventually restore its homeostatic condition, such as occurs in the novel when a river destroyed by the Old Ones prior to the Entropies, once “befouled and poisonous, noxious, and emptied of all life,” becomes “miraculously restored,” “fresh again,” and a “source of burgeoning life” (53). The “Gaia” part of the

Gaian Expedient reflects Teperman's belief that tribal-sized social formations, which for millions of years permitted the human species to exist in a balanced--however chaotic--relationship with the natural world, best support homeostasis and ensure the Principle of Diversity (128). Drew presents biodiversity and cultural diversity as intertwined and equally important by having those who manage the Gaian Expedient ensure that a variety of tribal cultures are nurtured within a variety of ecosystems; for instance, some tribes are seafaring and others live inland, each with their own unique customs, myths, and patterns of survival. Aside from occasional raids, which are closely monitored, contact is rare: until, that is, some of the tribes become too curious and are aided by more ambitious apocalyptic survivors beyond the Erthring.

The "expedient" portion of the Gaian Expedient involves Teperman's attempt to force homeostasis on the five districts for the benefit of Gaia as a whole by preventing the tribes from becoming "civilized." In an interesting twist that adds some ambiguity to the novel, Drew makes Teperman's design depart from what we might expect from the classic dystopian novel. Unlike Zamiatin's Grand Inquisitor in *We*, Huxley's Mustapha Mond in *Brave New World*, or Orwell's Big Brother in *1984*, Teperman does not wish to control the masses but to ensure that they never form in the first place: "I thought: I must be careful *not* to become a god," he utters while dreaming up his little "island of time in chaos" called Yggdrasil (253).⁵ Moreover, his use of the principles and technologies of rational efficiency as a means of controlling the tribes and their future is limited: they come with a shelf-life of 200 years. Though he certainly wants to give humanity a second chance, Teperman's larger concern is preventing the complete annihilation of the planet, and so he can be said to be motivated by ecological ethics. Together, then, the

two terms “Gaian” and “Expedient” connote Teperman’s desire to save the human species from itself and to protect all life on the planet by managing the tribes and their interaction with each other while members of the Project continue their work.

The Gaian Expedient operates by controlling the tribes’ mythologies, using “peregrini” or “myth-spinners” (349)--mystical figureheads who appear sporadically at the tribal camps. They parallel shaman figures in many indigenous cultures. Central to each tribe is its set of codices, called the “Codex” or “Tabuly,” and the job of the peregrini is to ensure the codices are being enforced through gentle persuasion and reminders of the invocations of the “gods”--those on Yggdrasil.⁶ One tribe, for instance, the Yuloks, have as their three central laws that “to violate the Earth is to violate Gaia,” that “the idea *that land can be owned*” is an “absurdity,” and that “life is sharing the astonishing abundance of Earth. Nothing more” (359). Teperman initiated several control measures to prevent the “civilization gene,” it might be called, from being expressed by the tribes:

“Broad-scale polyandrous activity with subsequent pair-bonding”. . . . “Patriarchal, quasi-hierarchical, shifting chiefship pattern”. . . . “Pubescent promiscuity . . . the usual homeostatic mechanisms”. . . . “Prolonged lactation, occasional infanticide, group two euthanasia, and so forth. To maintain isolation, previous Masters have authorized maintenance of ancestral animosities, with all the neighboring tribes”. . . . “Raids for the capture of young women were instituted as a measure against inbreeding . . . recessive genes.” (89)

More extreme measures are also used, including “Neffleheim’s Engenderment Program,” which includes “gene carpenters” (485) who perform “fetus structuring” (552). In some instances, the outcome is “potentially dangerous genetic quirks” (553). In many ways, the trilogy anticipates Margaret Atwood’s 2003 *Oryx and Crake*, a post-apocalyptic novel

which also explores environmental deterioration, genetic modification, and the dramatic altering of the human subject in both ecological and evolutionary contexts.

Selective memory erasure--partial lobotomies--can also be performed from a distance by remote-controlled machines buried deep in the earth, and a technologically advanced military force provides even harsher "corrective" measures. Fears that some tribes may by instinct abandon their codices and become curious about the ideas of the "Old Ones" prompt a small cell of leaders within Yggdrasil to go so far as to argue that the sacrifice of few for the greater good of the species may become necessary. Should a whole tribe get out of control, it may be necessary to utilize "final solutions. A strike from Yggdrasil. Genocide" (90). Though this faction is aware that "genocide violates the Principle of Diversity" (128), they eventually become powerful enough to upset the balance of power within Yggdrasil. Within or beyond "civilization," Drew suggests, conflict is inherent to our species; how we act on knowing this--and to what end--is his more vital concern. Drew never loses sight of the tenuous and complex relationship between environment and genes.

The tribes on the mainland are not privy to direct knowledge of the islands and their overseers, because knowledge of the "gods," like knowledge of the Old Ones, pose a threat to homeostasis. Drew's larger query is whether "perhaps, for a time, we must plan to restrain the application of knowledge by limiting knowledge itself" (286-87). On rare occasions, however, renegades with "abnormally high intelligence and curiosity quotients" (88) are brought to Yggdrasil, "the Islands of the Gods" (61), where the truth of the Gaian Expedient and the Project is revealed with the hope that they will elect to join Teperman's scheme in the name of a greater good. Once there, they are taught--by

computer programs, scholars, and first-hand archival research--about the pre-Entropic history of the "civilized" world. If they agree to join Yggdrasil, they become peregrini themselves and return to act as intermediaries; if not, their memories are selectively erased and they are returned to the mainland. Asa, the Alcheringian tribal protagonist, and his nemesis, the Kanik Garm, both become peregrini, but with opposing purposes: Asa reluctantly accepts what Yggdrasil represents, and Garm wants to destroy it.

Teperman designs the Project, led by an elite group of scientists, intellectuals, and scholars--among them linguists, sociologists, ethnographers, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and literary experts, of course--to meticulously scrutinize our species' evolutionary past to ascertain what precipitated the transition away from a hunter-gatherer way of life and into one that led to the Entropies. This body of thinkers--whom Drew affectionately calls "essential" and plagued with the "terrible beauty" (424) of what they must do (though the scholars can at times be "cantankerous and quarrelsome" [57]; Drew's private joke is not to go unseen)--are charged with a daunting task. They must determine if there is an identifiable core of instincts--a "natural centre in man, that wily and infinitely adaptable animal" (424)--that might be nurtured among the surviving tribes to prevent them from gravitating toward agricultural enclosure and the domestication of animals: two hallmarks of early human civilization. To find this "core," they assess billions of bytes of archived data--or, with another allusion to Matthew Arnold, "all the best of what had been thought and felt" (590) in human history, which Teperman has stored in a supercomputer aptly named "S.K.U.L.D." The Project's mandate is to prevent history from repeating itself. As part of the Project, itself described as "an act of faith" (57), Teperman constructs a series of four vaults, each of which contains data that he

deems the Scholars will need to advance and eventually finish the Project. However, they can only access each successive vault when they solve a riddle designed to show that they have imbibed the raw knowledge from the previous one and transformed it into ecological wisdom. They are specifically directed not to open the fourth vault but to live with having to restrain their curiosity. As we meet the team committed to the Project, they are still piecing together the data-puzzle for the first door and have been at it for about five generations or 150 years “post-Entropies.” Time is running out.

As the Yggdrasil narrative begins in the novel, the scientists and technicians have determined that there are only 42 years left to complete the Project. Teperman and his small planning cell died in the Entropies; their death, though not sacrificial, is deemed selfless insofar as it demonstrated an altruistic desire to “be responsible for all those who will come after, for all who are not yet born” (330). However, supplies in Yggdrasil are low, technologies are failing, discord is emerging both on the mainland and in Yggdrasil, and progress on the Project has been slow. The Gaian Expedient, too, is floundering, and despite Yggdrasil’s control measures, a few tribes are becoming obsessed with making what was public property private and are gradually abandoning the customs and myths that kept them in a hunter-gatherer state. Incursions from beyond the Erthring are becoming more frequent, especially those of the Juharians. With about 15 years remaining, the disconcerted tribes, led by the Juharians, form an unstable coalition and learn of Yggdrasil. They begin to plan an assault. Simultaneously, the insurgent faction is emerging from within Yggdrasil because of disagreements about how to best deal with the rebel tribes and the future of Yggdrasil. The insurgents, led by the efficient and power-hungry Nidor, who has become the Keeper of Yggdrasil, advocate genocide and

want to abandon the Gaian Expedient and Project. Nidor's faction is eventually joined by the Juharians, who are seeking to expand their hegemony by accessing a great source of power that Teperman has promised lies behind the fourth and final vault in Yggdrasil.

With only a few years left in the 200-year experiment, it becomes clear that the center cannot hold; things fall apart in Yggdrasil. Hubris, ambition, greed, and especially human curiosity have plagued the Gaian Expedient --"unknowing is like a gnawing in his stomach . . . he is man, a wondering animal," writes Drew (107)--and the Project's attempt at reifying, quantifying, and ultimately managing the human animal has proven futile. We sense that Teperman, despite his seemingly altruistic gesture, should have gone with his initial instinct to doubt whether he might be able to define and control human nature:

". . . answer me this!--how does man define himself except by this domination of nature?

I believed that. There is part of me that believes it still, as there is a part of all of us. It is that which has made man Earth's cancer.

I was an old man before I understood what we had become and what we had done. The knowledge paralyzed me, choked me with ironies. What, all our ethics, all our Western morality, all designed for man only? As if he were not part of the community of life? As if he did not depend upon the subtle functioning of Earth's systems? As if he were not bound by intricacies beyond his comprehension?" (250)

Having caught wind of the schism within Yggdrasil and sensing their gods' fallibility, the tribal rebels sail to Yggdrasil and mount their attack. Just as they are about to succeed, the insurgency led by Nidor and the Juharians force open Teperman's fourth vault: Yggdrasil, and Teperman's entire design with it, are literally blown into oblivion. As this happens, a second apocalypse can be said to occur. We see that life in the Ertring will

revert atavistically to an unstable, unpredictable, state of chaos. Civilization has come full cycle. But will the cycle begin anew?

As a few scattered survivors watch from the relative safety of the mainland the debris of human attempts to define and control nature fly across the sky and into the ocean, we are forced to contemplate the novel's open-ended conclusion. Asa dies, but his son, Tanis, is left burdened with the knowledge of history that led to the Entropies in the first place. We are left with only more questions. Will Tanis, too, try to prevent any future tribes' evolution out of hunter-gatherer existence and into the world of domestication, agriculture, and private property? Will the cycle repeat because our species cannot and "must not stop asking. Never . . . that is what being human means" (116)? Is our current pattern of ecocide a natural part of human evolution? Has Teperman's altruistic gesture been exposed as naïve and idealistic or as the only act of faith possible? In the concluding pages, Drew leaves us no tidy answers. We have only Tanis telling his dying father "the sad and beautiful tale" about "the tragic human weakness of *having to know*" (655).

Part II - Science Fiction, Science Fact: Entropy, Chaos, and Anarchy

The Cartesian partition between the I and the world, between the observer and the observed, cannot be made when dealing with atomic matter. In atomic physics, we can never speak about nature without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves. (Capra, *The Tao of Physics* 69)

Newtonian determinism sends the message that "nature has laws, and we can find them." Unfortunately, although mathematics allows us to calculate the solutions to many difficult problems, we are still left in an unordered world, where apparently simple motions, on closer inspection, become unpredictable and hence unexplainable in the

language of mathematics. It is appropriate at this point to introduce the nature of chaos. (Stewart 7)

Entropy is a measure of chaos. The second law of thermodynamics suggests that our entire universe is slowing down, because its entropy, or its need for sustaining energy, is increasing. . . . All systems wear down; energy is lost and cannot be totally recovered by a system. We can also consider entropy to be a measure of internal randomness, or molecular chaos. As entropy increases, chaos increases. (Schueler and Schueler)

Your familiarity with the ubiquitous but subtle double helix is an obvious sign of good health. (*Erthring* 387)

The instinctive human quest for knowledge over the past several million years eventually gave rise to the field of philosophical inquiry known as epistemology, whose purpose is to explore what defines knowledge and constitutes knowing and how it is we can know or claim to know--that is, on what grounds we often try to objectively validate our beliefs. As scientific advancements over the past century have increasingly exposed the tentativeness of knowability and continue to reveal that the natural world and cosmos seem infinitely complex, many of our most fundamental epistemological assumptions--especially about the nature of reality and our ability to understand and control the natural world--have begun to unravel. But change is slow. Shem, who initially oversees Norriya in the *Erthring*, before giving way to Asa, reminds Asa to “remember that the survivors of the Entropies were the inheritors of the deistic and anthropocentric philosophies of the Old Ones, with all their residual biases” (302). From the random genetic mutations that enable evolution, to the infinite interconnectivities of ecology, to the indeterminacy principles of quantum mechanics and questions about whether the universe is an open or closed entity, certainty, at its most fundamental levels, is gradually giving way to uncertainty as the guiding force in the universe. But millennia of biases remain.

In their discussion of Canadian science fiction, Robert Runté and Christine Kulyk argue that “Canadian [SF] endings are almost always ambiguous” (46), and though *Erthring* can rightly be called a post-apocalyptic novel, some of its messages--and particularly its ending--are so ambivalent that it is difficult to say whether it is best deemed utopian or dystopian. Similarly, though it can be called a work of science fiction, it also borders on speculative fiction inasmuch as the science and technology that drive the narrative are, for the most part, perfectly viable in modern society.⁷ Such ambiguities give the trilogy great force, because Drew avoids pushing his ecological inquiry completely into the realm of a fantastic, faraway future, forcing readers to imagine having to make decisions about how to act on the difficult questions he raises in the immediate years ahead: Unless we choose to restrain ourselves en masse, what forms of ecologically focused governance are we leaving ourselves open to in order to ensure our species’ future? Do we need to be spending billions of dollars on prolonging lives or exploring other worlds--money that could be better spent on integrating ourselves ecologically into this one? Is the human animal destined to struggle with instinctive drives for exploration, knowledge, and complexity that remain in perpetual conflict with others for stasis, ignorance, and simplicity? Is social, cultural, or economic, or other forms of conflict inevitable among our species, and if so, are there ways of reorganizing societies to minimize their ecological impact?

Either genre of speculative or science fiction invites readers to flex the boundaries of imagination to contemplate how Others of all sorts--cultural, ethnic, linguistic, temporal, spatial, and especially *non-human* (including the whole of the natural world, biotic and abiotic) and prehistoric (our hunter-gatherer descendants, our hominid

predecessors, and other extinct species)--must be rendered in at least partially familiar terms in order for the narrative to function meaningfully. In other words, science fiction may indeed be the best genre for engendering an “I-as-another” relational model of thinking, because it demands that to make sense of the words on the page, readers must necessarily suspend doubt and leave a familiar epistemological and ontological “home place” to enter a world of an Other that is unlike anything experienced in everyday life. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan’s collection of short stories, *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, is a superb example of how science fiction and postcolonial writing can be conflated to explore the borderland worlds of Otherness, and though limited by its anthropocentric focus on the familiar postcolonial themes of colonization, identity, and power relations, it remains in principle a useful model for an ecological ethics by emphasizing interconnectivity and inclusion.

The rise of science fiction as an imaginative response both to scientific and technological advances and to the shifting epistemological paradigm they occasion also seems to suggest that at some level, we are desperately seeking a venue to help us come to terms with new notions of space and time. Imagining as “fantastic” the otherness of Other worlds, peoples, technologies, times, spaces, dimensions, or ideas may be our way of trying to cope with the developing sense of our own Otherness not only in a shrinking cultural world but in a cosmos that is increasingly being theoretically reconfigured to account for such enigmas as black holes, wormholes, and the possibility of additional dimensions to reality.⁸ Drew uses science fiction as a medium to explore how we have become Othered in our own home since we settled into agriculture and civilization some 12 000 years ago, but he also uses it to suggest that those sciences that reveal a

fundamental quantum or astrophysical indeterminacy can ironically provide a *metaphysical* impetus for us to become determined to re-member ourselves as an integral part of Earth. Drew's metaphysics of mystery is here at its best:

Other scientists less admired by the Old Ones seemed to Asa much more interesting--Heisenberg, for example, and Bohr, and Gödel--all of whose work placed surprising limits on what could be known by the brain alone and, thus, questioned the authenticity of merely scientific ways of knowing.

Even more interesting were the paradoxes and dilemmas that Teperman had grown so fond of toward the end . . . beginning with Zeno . . . they represented man's groping attempts to surpass the best of himself, and Asa began to see that the brain alone was inadequate for this psychic mutation that must occur, for the brain functions by limiting, by focusing attention precisely. It is an organ of defense. But what was required for the *salto mortale*⁹ that the Project demanded was not increased protectiveness but increased risk and vulnerability. Asa thought that perhaps it was this that Teperman's beloved Einstein intuited when he said, "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed."

In those long days, Asa came to realize that man before the Entropies had been not so much a flawed species as one that had made a small misstep in evolution. He must go back. He must evolve a conscience large enough to enfold the Earth that contained his animal self. That was the work of the Project. (304-05)

Like many contemporary evolutionists, Drew rejects received notions of telos and progress and defines progress only in terms of our species' increasing complexity--rather than perfectibility--over time. He rejects, that is, any view that as a species or a collection of diverse societies moving "forward" in time, we are getting any "better" in any moral or purposive sense. Those who argue that the hunter-gatherer pattern of life was unpredictable, harsh, and brutal, Drew reminds his readers, overlook that it sustained our species for millions of years. Any presupposition that we have fundamentally

“improved” our condition since we invented civilization is delusional, he posits, since we remain just as capable and willing as our prehistoric ancestors were of killing each other and are more efficient at doing it. More importantly, we have unwittingly positioned ourselves to destroy the very thing that enables life. This said, and as he explores throughout *Erthring*, Drew is acutely aware that we are driven by instincts for knowledge and its application and that any fundamental change in our behaviour may have to occur despite and not because of those instincts.

Drew draws upon the most absurd of science fact to challenge as fiction many of the lingering assumptions we have inherited about knowability, particularly from “those graceful mathematical figures by which Western man, in his Newtonian hubris, had matched himself against the imponderable universe” (591). By “Newtonian hubris” he means the anthropocentricity that the scientific method inspired and how, in the West at least, people have believed for centuries that we can, should, and will quantify and control the natural world around us. When combined with Judeo-Christian teleology, Platonic idealism, and the modern forces of capitalism and globalization, Drew would argue, this lingering humanist faith now underlies our destruction of the planet. Turning from the Newtonian worldview to that provided by quantum physics, however, provides Drew a means of forcing his readers to contemplate a much different view of our place in the universe, one that is much more unsettling. It is, in fact, fundamentally chaotic.

Chaos theory is often used today as an umbrella category for random or “chaotic” phenomena that have been observed at both quantum and cosmic levels. It has its origins in Edward Lorenz’s 1961 “Butterfly Effect,” which revealed how what appeared to be an underlying order in weather patterns was in fact so sensitive to small changes in input

that a seemingly minute variation (a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil) could cause an entirely random output (a tornado in Texas); subsequent studies in “strange attractors” and Benoit Mandelbrot’s work in fractals expanded Lorenz’s findings well beyond the world of long-range weather prediction, overturning the long held assumption that simple systems produce simple behavior and complex systems produce complex behaviour.¹⁰ Chaos was defined in 1986 by the Royal Society as “stochastic behavior occurring in a deterministic system” or, in other words, as an incredible sensitivity to initial conditions that produces a random output (Stewart 17).

Three related ideas from the domain of Chaos theory that Drew explores are the principles of random mutation in biogenetics, entropy in thermodynamics, and Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle--a cornerstone of quantum mechanics. After briefly describing each, I will show how Drew uses them collectively to develop his themes of restraint and limitation. Random genetic mutation, the “raw material of evolution” (Freeman and Herron 103), is a fairly straightforward principle, even for the non-evolutionary biologist. Mutation occurs when random errors in DNA or RNA synthesis occur, damaging or changing a gene in such a way as to alter the genetic message (amino acid sequence in proteins) it carries when performing the replicating function. Mutation causes a gene’s phenotype--the observable physical or biochemical characteristics that define the gene --to permanently change. As molecular biologists Freeman and Herron note, the probability for a random mutational event in any given gene during DNA replication in humans is about 1 per 100,000 genes (106). This is to say nothing of the environmental impact on mutation caused by mutagens: the chemical,

ultraviolet, radioactive, and other environmental forces--many of which we produce daily in industry--that increase the probability of mutation.

Entropy is a measurement of the energy available for productive use and/or the state of disorder in a system (from the molecular to the cosmological).¹¹ The higher the entropy, the higher the state of disorder and the less energy available for productive use (most energy takes the form of heat and, once exhausted, is irretrievable for “productive” purposes, like forming new sources of energy such as stars or suns). If the “Hot” Big Bang Theory--the original source of all cosmic energy--is accurate, as many cosmologists argue it is, then entropy has been increasing ever since the universe was first formed.¹² An observable trend discovered in 1965 by Arnold Penzias and Robert Wilson called “cosmological red shift” or “background microwave radiation,” which is akin to the afterglow of a fire, reveals that the universe has cooled a thousand times from its original temperature (to its current average of 2.7° K), supporting the Big Bang theory and likewise suggesting that the cosmos is gradually winding down into a state of ultimate disequilibrium--or “death,” as it were (Hawking, Partridge, Seife, Silk).

Heisenberg’s publication of his paper on the “Uncertainty Principle” in 1927 launched the field of quantum mechanics and also revolutionized the way we conceive of ordered reality. At the quantum level, that is, reality has become a “best guess”:

Subatomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities but can only be understood as interconnections. . . . [they] are not “things” but interconnections among things, and these, in turn, are interconnections among other things, and so on. In quantum theory we never end up with any “things”; we always deal with interconnections. (Capra, *The Web of Life* 30)

To summarize the principle, consider that light is comprised of particles of energy known as photons, and that measuring the position or velocity of a subatomic particle can be achieved by illuminating it with a photon. On a macroscopic scale, the photon has no observable effect on the particle, but at the quantum level, the photon colliding with the particle forces it to move. The consequence is that at the instant the position of the particle has been determined, its velocity has been slightly altered. In turn, measurement in the quantum atomic world is rendered a series of “probabilities”: as Capra observes, atoms do not exist as “things” but as likelihoods (by “interconnections,” Capra means interconnected probabilities). Ultimately, the uncertainty principle produces a paradox that reality is altered in the very act of attempting to observe it.

Drew turns to these three scientific principles of indeterminacy to position human terrestrial evolution within the nexus of cosmic evolution and to inquire, thus, whether the “natural” state of the material world, including human society, is one of fundamental disorder. Each points to indeterminacy as the fundamental guiding force in the cosmos--and thus of our world within it, and Drew uses them together to draw our attention to how what we routinely experience as order and form has an underlying pattern of instability, just as a fractal, for instance, is in fact an infinite series of chaotic iterations that only gives the illusion of being ordered (“ordered chaos” is commonly used to describe fractals). Simply accepting this world of nonlinearity, discontinuity, and errata as a fundamental ontological and epistemic premise, he hopes, can help deconstruct those beliefs and attitudes that underlie the environmental crisis--such as those borne from teleological religion or scientific determinism--that still linger from our pre-quantum past and gesture toward final ends and certainties. Moreover, for Drew, that we have even

evolved to where we can begin having discussions of the sort chaos theory inspires invites questions about whether our instincts for order, which have led us to design the cultural and social systems we live in--“specialized function systems such as law, politics, economy, religion and education” (Simmons 39)--might not be in competition with others that recognize chaos and disorder as the fundamental driving force of the cosmos. Disorder and indeterminacy may literally be more a part of us than we realize, since even we “exist” at the quantum level as forms of biochemical matter in random perpetual motion and have “minds,” likewise, whose neurobiological operations are also best described in terms of an orderly chaos.¹³

The epigraph from Jacques Ellul that Drew uses to open *The Erthring Cycle*--“The sacred is what man decides unconsciously to repeat”--may in fact have a much deeper meaning than at first appears, if by unconscious we imagine a cosmic and quantum genetic authority influencing our perceptions. As Gillian Beer reminds us in *Darwin's Plots*,

the environment is not monolithic and stable: it is itself a matrix of possibilities, the outcome of multiple interactions between organisms and within matter. We tend to think of the individual organism as dynamic and the environment as static--but the environment, being composed of so many more varied needs than the individual, is prone to unforeseeable and uncontrollable changes. (18)

“Between” and “within” are the key terms here. Any environment that is unstable and uncontrollable--including the “within” environment of the human mind no less than the “between” interactions of the individual and society and those among varying social environments--is, by definition, chaotic, and in the novel, chaos is presented as the

natural outcome of Teperman's attempts to both control the surviving tribes and locate the "core" of human nature.

In the novel, the culmination of human evolution in the Entropies reveals civilization to be only a temporary and largely illusory reprieve from millions of years of the disorder that defines our pre-civilized past. Its collapse is presented as inevitable, and Teperman's goal is to prevent the cycle from recurring. But his plan is flawed from the start, because he presumes that the Project will locate a definitive human core that is, in a universe defined by chaos, impossible to find. On the mainland, the surviving tribes are prevented from settling down in any one area for more than six months and are kept in a state of limited conflict with each other. Cross-border raids for women and horses to prevent inbreeding and ensure homeostasis are encouraged by those working on the Gaian Expedient. But the plan fails in part, because, despite warnings, some tribal members "scoff at the injunction that prevents you from entering" the Wayst (34)--the symbol of potential knowledge and explanation--and are eventually driven by instinct.

In Yggdrasil, "Val," where scholars go for a psychologically induced break from reality--an unsubtle reference to Valhalla and a tribute to Huxley's soma in *Brave New World* (except that it is not the masses but the scholars who most often need a temporary reprieve from "reality")--is symbolic of both the human desire to repress our knowledge of chaos and the increasing capability of technology to facilitate that repression. To accomplish its task, Val, which consists of a series of computers, robots, and relaxation chambers, employs a series of sensors and scanners to monitor and record dreams, intervene and modify them, and thus transform "the repressions of troubled souls . . . to satisfactions" (30). Val, however, being constructed by humans, is not infallible; neither

is the human biogenetic matrix itself capable of being predictably manipulated, even by the extreme application of scientific reductivism, “so subtle are the tiny impulses activating synapses, so delicate the chemistry, so complex the chromosomal skein of necessities on which all action depends” (29-30). That Val’s induced respites from reality are not enough to save the *Erthring* project is demonstrated partially in that it has clearly failed to pacify Nidor and his faction, to remedy their “troubled souls” and their quest for power.

Drew’s evocation of a fundamentally disorderly universe begs the question of whether any inclination our species might have for social formations that are often rendered “anarchic” may be motivated, in part, by an innate recognition of a survival value in disorder. This would seem to run counter to our evolution into civilization, which is why Drew is curious in *Erthring* about whether it might be a “misstep” that can be corrected. Such a connection between cosmic chaos, a social formation based on the principles of chaos, and the chaos of the human mind itself is, to say the least, revolutionary. And yet, ecocritic Onno Oerlemans reminds us that “the progress of scientific thought has made it increasingly difficult to hold that we are in any material way separate from the natural world” (6), and he bases such a statement on research by those like quantum physicist Norman Packard, who argues that “the pinnacle of complicated dynamics are processes of biological evolution, or thought processes” and that “billions of years ago there were just blobs of protoplasm: now billions of years later here we are. So information has been created and stored in our structure” (qtd. in Gleick 262). If the nature of the cosmos is indeterminate and chaotic, is it just possible that some of that “information” has been encoded in our genes as we evolved into existence

over billions of years from cosmic dust? When Danah Zohar observes that “some quantum physicists, whose research has led them to the mystical sense that the whole universe is ‘alive,’ are already convinced that animism is the most useful perspective for science” (42), it becomes clear that Drew just might be onto something, even if it may (as of yet?) be empirically impossible to identify. Whatever impulse we might have for chaos remains, for the time being, in permanent tension with one seeking knowledge and order--as emerges in the novel in Teperman’s ironic decision to try to impose order to achieve anarchy. Any real-world argument for a sociopolitical way of coexisting based on the scientific premises of unpredictability and indeterminacy in ecology and evolution would have to account for any such tension.

Part III - The Epicurean Alternative: Xtaplacia

“Of course I know what Socrates said about the unexamined life being not worth living, but I have observed that that is simply untrue. Most people live quite lustily, irresponsibly, and with some degree of happiness. Not joy, but happiness.” (*Erthring* 253)

Xtaplacia was an extravagant civil bloom set in the profligate monotony of the jungle . . . an architectural hymn. (401)

Where the tribes represent where our species has come from, the Xtaplacians symbolize all that we risk becoming as the twenty-first century unfolds: more isolationist, self-serving, complacent, and hedonistic. The Xtaplacians are introduced in the second instalment of the trilogy, *The Gaian Expedient*, after the scholars working on the Project successfully open the second door with time winding down on their 200-year mission to define the core of nature in humankind. With a shock that reverberates

throughout Yggdrasil, Teperman's pre-recorded voice reveals to the scholars that a second Erthring exists in a southern continent. The test for Yggdrasil now is to prove their ability to cooperate with another civilization for the common good:

“If they have been as dutiful in their quest as you, they should be at approximately the same stage of development. They will have solved comparable problems and they will be encountering similar difficulties and frustrations in maintaining their form of the Gaian Expedient. You both will have reached a critical point, at which you would benefit from cooperation. . . . We recommend to you both that in the preliminary stages you attempt communication by some means other than spoken language, hereby eliminating as far as possible the margin for error and misunderstanding. You might try the elemental arithmetical forms of Freudenthal's Lincos¹⁴ . . . or perhaps some form of Ivan Bell's¹⁵ interplanetary message.” (389)

The Xtaplacian response to the apocalypse, however, as they gathered together and formed their own new world, was to reject the Old Ones' invocations to try to prevent a repetition of history and isolate themselves in a world of hedonistic Epicureanism. With a motto of “All is well . . . all is as it should be” (418), they feel no responsibility for life beyond the confines of their own walls.

Drew's choice of Xtaplacia as a name immediately invokes images of Coleridge's Xanadu in “Kubla Khan,” and Drew seems to draw on the poet's opium-induced vision to show how a paradise available only to the few is increasingly becoming the reality of the modern Western world--especially when compared to most of the rest of the globe's inhabitants. As the Yggdrasilian entourage, led by Asa, descends by aircraft into Xtaplacia's rich, luxurious jungle setting, they observe amid the “lush green canopy of forest” a “brilliant patch of white” several hundred feet high atop a two-mile wide rock-cliffed plateau, “resplendent with lights, throbbing with energy, euphonious with the

sounds of human celebration” (400-01). Xtaplacia is the utmost in aesthetic decadence, “an extravagant civil bloom set in the profligate monotony of the jungle,” replete with elevators of glass, luxurious vines, lush gardens--the pride of all Xtaplacians--and “the murmuring of long-feathered birds” and citizens singing and smiling constantly (401-02). It appears, indeed, a stately pleasure dome decreed.

What appears on the surface to be a utopia compared to the strife and instability in the Yggdrasilian Erthring is revealed as an absurd aberration, however, when Asa and his team learn *how* Xtaplacia came into being following the Entropies. Instead of attempting their version of the Gaian Expedient and the Project, as the Xtaplacian leader, Muan, explains,

“we selected what we would attempt and what we would ignore. . . . you have taken *literally* the injunctions of the Old Ones to find the key to evolving a new man? Undestructive? Part of nature?. . . Never! You see, we decided at the beginning that our chances of succeeding, where the Old Ones had failed with all their knowledge and advantages, were slim.” (403)

When pressed by Asa about what has become of the surviving tribes surrounding Xtaplacia, Muan answers by saying “we have no idea” and that “presumably they have worked out their own quarrels, followed their own paths as chance dictated” (404). The Xtaplacians symbolize what may happen--if it is not already happening--as the environmental crisis worsens and nations or classes within them become increasingly disillusioned about the likelihood of remedial change.

More interesting, however, is that the Xtaplacian ethos of indifference is borne not merely from self-serving interests but that it also has an unsettling existential aspect resulting from their having accepted that their place in the cosmos is irrelevant precisely

because of sciences that increasingly support such a view. Muan sees reasons to cease caring about responsibility in the “inestimable intricacy of the animal body, the ineluctable delicacies of ecosystems, the subtly myriad balances of the Earth and its multifarious creatures, even the galactic profundities of the universe itself” (405). Knowing that “all our endeavors will be but a moment of birdsong in infinity--unheard, inconsequential” (408), the Xtaplacians tend to see the Old Ones, and ultimately all of humanity, as hopelessly and naively misguided: “we see them as ailing creatures even to the last. Especially at the last. We believe that anything they designed, including the Project, would be tainted with the seed of destruction” (405). Drew raises the issue because he would have readers discern a difference between honoring mystery and enjoying life with a sense of responsibility, and reveling in it with hedonistic abandon. The Xtaplacians “live in an eternal present” (406) with the belief that “posterity will have to look after itself” (407), precisely because they accept the ultimate meaninglessness of the human experiment. So it is that Xtaplacians do little but celebrate. Everywhere Asa looks, “the message was the same: ‘Life is short, too short to be anything but beautiful’” (412). By later rejecting Xtaplacia, however, Asa seems to reject the aesthetic beauty derived from “art for art’s sake” and to embrace a different form of beauty borne from his awe in the struggle for existence itself.

The tension between caring and not caring or feeling a sense of responsibility or abandoning it forms the most troublesome theme in the trilogy, because arguments on both sides seem to have equal merit. Drew’s observations on these dichotomies are not new--they form the subject of much twentieth-century absurdist and existential art and philosophy spurred on by the gradual acceptance of Darwinism--but they *are* unique in

that he considers their consequences on our treatment of the environment specifically. Where in many cases his modernist predecessors focused on such absurdities and yet retained the hope for social justice, Drew extends the inquiry well beyond humanism. Still, though our species demonstrates daily its ability for mutual aid, empathy, and cooperation, and though these traits are the cornerstones of most of the world's major mythologies--which suggests their adaptive importance--a worldview increasingly grounded in the science of indeterminacy and complexity and that destroys accepted myths and religions poses its own problems. Drew seems to be aware that the struggle for survival might, for many, increasingly develop into a struggle for hope.

To offset the Xtaplacian rejection of responsibility for posterity and abandonment of hope for the future, Drew turns to what has moved him throughout his work: an appreciation and respect for an indigenous way of conceiving the human relationship to the natural world. However, he complicates the meaning of "Native" as even he has used it elsewhere in his fiction to emphasize that all humans share in a planetary indigeneity dating back millions of years. It is vital to reiterate that since Drew rejects outright the idea of "evolution as progress," any associations he makes between today's Native peoples and our common hunter-gatherer ancestors are not designed to render the former "primitive" in the condescending and derogatory context in which the term can be used. Nor is he idealizing "Natives," per say, as having some special access to ecological truths or profound wisdom. Drew is well aware that the term "Native" can be a sociopolitical term of homogenization and hegemony as much as it is a useful term for resistance against those pressures. If he supports an ideal like "simplicity" or "ecological integration" and sees it being enacted in closer day-to-day practical and spiritual

connections to the land that many Native communities--and arguably not even most, anymore--practice, he does so with open eyes and only after having seriously considered the urban alternatives. He broadens the circle of indigeneity beyond race or ethnicity by inviting us all to look into our common past, trace our evolution, and imagine what it is we want for the future and how best to achieve it: as a species.

Drew achieves this broadening of indigeneity in the trilogy by refusing to racially identify his characters and by fusing what we might immediately assume to be “Native” characterizations, symbols, myths, and settings with similar elements from the traditional Nordic culture, which is also very heavily “rooted,” to play on the Yggdrasilian pun, in nature. For instance, tribes and tribalism, shamanism, cave-paintings, tee-pees, bows and arrows, and a wide array of other devices associated with Native cultures are strewn throughout the narrative. But despite what may on the surface seem for some to be cultural appropriation, we are not given any clues to the racial identity either of Teperman and the group he assembles before the Entropies, any of the tribes or peregrini, any other cultural groups that help form the Erthring, or of the Yggdrasilians. In refusing to isolate race or ethnicity as a meaningful term of discourse, Drew foregrounds a trans-cultural species’ hunter-gatherer descent that applies to all of us and which, in turn, supports his theme of planetary indigeneity. Doing so actually prompts us to consider whether identifying as groups living in specific ecosystems might be a better way of ensuring the diversity that best guarantees a homeostatic world.

Drew also intentionally juxtaposes “Native” with Norse mythologies to show how at least one Western non-Native culture has a long history whose myths and customs were rooted in ecological thinking. Yggdrasil, the home of Teperman’s scholars and

rulers, is, in Norse mythology, a world tree that symbolizes life extending outward to nine worlds. Linked to it is Niflheim, the land of fog and ice, which in the trilogy symbolizes the confusion surrounding the Gaian Expedient's attempt to control the tribes. Asgard, the centre of political activity and control in Yggdrasil, is in Nordic mythology the dwelling place of the ruling gods. Jotunheim, the homeland of the frost giants and rock giants, is in the novel the home of the scholars, who have an "immense" responsibility to try to locate the core of human nature. And, finally, SKULD, one of the three mysterious goddesses in Norse mythology who wove the thread of life at the base of the world tree, is ironically both the source of illusion and death and the hope for new life in the trilogy. As the mechanical contrivance that the leaders of Yggdrasil use to attempt to measure, predict, and control the tribes and to manage the Erthring, it reveals the limitations of knowledge and futility of technology alone to give real meaning to human existence. With Teperman's fourth door, SKULD represents the choice facing us as a species about continuing to rely on technology to try to fix the problems technology has caused or to attempt, for a while at least, to restrain ourselves:

The door is there to resolve a debate that we have had from the beginning. Thorvald, Michurin, and McPhee have maintained that whatever else a man may be he is an insatiably curious animal, so curious that even if he knew that the further acquisition of knowledge would mean self-destruction he would still attempt to acquire that knowledge. Gonzalez, Bornuwalski, and I doubt that. We maintain that whatever else man may be, whatever patterns of aberrant behavior he may occasionally have fallen into, he is by definition a rational animal capable of avoiding dire consequences. The corollary of that belief is that man is capable of living with uncertainty and mystery. Indeed, we believe that wisdom consists in cherishing mystery.

Are we naïve? Perhaps. (583)

Teperman is not naïve in having hope, and Drew, by contrasting Xtaplacian decadence and egotism with those who desire an ecological ethic, presents humanity with the most difficult of choices. Either we start thinking in much more inclusive terms as a species and risk taking tangible steps toward honoring the diversity that ensures a homeostatic world, or we risk remaining fixed in inherited patterns of isolation that promise environmental oblivion. As one of the leaders of Yggdrasil, Egon, reflects, Teperman's scheme, despite the outcome, speaks to a common human desire to survive:

“Wednesday, tomorrow, Yggdrasil will end. . . . Better than anyone you know the cost to the Old Ones to buy these two centuries for us. You know that they could not believe that civilization had failed. They believed in intellect, and in the good-will of civilized people to give their descendants another chance. A chance to become sane animals. They believed that in those two centuries civilization might at last find its true direction, in us and through us. They believed in progress, real progress, not the progress of death and destruction. They believed that their quantum leap in technology could be matched by comparable ethical change. . . . We have failed. . . . but we have tried. And it is no bad thing to have spent our lives on what no one else has attempted, ever, to accomplish. There is no disgrace in having tried that impossible thing and failed. Better that than simply to have lived.” (635)

Yggdrasil's collapse symbolizes the difficulty of harnessing the will that our species will require for the environmental challenges ahead. But though a quest for self-preservation in light of the pace and scope of environmental decay will be no easy task, it is--as it has always been--the only option we have.

Notes

¹ It is critical to contextualize the trilogy by noting that Drew wrote it prior to the end of the Cold War. He is concerned not merely with the human but also the ecological carnage that a large-scale use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons would involve. Increased global instability and access to nuclear weapons by more radical nations and fundamentalist groups over the past two decades make his concerns all the more valid and keep *Erthring* as relevant as when it was first published.

² For those interested in obtaining copies of *Erthring*, Abe Books has links to sellers of both the individual works and the Nelson Doubleday Book Club collected edition. See <<<http://www.abebooks.com/>>>. All citations here are taken from the latter.

³ Consider, for instance, the detail in this excerpt:

By the Entropies, the Old Ones knew enough about the functioning of the brain to have developed several ways in which memories or impulses might be excised completely. . . by inhibiting the production of acetylcholine it is possible to induce Alzheimer's disease, with irrevocable cell damage. . . . Or by blocking the production of the neurotransmitter serotonin, it is possible to prevent the neuron adaptations necessary for the retaining of information. . . . Using surgery, it is possible to neutralize the hippocampus . . . one can similarly interfere with the processing of memories through the amalygdala, or excise Broca's area, where short term memories are stored. (40-41)

⁴ The Genesis reference is to humankind being cursed by attempting to access the sacred Tree of Knowledge; Solomon observes that "in much wisdom there is much sorrow, and he who stores up knowledge stores up grief" (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

⁵ For a similar inversion that also explores ecological themes and quantum and cosmological physics and mathematics, and that may have influenced Drew's writing of the trilogy alongside Zamiatin's *We*, see Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*.

⁶ There are six laws in the Alcheringian Tabuly (89):

1. You shall not look upon the gods.
2. You shall not move any plant, or bury the seed of any plant.
3. You shall not feed any animal, or use any for burden, or keep any encaged.

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4. You shall not feed upon the unimorphs.
 5. You shall not go near the islands of the gods, or the forbidden regions--the Northern Wayst, The Middle Wayst, and the lands beyond.
 6. You shall not live in any lodge, in any place, more than six months.

⁷ Robert Heinlein's "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction" (1949) marks the first usage of the phrase in its modern sense. Heinlein associates speculative fiction with science fiction but distinguishes it from "fantasy fiction, as it rules out the use of anything as material which violates established scientific fact, laws of nature, call it what you will, i.e., it must be possible to the universe as we know it." See R. A. Heinlein & V. Heinlein, *Grumbles from the Grave* (New York: Del Rey, 1989): 49.

⁸ In addition to Gleick, see Lawrence M. Krauss, *Hiding in the Mirror* (New York: Viking, 2005).

⁹ *Salto mortale*, Italian for *somersault* (with an implication of "risky" somersault), is likely a direct allusion to its use in Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing, 1916). The complete text can be found at <http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/Bakunin/gas.html>. Accessed 12 Nov 2005.

¹⁰ For an introduction to all of these phenomena, see James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987). Though somewhat dated by scientific standards, it is an accessible and entertaining venue for the lay chaos theorist. See also Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, the revised 10th anniversary edition of which is available online at <<http://www.physics.metu.edu.tr/~fizikt/html/Hawking/A_Brief_History_in_Time.html>>. Accessed 6 Jan 2006.

¹¹ German physicist Rudolf Clausius introduced the mathematical concept of entropy in the early 1850s while exploring thermodynamics, but it has since been adapted in many other fields of inquiry such as evolution, statistical mechanics, information theory, and economics. See Gleick 255-72.

¹² For an excellent introduction to the subject, see Michael Sudduth's "Big Bang Cosmology Primer" at <<<http://www.homestead.com/philofreligion/files/BigBangCosmologyPrimer.htm>>>.

¹³ Understandably, Chaos theory, also called non-linear dynamics (NLD), has in the past decade gained prominence in many fields of medicine, including psychiatry and psychopathology. See David M. Kreindler and Charles J. Lumsden's website, "Chaos and Psyche," at the University of Toronto: "The key to applying NLD in physics, biology, and medicine is the recognition that complex, 'messy' systems obey certain principles, and that, almost universally, nonlinearity connects structure to function in

such systems.” <<http://cellmath.med.utoronto.ca/PSYCHE/Lit_Guide.html>>. Accessed 12 Jul 2006.

¹⁴ Mathematician Hans Freudenthal developed “Lincos” in 1974 as a mathematical language for cosmic communication. It was still in use as recently as May 1999 by Canadian Defence Research Establishment astrobiologists for sending messages into space. See “An Interview with Dr. Yvan Dutil,” *Astrobiology: The Living Universe*. <<<http://www.ibiblio.org/astrobiology/index.php?page=interview01>>>. Accessed 12 Jun 2006.

¹⁵ Ivan Bell may be an allusion to nineteenth-century educator Andrew Bell, a contemporary of Samuel Coleridge and Thomas de Quincey, whom the latter berates in his *Narrative and Miscellaneous Papers* as “wooden spoon dull” and “Fishy were his eyes; torpedinous was his manner” (278). However, de Quincey goes on: “his main idea, out of two which he really had, related to the moon--from which you infer, perhaps, that he was lunatic. By no means. It was no craze, under the influence of the moon, which possessed him; it was an idea of mere hostility to the moon” (278). Bell’s “main idea,” de Quincey infers, was some form of cosmic communication.

CONCLUSION:

Evolutionary Atavism, Literary Darwinism

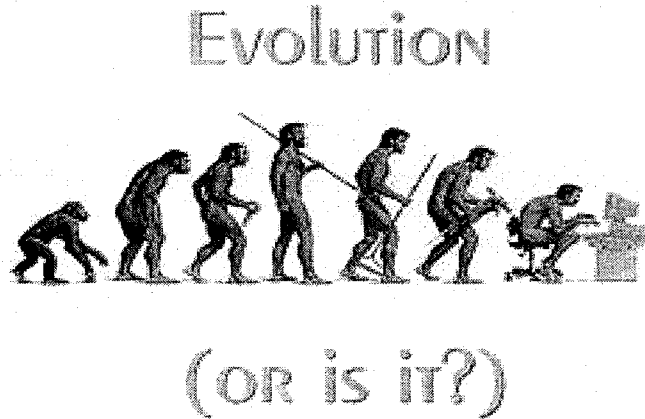


Figure 2¹

Human civilization is now so complex and diverse, so sprawling and massive, that it is difficult to see how we can respond in a coordinated, collective way to the global environmental crisis. . . . We find it difficult to imagine a realistic basis for hope that the environment can be saved, not only because we still lack widespread agreement on the need for this task, but also because we have never worked together globally on any problem even approaching this one in degree of difficulty. Even so, we must find a way to join this common cause, because the crisis we face is, in the final analysis, a global problem and can only be solved on a global basis. (Gore 294)

For us, it's restraining ourselves now--*that's* the big project for us now, in my mind--and that's what my novels have addressed themselves to. We can't go back, but we can slow down. (Drew, Belyea interview A25)

It should be apparent by now that Drew's work raises some of the most exigent issues to face humankind in the 21st century. In his photojournalistic travelogue, *Superior: The Haunted Shore*, co-created with Ontario photographer and longtime friend and canoeing companion Bruce Litteljohn, he comments on how he was overwhelmed by two contrasting perspectives while exploring Lake Superior: "The first is the co-

existence of power and fragility--of the immensity of landscape on the one hand, and the astonishing resilience of delicate plant and animal life on the other. The second is the humbling insignificance of the human record as the rocks of Lake Superior reveal it--ten restless millennia against three billion somber years of endurance" ("Introduction," n. pag.). Drew's writing is intensely personal, and he is the first Canadian writer to make ecology and evolution so overwhelmingly the dominant subjects of his fiction. His passion for change is matched only by his compassion for all life on Earth--as it exists now or might in the future--and any occasions where he comes across as didactic, idealistic, romantic, or rhetorical must be weighed against his deep sense of conviction for posterity and his keen insight into how fast the environment is deteriorating and why. Like Al Gore, he believes that we can still find our way, if we act quickly and in concert, and part of our acting may well have to involve consciously deciding to revert, atavistically, to some of the patterns of living together that have sustained our species throughout most of its history.

Donna Haraway has suggested that we are undergoing a radical shift in how we define "human" in the 21st century because of technology that renders us "chimeras" and "fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (70). Likewise, genetic engineering promises even more drastic alterations to our species in the decades to come. But while these trends unfold, ecology is looking outward to the larger biotic and abiotic world to reposition humans in a bigger matrix of life, and evolutionary science is redefining humanity in its own way, by looking back into our terrestrial and cosmic past in order to figure out how our mating, kinship, parenting, social, or survival patterns link us across space and time. As they do, we, as literary scholars, are faced with an entirely new set of

questions and challenges, rooted as much in biology as in culture, as much in nature as in nurture: Are all formal literary structures “prosthetic developments of evolved cognitive structures that serve adaptive functions” (Wilson, *Consilience* 374)? Why do we tell ourselves stories--why not just relay facts? Where do our stories come from? As Daniel Dutton observes,

like language, we know the obsession with fiction is universal: stories told, read, and dramatically or poetically performed are independently invented in all known cultures, literate or not, having advanced technologies or not. Wherever printing arrives, it is used to reproduce fictions. . . . A love of fiction is as universal as governance, marriage, jokes, religion, and the incest taboo. (453)

Why do new stories emerge, some adapt, and most disappear? Are there consistent themes across cultural boundaries--such as avoiding predators, courtship and mating, favoring kin, reciprocation, achieving status, or ensuring safety--that speak to our shared evolutionary adaptation and fitness? Are there parallels between the diversity of languages and stories within them and the diversity of living organisms? Is any movement away from mythology an adaptation, and is it cultural or biological or both? What new insights into the complex functions, roles, and varieties of storytelling can, in turn, inform ongoing research in ecology and evolution? What will literature look like--and be expected to *do*--as the Age of Evolution sweeps across the globe? We live in the most interesting of times, as the sciences exploring all that we have been or might be meet on the centre stage of the human experiment.

While this colossal epistemic transition unfolds, however, we cannot forget that we have urgent choices to make about our responsibilities in light of rapidly deteriorating ecological conditions. Unless we immediately begin limiting population growth,

noticeably reduce our consumption of natural resources, and adopt an ecological ethic that ensures that we care about posterity, the Sixth Extinction will be inevitable. The choice is ours now, because, as Drew keeps reminding us, we *know*. In *The Wabeno Feast*, Liv Henry wonders,

What has happened to us? What kind of animal have we become that in all our wisdom and culture we create and cherish the very forces that destroy us? What kind of animal would not give its young clean air, at any cost, and pure water, and healthy food? Are we so sick and aberrant that we cannot see what we are doing? Or do we work at it because we are hateful to ourselves and to life? Is depravity our element? (197-98)

Liv is not cynical but she is bitterly angry at the captains of industry who are responsible for her son's death, the destruction of southern Ontario, and the spreading influence of the dominant Western ideology across the globe. She, like her creator, is also aware of her complicity, but equally important is that she sees herself as one animal among many, all struggling for survival. Throughout his writing, and although he, too, has moments of frustration and anger, Drew remains focused on the fragility of our species, and he sustains a cautious optimism about how a renewed reverence for the natural world may yet save us. Rod Preece suggests that "when we share our identity with the natural world, the awesome, lovable, and beautiful elements of that world will be treated with respect and reverence both because they are instrumental to our well-being and because they will be valued for themselves" (229). Whether in the historical *The Wabeno Feast*, the magic-realist contemporary domain of *Halfway Man*, or the post-apocalyptic future of *The Erthring Cycle*, Drew's message remains the same: despite all instinct, we must honour mystery, and in honouring it, we must *act*.

Notes

¹ Image downloaded from <<<http://serc.carleton.edu/images/microbelife/evolution.jpg>>>
4 Sep 2006.

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APPENDIX A:

Wayland Drew: Interview with a Mythmaker

Wayland Drew: Interview with a Mythmaker

Conducted by Andy Belyea
April 1997

Well, how about we start off with the *easier* stuff: your personal background - where you were born, lived, your earlier attitudes towards education, how and when you developed an interest in literature, that kind of thing?

(Opens with chuckling that grows at the part of the question on early attitudes towards education) . . . that could take up most of the interview. Let's see . . . born in Oshawa, did elementary school and secondary school in Oshawa, and then later the University of Toronto, and then wrote, for a time--unsuccessfully, in the sense of making any money. Gwen and I married, and then I started teaching when we began a family--in Port Parry--and then I worked for a time in what is now the Ministry of Education in Toronto . . . that's the basic early biographical stuff, but it doesn't tell you very much. I think what's more important, when I look back on it, a couple of things are important if you're curious about what makes people want to write--to find things--or withdraw from the world in the way that writers do (more laughter): the first was that my father was considerably older than my mother and he was dead by the time I was five, so I grew up in a one-parent family. I hadn't realized until really quite recently the influence of that on me, the influence of his departure and my missing him and the need perhaps to define or write out emotions. That's one thing.

The other is that my mother had a wonderful recognition of the need for books and was constantly buying me good books; there was no television then, but there was radio which, of course, is much closer to literature than is television. So, I listened to quite a bit of radio, and I read a lot because I was sick a lot as a youth, and I think the need or desire to imitate started with my recognition of the power of words. You know, if you are moved by books you think, "Isn't that wonderful! There's such power there . . . I wish I could *do* that . . . I wish I could *have* that."

Did you recognize this fairly young?

Yes, because you have immediate feedback; when you experiment with it and try it--when you're starting out and you find that it has a visible effect on people--then you begin to recognize a power in the words, and it becomes even *more* important to get them right. You develop a respect for that power, I think, and you don't want to misuse it, so the task of writing gets progressively more difficult . . . strangely, it doesn't get *easier* as the years go on because you become more and more demanding on yourself. Those are a couple things in the genesis of the process for me.

Who could you say has influenced you substantially as a writer?

One conscious influence that comes to mind, I guess, is Paul St. Pierre, a Western writer . . . if you haven't read him you should get a book called *Breaking Smith's Quarterhorse*, published about 1964; it's just a beautiful little thing. He's a lovely, economical writer. Henry Miller, too. I've been thinking about him a lot, lately, because my wife and I are planning a trip down to that area, to Big Sur, California, where he lived and worked. There were influences in university, too, like D.H. Lawrence. Scott Fitzgerald was an early love; I really loved his work, and it had a big impact. I was very fond of Hemingway, though I don't know that I could say there was a *lot* of influence there. But after university there were a number of other people, and Miller was perhaps foremost among those immediately after. I got so intrigued by him that I took an entire year off to read everything he had written, and then to read everything that had ever influenced him . . . it sort of went out like ripples. It took me an entire year and I did nothing else.

Was this a project related to future academic studies you had in mind?

No. I just did it because I loved the man's work; it took me into areas that I had never encountered--all of the anarchist literature to start with. What else. I had never read about St. Francis of Assisi, and so I read Bonaventure's wonderful little book on St. Francis and many, many more. That was a great journey, and he, too, would have to be a great influence on me. Anyway, as you can see, the influences are largely American and not Canadian.

Do you read much contemporary Canadian Literature?

No . . . no . . . very little, I'm ashamed to say, though I've read a fair amount of the older. I find that I re-read now, more than anything; for instance, right now I am re-reading all of Patrick O' Brien's books--the Irish-English writer whose done a number of things, among them an *extraordinary* series of eighteenth-century--and early nineteenth-century--naval novels, which are certainly the best in the genre. They are a series of eighteen novels, all of them fat, all of them with the same principal two characters--one a Tory sea-captain, the other an Irish-Spanish libertarian surgeon-spy, for the English. These two form this very unlikely friendship early on which carries on through the entire eighteen novels, through all the voyages and all the adventures. I *love* those books . . . they're a *great* meditation on friendship. So, I often find myself going back to those, and back to some of the Latin writers of my university days--Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Catullus--going back to *fustier* stuff (laughing).

Have you written much that you chose not to publish?

Oh yes, yes . . . hundreds of thousands of words not published.

Any poetry amongst them?

No, actually. I've always distrusted my ear for poetry; I really admire poets, though, and I wish I could achieve the same distillation, but I don't feel that I can. I feel that prose is my medium, because I require huge space, a big canvas, and a lot of time--not that poets don't, sometimes, but they seem to be more incisive, somehow, and more elliptical than I can be. So, poetry is not something that I have ever had much success with. The journey has really been prose and prose, and I guess I wrote three novels before I published the first one, and heaven knows how many short stories, some of which were published and many of which were not published. That's common, that's what writers do--collecting rejection slips (extended laughter) . . . I once papered a wall with them. On a more serious tone, though, it *is* hard at times, you know, because you *make* things--you've done your best with the damn thing, you know, and however graciously they say it, "We just don't need this material at this time," or "It's not quite what we're looking for at this time," or whatever, still, it's a rejection of something that's very close to you and it hurts. And so you've got to be very tough and keep going on, for yourself more than anything.

Are you writing anything right now, and if so, do you have any plans for publication?

I don't know that I'll publish anything else; at the moment, I'm not planning ever to write for publication again. I am, however, writing a series of essays that I'm enjoying hugely, that are intended for my children and grandchildren. The reason that I'm writing them is because they have recently begun to ask me questions about our family, some of which I could answer and some of which I couldn't answer. So, I felt obliged to find out, to do a little bit of genealogical research and to search out my own memory. And so I've been writing these essays. I would *never* attempt an autobiography; on the other hand, I find the essays more accessible and easier to focus on one's own life, on one's parents' lives, grandparents' lives, and so on. So I am writing those, but they will be just for the family.

Speaking of essays, how did *Nature of Fish* and *Nature of Mammals* come about?

Oh . . . those . . . ha, ha, ha! Those were bizarre little things, really (more laughter). They're the kinds of things that happen to you when you're trying to

make a living writing, and you know, not being all that successful at it. They just came out of the blue and carried with them a fairly hefty stipend, which was more than I, back in the early seventies, could make in months. Anyway, so they were a series of three essays, intended to be one, originally. This editor phoned me up and said, "We're intending to do a book, and we'd like you to write an essay on mammals," and I laughed and said, "Well, you've made a mistake, because I'm not a zoologist . . . or even a naturalist." He replied, "Well, that doesn't matter . . . what we need is somebody who can meet deadlines because the deadline is three weeks away" (laughing).

So they needed a writer.

Yeah! So I moved into the Metro Toronto research library, you know, at the time on the corner of College and St. George, filled mainly with drunks sleeping off something or other. . . . I recall all the snoring at the tables. With the help of some fantastic librarians, I wrote what I felt was a pretty respectable first essay; then they asked me to do another--someone else had copped out, I guess--and then another. So there were two on mammals, if I recall, and one for the fish book. By the fish, though, it was really getting a little thin. I mean, you can relate to mammals--they do have warm blood and hair (chuckling), you know--but *how much* can you write about *fish* for God's sake.

Maybe a chapter on the advantages of frying over poaching?

(Much laughter) yes, yes . . . but that's maybe not the kind of *nature* they had in mind.

What about *Brown's Weir*? Here we have a delicious morsel of Canadian culture, brought to life by your words and Gwen's fabulous photography. Was this a family that you knew, or are related to?

Not related, no, but we got to know them very well, actually. When I began the idea of *The Wabeno Feast*, I was looking for a quiet place and so I went to Grand Manan for a month just to think over what I wanted to do. At that time, back in 1970, I got to know some of the people there. Then, at a later date, my wife and I went back for a holiday; the cottage we rented, which had been owned by the American writer, Willa Cather, was right on the sea, and right in front of it was one of these weirs. I became entranced by the thing itself--it was like a living creature, with different lights and lives and tides, massive tides from the Bay of Fundy that were constantly changing--and the bird life that it was constantly attracting made it just a *fascinating* thing. And so, we thought, let's make a book! We approached the owners, the Browns, and they were very interested in the idea, so the next summer we went back and took a canoe with us. Gwen did her

photography from the bow of the canoe and, of course, I did the essay. (Starts chuckling) It's funny, now that I look back on it; a whole lot of the locals there--the more experienced ones, I guess--thought we were a bit crazy, out there in the Bay of Fundy at the crack of dawn in nothing but a canoe. But we survived it. In fact, we did that as a twenty-fifth anniversary celebration.

Your attempt to capture the contemporary Native dilemma in *Halfway Man* seems to me to be successful; for instance, on the one hand, you have created a character like Travis, who represents not only elements of the physical world but also those of a more spiritual ideal . . . a world that seems to suggest that Natives and Whites alike can come to embrace each other's cultures and to co-exist. Yet, you also introduce his opposite--the *Shadow Man*--whose answer to problems with Whites is violence. Is your appreciation of this dichotomy based on your experiences with first-hand sources? And do you have many Native friends here in the area that may have helped to shape your attitudes?

Oh yes, I do have Native friends, and they've given me a tremendous amount. I suppose that my sensitivity to their culture is such that it is--and I don't pretend to be knowledgeable--is something that goes back many years to my early days in university when I guided in Temagami and began, really for the first time, meeting Native people. Even when I was a child, here in Muskoka, people would come around in the summertime selling baskets--beautiful baskets and other hand-made things--and people would buy something or other, and then the Natives would go away. They were always very mysterious for me, always people who seemed to magically appear and disappear. Now, of course, I know where they came from and who they were, and I know some of their descendants. When I began *The Wabeno Feast*, it grew out of a sense of tremendous disparity between the cultures and a sense that one of the cultures was getting something *much* more right, most of the time, than the other culture, and that that would be something that would behoove us to investigate.

So, my initial exploration began with that idea and with whatever books I had, which were very often written by people who had an axe of one kind or another to grind. But, as I read, I became interested not only in what they said but in *how* they said it; I became interested in the Native language itself. In fact, I became fascinated by Ojibway, and so, as the years went on, I made a conscious effort to learn it. That brought me into contact with people who spoke it fluently, people from whom I could learn not only the language but also the attitudes--the cultural attitudes that were inherent in the language. There is such a difference in how *we* blend attitudes and language and they do. Theirs doesn't have any of the roots that our language has--there are none in French, none in Latin, Greek, Spanish, Scandinavian--it *is* its own thing. It's related, of course, to other Native language

groups--it is an Algonquian language--so if you speak Ojibway, you're probably going to be able to get along with an Abenaki person, or a Micmak person or a Cree person in the same way that we could probably get along with a Scottish person or an Irish person.

So, that process of just *listening*, a lot, which is important I think, was hugely beneficial to me. I was lucky in finding people, and friends, who could give me what they could of the language--and of the culture that went with it--and I hope that I have, in the *Halfway Man*, respected that. I appreciate that there is a current political debate about non-Native people writing about Natives, but I think it's important--*very* important--to be able to transcend all of that. I think that, surely, what is vital now for all of us is to be able to be bigger than both of our cultures, to learn what we can from one another, to build whatever bridges we can, and to risk making mistakes sometimes--to do the thing in good faith and to have regard for one another. *That* is what I tried to get across in the book between Travis and Michael.

They seem to succeed where Mackay and Miskobenesa fail in *The Wabeno Feast*. Miskobenesa says, "There is no fair trade" with White men, "there is only loss." We get an interesting contrast if we consider someone like Buffy Sainte-Marie, who seems to say, "Reach out and hold hands" instead of tearing each other down and strengthening borders and barriers?

Absolutely . . . and Native peoples are far more ready to do that than we are, generally speaking, you know.

So how, then, have these two books been received by Native peoples, that you are aware of?

Usually, you have to ask (laughter). I find that there is a natural reluctance to impose an opinion, or thought. With *The Wabeno Feast*, I can't say; I can't recall any specific feedback from Native communities. With *Halfway Man*, it seems to me that there were a couple of reviews--favourable reviews--in Native newspapers or magazines that were sent to me, and that's something that we'd have to check in the files at Trent. Let me tell you two anecdotes that do come to mind, though. First, on the question of this narrow cultural interpretation, which I think is quite wrong-headed: I get phone calls, late at night, usually. People will call, and they've just finished reading the book and have called Bracebridge information and have gotten my number and they *have* to tell me how much they've liked it; they've just got it and they've read it all day, compulsively, and they've just now finished it and they've got to talk to me. And this, for a few years after the book was published, was not unusual and these calls would come. One night I got such a call and the woman raved about the book and asked questions; we talked about

it, and she was just *so* enthusiastic. And *then* she asked, “So . . . what are you . . . are you Cree, are you Anishnabi, an Ojibway?” And I said, softly, “Well, actually . . . I’m *shaganash*--I’m White.” And she said, “Oh . . .” and there was this “Click!”

Could you tell if it was a *Native* woman on the other end of the line?

I believe she was, yes, and I don’t know what to say about that. I believe the problem is *hers*, not mine, and I suspect that she will work that through, if I remember the tenor of her questions correctly. But, she quite obviously got one hell of a shock!

If I recall, Timothy Findley received a similar treatment when he wrote *The Wars*: “How dare you write about things that you haven’t experienced firsthand,” or something along those lines: “You weren’t there, you didn’t live in the trenches” and so on. But please tell me that you don’t think that one *has to* experience a thing first-hand to have a feeling for it or, more directly, to be compelled to write about it?

Of course not, of course not, not at all. There would be a lot fewer writers, wouldn’t there, if that were the case? As a matter of fact, the other anecdote I have for you is that one night, at a banquet, I was sitting next to a man I respect enormously, Garry Potts, the ex-chief of the Temagami Band. Potts, as a very young man, was responsible for lifting that community up by its bootstraps and acting, forcefully and directly, by putting a land-freeze on all Temagami land, saying, “This is *our* land, and its up to *you* guys to prove that it isn’t. In the meantime, nothing can be sold, no exploitation can go ahead.” Potts was behind that, a very tough-minded, *good* leader, and anyway, we found ourselves sitting beside one another, and at one point in the evening he leaned over to me and he said, “You wrote that book, *Halfway Man*.” And I said, “Yes . . . yes I did.” And he replied, very softly and very bluntly, “Good book.” After a long pause, he leaned back over and said, “You were a *messenger*.” And that, perhaps, is the biggest compliment I’ve *ever* received about the book, because that’s what I would like to feel happened, that there is and was a bridge made in a small way that assists with understanding.

Margaret Laurence calls writing “a sense of doing something which is to some extent beyond your conscious control” (Donald Cameron, *Conversations With Canadian Novelists* 110). Jack Ludwig uses the phrase “courage to stay with the thing you were doing” (*Conversations* 122) to describe following the creation of a novel through to fruition. What keeps you inspired and motivated to tell stories--the need to express, to get the inside stuff out, or is it the outward influences working their way to the

inside? Or both?

It's a combination of the two, I think. Inspiration, to me, means writing beyond yourself. It means that you know, while you're doing it, that it's better than you can do. I hope that makes sense to you. You position yourself, and then you realize that you're over the bar before you have realized that a bar was there and that you have already made the approach and jumped. Courage is going in and sitting down at it when you really don't feel that there's anything in there; more often than not, though, it starts to come out.

So, where does a story begin for you? How do patterns and ideas come to you? Do you organize things conceptually as they come into being in your mind, or do you just vent?

Let me answer it for you this way: I have a friend, a psychologist, who always wanted to write; so I said, "Well, why don't you write. Look, you don't have any children, you have this small fortune that you've squirreled away from teaching and practising, and so why don't you just take a year off and write?" So, he told me that he had pretty well plotted this novel when I saw him a few months later, and said that he had it all down and ready--like Faulkner when he wrote *Fable*, who was going to just put it all up on the wall--structured, chapter by chapter, all plotted out--and begin to write from start to finish until it was done. And so I warned him, "Please . . . don't . . . begin with Chapter One and see where it goes from there. You've got to have it under control from the start, and it's got to be an exercise of the mind." Somewhere, three-quarters of the way through the first chapter, one of his characters said something he hadn't anticipated, and it was such a pure and lovely thing that he wanted to keep it. Of course, that meant changing the whole thing. The ripple effect was too great for him to manage, the idea of creating new links and killing old ones. It's like I always tell my students: "Just do it. It's going to be a great, huge mess, but you can see, later, what is important and what you want to cut. It will reveal itself." My poor friend couldn't. He just gave up.

Do you write regularly? Do you have a certain "quota" that you try to achieve?

While I'm writing a novel, about a thousand words a day on the average. That's the target I set for myself, and though I usually end up cutting a great deal, it's not abnormal to end up with hundreds of thousands of words. The important thing is to just keep going and going until it's all out.

Miriam Waddington (*Twelve Voices* 183) says, "I don't know what my creative process is, and I never want to know. If anything is private, for

heaven's sake, the creative process is." How do you feel about this comment, considering, I guess, how much I've already asked you about it today?

(Laughter) . . . Well, I can see where she's coming from with that, but I really think it's different for everyone. The actual idea of creative *is* difficult to capture, and is so different for everyone, but I can see where some people don't want to go too deep into discussing it for fear of casting a spell of some kind on themselves.

Do you think anyone can write, or is it a craft that involves special gifts of some kind? Can we define a "natural" writer as we often hear athletes or musicians described as "naturals"?

Oh, I think anyone can write, and I think some people might be better at it, too. What's more important, though, is that you *enjoy* the process of doing it and that it comes from you and is, above all, *for* you.

Maritime author Ernest Buckler describes the writing process as "almost like constipation, really; it's like going to the john at a certain time every day. You'll eventually have a movement" (*Conversations 6*). Comments?

Well, sometimes you have to take a little enema (huge laughter). Ernest Buckler. Yes, wonderful--*Mountain in the Valley*--beautiful, beautiful novel, oh, it's a gorgeous novel. I taught it for several years in Grade 13 and was always richly, richly rewarded. In shaping random words, sometimes you just sit down and start any gibberish, and pretty soon you expose yourself-- and your thoughts--with it. One thing always leads to another, and it's not always a story, but it could be a *part* of a story or some facet of one somehow. But Buckler is quite right. You've got to do it every day, whether or not you feel like it; you might get going, and there will be nothing there, but pretty soon you find that there is no shortage of stuff and it's *pouring* out of you.

Ha ha . . . have you ever taken a substantial break from writing and found it difficult to get back into it when you return? Between books, for instance?

Not really; it's always been a different exploration for me. I *did* take a break in *Halfway Man* that interested me, and might interest you: the book was, I thought at the time, almost thought through, and I'd written it from Gardner's perspective. Then I took a break of about three weeks and went on a canoe trip with a friend of mine up to Superior, along the east coast; and then, because the weather was so beautiful, we just kept going and ended up along the north coast. Partway along, we stopped at this beautiful, remote place where there actually is a point very similar to the point in Neyashing in *Halfway Man*, and I spent a long time just

sitting there, thinking and pondering. Anyway, when I came back I found that I couldn't write for a while in the same voice; I tried several times, and it just sounded false. And then, one day, this other voice was there. I started to write, and the voice continued, and it was the voice of this person who I had intended to be a very small character in the novel: Travis. So, the more I explored it, the more it became clear to me that Travis had a much larger role to play than I had initially thought.

Right from the opening page of *Halfway Man*, we sense that you enjoy the idea of developing the theme that there exists a significant schism between White and Native cultures in this society. In fact, Travis' first words on the subject are, "I know what whitemen think of time." What *do* White men think of time, in your opinion?

As a kind of safety . . . as a kind of exoskeleton or shell--a protective thing. And also as something linear--I think we think of it in terms of contrast and opposites. Travis is a more cyclic being; he tends to see the cycles in nature and to see the way in which things come full-circle in other aspects of life. For him, there will be no endings: there will be just cycles. But I think the Western inheritance leads us to think very much about endings, and beginnings, and what's between, so that there's this lineal notion that is . . . well, *not* very helpful, I think.

An *egocentricity* of sorts? As opposed to say, an Aboriginal, African, or Native—an *indigenous*, maybe--idea that endings and beginnings are simply *not*? That time is part of a larger mystery that transcends beginnings and endings, and is, itself, a mystery that should be left alone?

That's right, absolutely. You've put your finger on something essential there. If you listen to any of the hearings that involve Native people, and their confrontations with White culture, you will hear the elders saying, "But you're *not* thinking of six generations from now." You know, "What's that going to do six generations down the line." Well, six generations is really unthinkable for us and that's why we don't think about it; we don't *see* that far ahead, whereas in traditional Native culture it's nothing at all. These cultures will go back that far, easily; the thing is, as long as the context doesn't change--as long as the *land* is there to support the culture, as long as the *waters* are healthy and the *animals* are healthy--there is no separation between the culture and the land. That's what's essential, as long as *that* relationship is allowed to exist. For us, it is very much a separation--land is simply something to be *used*.

Speaking of separations, Travis, for instance, maintains a balance of dualities: past and present, reality and mythology, inner and outer selves, and destitution and hope, to name a few. And Jenny, too; at one point, you

describe her as having the “colour of clouds, a pale spirit moving between fire and shadows” (12). Travis describes her as “a spirit blending everything I owned” (13). Throughout *Halfway Man*, you invite us into an excellent journey into Northern Ontario, into a mysterious and unfrequented place for most Canadians, into the hearts and minds of Native peoples, and into that part of each of us that I believe we often deny, *especially* in contemporary times. Do you suggest that each of us is, in some way, living *halfway* to or from all that we can become?

Well, yes, that’s true to a great degree, isn’t it? *Michael* is certainly the most *halfway from* it all, I think. He has the most work to do, but your idea certainly agrees with one of the messages in the novel--that *all* of us have a role to play, both Native and non-Native, in shaping the country.

Frequently, in novels utilizing a journey motif and, arguably, especially in Canadian literature, we discover an archetypal, Joseph Campbell-ian “wise old man” figure who acts as a source of spiritual, emotional, and psychological guidance to the evolving hero. Urquhart offers Exodus Crow, for instance, in *Away*, to prompt a young Liam to confront his mother’s death by connecting it to the natural passage of the seasons. You chose to create a “wise old woman” to perform the role of mentor in *Halfway Man: Ajawac*, a figure who “moved when people needed her to move” (15). Did you feel that the female Aja would be better suited to the role of wise advisor based on the idea of her as a “Mother Nature” or “Mother Earth” figure to Travis?

In a sense, yes--I *was* after the idea of her as a nurturing and motherly figure--although I don’t know that I intentionally chose a woman over a man or anything that drastic (laughing).

Does this, then, tell us anything about Travis’s lack of a relationship with a father? You have Travis note to Gardner that ““Oh, we had many fathers. In Neyashing, all the men were our fathers”” (182). In fact, now that I mention it, it seems to me that Paul never really finds out about *his* father in *The Wabeno Feast* either, does he? The opportunity for him to discover his father is there, hidden somewhere under stacks of pages and dusty folders in an English professor’s dingy old office, but neither he--nor *we*--ever seem to get around to discovery; the next thing we know the story is up. Is an absence of father-son relations in each of these two novels coincidence or intent?

That is true, that is true . . . a nice connection. Because I never really had one of my own, it’s just that I don’t feel confident writing about it, I guess, it’s just one

of those things that has been beyond my purview, my scope. There are mentors, or there is the search for mentors, like Aja, like Malcolmson, like the passage you refer to, but there isn't any exploration of *that* particular relationship . . . it would be interesting if *my* son were here, he would have more to say about that . . . (laughter) . . .

Gwendolyn MacEwan (*In Their Words* 100) says of Greece: “You are forced to consider how myth is operating in modern life; myth is present everywhere.” She then goes on to suggest that, perhaps, Canadians lack this connection between modern life and myth. She also says that Canada doesn't have “an ancient history” (100). Do you feel the same way?

As far as the connection, it's probably true, yes. Frye said something that came back to me years after I'd had him as a teacher, something that moved me quite deeply. Someone had asked him about my work, and he said, “Yes, he's one of my boys.” I had not even felt that Frye was aware of my presence, yet, I guess what he was saying was that he recognized his influence on me in whatever sense that person was talking about. And, of course, he would say that the entire Bible is a myth and that all of Christianity is myth-driven, whether we admit it or not, and that the really important things are the stories rather than the literal truths, whatever they may have been. And I guess I do adhere to that interpretation. I can't comment culturally--I don't know Greece--but it wouldn't surprise me if what she said is absolutely true. We *do*, though, certainly have an ancient history . . . just not in a White context.

Frye also says that the loss and regaining of identity is the framework of all literature.

Yes, I would suggest that all literature occurs within that map, somehow.

I would think that maybe the statement could be applied to *The Wabeno Feast and Halfway*.

How so?

Paul is looking for parts of his identity, in his past--connections to a father he never knew and the possibility that he can learn of him through Malcolmson, on the one hand. On the other hand, Travis isn't really searching, but Michael is. He's looking for an identity of innocence that he had as a child, has since lost, and is trying to regain--at least in part. By the novel's end, he seems to have done it.

Yes, that's very interesting. Really, very interesting. You know, the Native view

would be that it is really important to lose one's identity in the collective, you know, at times, and in a modest way. I'd really have to think about that, though-- I'm sorry to let you down (laughter). It's a great quote (more laughter). Leave it to Frye to throw out something like that . . . and five minutes later start to open his mail. Actually, you look a little bit like him . . . ha, ha, ha.

When Travis, Cutler, Jimmy and Maynard go down to Duluth (Minnesota), they find themselves in “one of those places with red neon in the windows” with “guys wearing hardhats or talking caps” who were “just itching to beat the shit out of somebody” (17). Having spent several years in a small town north of Edmonton, whose chief industries were oil and farming, I can't begin to tell you how much I laughed when I read this. Though you place the predicament in Duluth, Minnesota, could this not almost be “Smalltown, Anywhere, Canada?”

(Laughter) It's *everywhere*, it's everywhere. In the novel, though, I'm not convinced that it *works*. I wanted to establish, early in the novel, that we're not dealing with a wimp in Travis, that here's a guy that has been exposed to a fair amount of life. I felt that this was important, because later on, when the sensitivity of the man emerges, my hope was that it would be all the more powerful for *that*, for the earlier recognition that he has taken his various knocks in various places. That is why that episode was included.

There are also many, many, subtle moments of comedy in *Halfway Man*; the favourite that comes to mind for me is your characterization--your *humanization*, I guess-- of Guaranteed, Travis's dog. Just how much does the “gritty, sceptical . . . but still had his spirit” (6) wolverinish Guaranteed represent his owner?

I hadn't thought about that, really, but I suppose he does. Guaranteed was based on a friend of mine's dog, and I really tried to capture the same characteristics. It was one of those magnificent little creatures you meet that seems destined to find its way into print. He seemed a really nice complement to Travis, for sure. Both are lovable, but both have limits, too.

What does it mean that Travis should have a university education, that he's seen a world that few in his community, presumably, have seen, and how do you see this as having contributed to his acquiring--or having been bestowed with--the role of leader in Neyashing? *As necessary?*

Not necessary, no, but it does mean that he has been exposed to that side of the world that he dislikes. I think that that was a necessary step in creating him; in order to become dissatisfied with our world, it was important that he have a

chance to see it on a larger scale, and to be immersed in it long enough to come to understand how it works--on itself and on him. Only then can he have the wisdom to know better and to know how to act when the moment comes.

It also means that he has been “educated” in ways that are really of no use to him, except when it comes to dealing with a personification of that world in Michael.

Sure. He’s had a chance to see what’s out there, and he can know better how to deal with it, and Michael, because of that.

On that note, Travis is also an educated storyteller, isn’t he? Not only does he recount the education of Michael Gardner (5) but he also tells three “formal” short stories and many others along the way to the end of the novel. In relaying his version of the three stories to the children, he recalls his grandfather “telling both the land and me into being, teaching me that the real world is not substance but story, that tales contain the only world we’ll really ever have.” Where did you get the ideas for each of the three *stories-within-a-story*, as I like to call them?

Well, the frameworks of the stories themselves were passed on to me from some of my Native friends, and I modified them a little bit to fit them thematically to what is going on in Travis’s life and in the main stream of the novel. There are countless stories like them out there, you know, and they all carry really very interesting and very important pieces of information. Travis is, in that sense, telling us some of those stories.

One of my favourite passages: “I know how history and philosophy and pure reason can get such a shaganash stranglehold on you that you start eating yourself like a wendigo, from the inside out. And I know there are alternatives. I remember reading that line of Wordsworth for the first time, ‘a pagan suckled in a creed outworn.’ I loved it! ‘Hey,’ I said. ‘That’s me!’ If he’d been alive I would’ve phoned him right then: ‘Come on, Willie. We’ll take a few days, go back into the bush and have a look at the spirit world. I’ll show you how outworn it is!’” (26). Does it seem to you that the more we think and reason, isolate and define, codify and “technologize,” the less likely becomes our ability to find true peace, or does this sound like the insane rambling of someone who’s been in university too long?

(Laughter) Oh, *that’ll* do it to almost anyone. Sure. Although I think there are technological expressions of the problem, I’m not sure that I don’t blame *Plato* for a great deal. The *idealism* of Plato, I think, is responsible for just a *huge* amount of light and destruction both. Now, it’s not his alone, of course--the blame. It gets expressed in many ways: in Christianity, in idealism of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, in the whole notion that there is always something better: “We can make it better. We can take the wilderness and make it better, make it a

garden.” It is just an assumption of our society, and you can trace it back, if you want to, those thousands of years. So I’m not sure if it isn’t that attitude that has done it.

Of course, we *do* think too much: and worse is that we think dialectically--either or, either or, either or--and the most powerful tool in all of our society is structured on that basic principle: the *computer*. It’s such a huge oversimplification of most of what’s obvious around us. It seems that we need to bring it down to size. I’m always fascinated by the pictures of loggers standing on trees getting their pictures taken, you know, before they chop off a tree’s head or, afterwards, posing with it like a kill; how much more of an irony can there be than that?

I think that the process that *you’re* talking about--the either or, but then maybe this and perhaps that and how about this as an alternative--is more like a spider’s web and the web of alternatives is much larger. Now, what would happen if *everybody* began to think that way? The world would become an enormously better place to live and be.

We’d start slowing down, first of all; there would be no quick answers and quick solutions.

Exactly. That’s right. And that’s what takes Travis so long to ponder; he needs to wait until the time is right to act, not act because time seems short.

Your view of hope for humankind’s ability to find that part of itself which is at peace with the natural universe is evident in both novels, but more so in *Halfway Man*. I find this ironic, given the technological, bureaucratic, and industrial leaps and bounds of the past two decades. Simply put, *Halfway Man* seems to end on a more romantic note with Michael Gardner’s return to the North and with the survival of Travis’ community and culture. And even though we could argue that Paul, Milo, and Mackay find truth, for themselves, in *Wabeno*, none of the three seem to experience the same sense of freedom as Travis and Michael. Was their anything in the 14 or so years between publications that prompted you to develop a *more* optimistic view of man’s ability to come to terms with that part of himself best expressed through a connection to nature?

No, not really--I suppose I haven’t thought about that much. I really think that there’s more hope for Paul and Liv than, perhaps, you do, in that they’ve taken the steps necessary to find peace of mind by going back North. Certainly, though, I can see why you might find *Halfway Man* more romantic.

O.K. Maybe this will help. Like many in his shoes--Henderson in Saul Bellow's *Henderson The Rain King*, or his Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day*, or Winterbourne in Henry James' *Daisy Miller*--Jerry Rattray "does not believe in suffering" (182). Yet, he suffers a great deal. At 8000 feet and en route to the pavement without an open parachute, we discover that Jerry feels, "You were born in alone-ness and you lived in it, and those who said otherwise were liars and pretenders" (227). He has no real relationship with his wife, he truly feels alone with his money, toys, and power, and his alienation from society is, in essence, self-mandated. He chooses to die in a heroic fashion rather than turn back to a wealthy and mundane existence. Is his an attitude that you attribute to those engulfed in a pursuit of "the good life"? Is death the only alternative for a Jerry Rattray archetype?

I don't know that it's safe to call him an archetype--well, *maybe*--there *are* many characters like him in twentieth-century literature, aren't there? Not just men--but *women*, too, now--whose reality is much distorted by some kind of race to finish on top. They go and go and go without thinking about anything around them and, eventually, they burn out--whether at eighty or forty--but they do often just flame out. Now, I don't think that death is the *only* alternative for these kinds of people; look at Michael Gardner. Here's an example of one who came close to the edge but who never fell off. At the same time, maybe Michael's in the smaller of the two camps.

Fair enough. O.K. On to one of my favourites; Kenneth Malcolmson is, to me, an immensely interesting character. Here we have a teacher of English Lit for those "whose interest in the subject was assumed to be slight"(119). Reminds me of Engineering students at RMC. He lives in a "decayed" (212) physical environment that reflects his decaying inner world; he is, in fact, "prey to vandals" (212) and a "comic strip old man" (213); and he "speculated, he hypothesized, he wondered, mused, mumbled, scattered incoherencies, and behaved in all the ways like the apologetic incompetent he was" (120). What does your characterization tell us about English teachers and academia in general?

(Immense laughter) . . . Oh . . . that's a nice one, lovely. Pretty accurate . . . well, I think there's a certain "wonky" beauty about him--I *hope*--that I hope suggests that he's dealing with just too many possibilities. I love people who are overwhelmed by possibilities. I think you can see it happening all the time. In politics, for instance, there are some people that are too intelligent and too sensitive to hold out in politics for very long because they see too much, too many things. I think that Jefferson was one of those people. I don't mean to suggest that one is necessarily better than the other, but if you compare the Democrats to the Republicans, you find that the Democrats have this perennial problem that

shows up in their presidents, like Clinton: they *think* (laughter), whereas the Republicans don't have that problem because they hold out more strictly to a program, a platform, a dogma. Look at Reagan (more laughter). So, they're relieved of this responsibility.

The problem is, for people like Malcolmson, that he's got *so* many things to consider that he becomes paralysed by the notion of determining, "What is the right thing?" Travis, on the other hand, finds the hidden power in possibilities; he merely waits until the right one jumps out at him before he moves to action.

With Aja's help.

Yes, and with that of all she represents--in spirit, in connection with the whole Native history. There's a lot of wisdom guiding Travis to a decision, even though he faces a tremendous number of possibilities, like Malcolmson. Notably, Malcolmson's problem with ambiguity is remarkably like one of the things that happens in a book, too, because a book is just like a process of thinking out--or addressing--a problem and presenting it in an unformed state, or an unfinished state, with all the aspects you can think of made manifest in characters believing and acting and working out all of the possibilities, all the different angles. Characters become facets in that regard, and sometimes that acts as a double-edged sword: you get all of the possibilities coming through into all of the characters, but *matching* and *placing* them can become challenging. Who gets what? Why? And so on.

And yes, I think that English profs can tend to be that way, and that's a good thing; if you're a scientist, you don't really have that. For instance, if you're a scientist, you don't think about, usually--and unless you're a *very* unusual scientist--whether you *ought* to learn or not. And, as a scientist will always say, "Well, *of course*, I mean what kind of *stupid* question is that?" . . . or . . . "Of *course* you've got to know!" whereas someone like Malcolmson will fret about it and fret about it, and there will be all of this fuzziness and grey and indefinable *stuff* that he fights with, constantly.

Malcolmson's final words to Paul (and us) are "We have a good deal to forget" and "Go all the way!" He thinks Paul is "ever the optimist" (254) and that those like him are deluding themselves, those who believe that mankind has a "core" underneath something which must be "peeled away and peeled away" (254) in order to get to it, to expose it. Can you describe this core?

Gosh, I don't know that I can. I remember that image vaguely. I guess he assumes that there is a core, some form of genetic programming which involves

the practice of mutual aid. A core of sanity, maybe, or a core of goodness and trust in the future, in others.

Does Paul find this core, even though he admits to Liv that “I don’t want to know that I’m going back” (254). Can one truly find one’s inner core of life and living without confronting inner demons? What comes to mind, for me, is Dunstan Ramsay’s inevitable confrontation with *his* inner demons--namely, Liesl, Magnus Eisengrim, and Faustina--in Robertson Davies’ *Fifth Business* or, in a lighter sense, even Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*. When, near the end of the novel, Liv asks, “We’ll have won, won’t we?” (253), can we reasonably infer that although the physical journey is almost complete, Paul will still have a psychological voyage to finish off? Can escaping the physical world be enough?

I’m not quite sure *how* I feel about that, so I’ll just grope a little bit. Let’s use the word *harmony*, what Native people sometimes say in English, a sense of being in oneness with everything. Essentially, I guess my opinion of that is that it is not something at all that you have to work at. I think maybe Paul comes to understand that; Michael, too, comes to understand that. It doesn’t require a huge journey or a huge quest, but it does involve stepping out of the stream--out of this rush of time--and you suddenly find that you are *not* apart from the trees, you are *not* apart from the fish, or from anything else surrounding you: the stars, the earth, the sky. You are a part of it all. That sense of harmony--*oneness*--is what I would like to think they both feel.

Your advice would be just to try and step off the train every now and then.

Yes, and that’s what they have come to. And in the end, you realize that it’s the easiest thing in the world; you don’t have to take yoga for twenty years, or put on a saffron robe and chant away or anything like that (laughter). More important than *escape*, for Paul and Liv, is that they are going *back*, back *into* something in the North, and what they are accepting is a huge vulnerability. There are no longer any protective shells, no more masks, and they are taking their chances. Maybe they are going to die, and maybe they’re not, but they are open to what is there in the North and will accept it either way because it’s pure.

You know, the *first* real halfway man in these two novels is, ironically, neither Travis nor Michael but Paul’s deceased father (253,254); Paul actually becomes halfway too, in many regards--halfway between many polar opposites like past and present, youth and adulthood, knowledge and ignorance (about or of his father’s person)--yet he remains balanced, like Travis. Did your development of this theme in *The Wabeno Feast* serve as an impetus for, or consciously re-surface when creating, *Halfway Man*?

It's funny that you should mention that, for about six months after *Halfway Man* had been released, a friend of mine revealed the same connection to me, and I was caught by surprise. Maybe something was working there, underneath the surface, which I wasn't aware of at the time. But no, no, I can't admit that it was intentional.

Do your novels change who *you* are, as a human being, both while writing them and after their having been written?

Yes . . . yes, sure. It's inevitable. I can't speak for other people, but I think that you must, inevitably, emerge more humble in the end because what has happened has been so strange and so wonderful. It's like having been given a huge gift, for me; in one sense, you're responsible for it, because you're name is on the book. In another sense, though, you really feel that you're *not* entirely responsible for it (tentative, curious laughter). Overall, I think it is a humbling experience, and I also think that it's an experience that really takes you out of life, and this is the negative side for me and a big part of the reason that I'm not working now on a big book. It's compulsive, it has got to be every day, it takes most of your energies, and there is very little left over. Sometimes you are working under very stressful deadlines--for instance, I've had to say to Gwen, "I'm sorry, I can't go to your birthday party." My children assure me, too, that they don't feel that they were deprived of my influence in their childhood, but, still, I think they probably were. Had I not been a writer and had I done something that would have been less obsessive, I would have had more time for them. So, it's nice now not to have to worry too much about that, and to be able to have the time to do what other people have been doing all of these years--going to movies, or going skiing, or whatever that is . . . maybe *Star Wars*. (laughter).

Did you ever find that even though you might stop writing at the end of the day that you never stopped *thinking* about what you had just written, or were writing, and that that is part of the time consumption as well? Is that, perhaps, what you mean by *obsession*?

Yes, of course. *Always* in fact. Even if I went for a jog up the road towards the river (points beyond the house) it would be there. I could jog three miles and never have seen a damned thing (laughter), because this (pointing to his head) hadn't shut off the whole time. Many of the manuscripts--that are down at Trent now--are sweat-stained and crinkled, because I'd come back dripping with sweat but full of ideas that had to go down right away. That process is really important because it's the subconscious coming out . . . sometimes it comes reaching up and goes, "Bang!" and there it is. The same thing happens in the morning; it, too, is one of the interesting points of convergence that is difficult to isolate.

Robertson Davies attributes to Canadians an environmental relationship to the land that he describes as a “fantastic sort of fossilized past . . . but we never talk about ourselves as a country with a sort of living past” (*Conversations* 33). Timothy Findley suggests that “we’re at war with nature, and we have declared war on a defenceless enemy” (*Conversations* 50). I sense in each of these two of your novels a desire to draw Canadians into that fossilized past and have them measure the potential war-like consequences of present-day industry and technology against it. Consider each of your own brilliant sensory lists: first, of Travis’s reactions to the city--grey like sewage spills, smells of death, “noise” (30) instead of sound, a “labyrinth” (30), “clean and measurable” (31), “awful” (31), and “right-angled” (32)--and, by contrast, his reactions to the north, where we find, amongst the descriptions of beauty, peace, and freedom, a Travis that “worked hard, sweating the city out of me” (33). In your 1990 Pat Barclay interview (*Books In Canada*, Vol 19, June/July 1990, p21), she refers to you as an *environmentalist* writer. Are you content with this label?

Oh, dear. Well . . . *no*, I guess not, because of its implicit homocentricity. What an environment is--what it means--is from a Latin word meaning “that which surrounds man.” Man, then, is right at the centre of it all, and so his view of the world--from the eyes of humanity, at the centre looking outwards--is that the environment is just what is there for our use or our treatment. I find that to be really an inadequate view, though I don’t know what I’d call myself. We need a new vocabulary. At one time I began to make a list of words that we need--it’s still there, somewhere in my computer--and one of them is a word which suggests that we need a philosophy of vulnerability; we need to develop ourselves in such a way so that we are not so afraid of . . . of the deep, dark woods and of all its inhabitants. I’ll never get the vocabulary finished, but *environmentalism* is not it for me because it presumes that man is still there at the centre of things; it also presumes that there is still the management aspect--you know, that we can *count* the number of elk and *count* the number of polar bears--and that *we* can keep things in balance. It’s just another disastrous attempt at a solution. We can’t do it.

Counting, codifying, registering, and a false sense of control--things that Travis thinks about in the city and has to escape from because they makes no sense to him.

Exactly, you’re quite right, you’ve got the idea. We don’t even know how to *think* about it because we don’t have the vocabulary.

Do you consider yourself to be strongly “Canadian?”

Umm, no. If you mean nationalistic, then the answer is no.

Would it be fair to say “naturalistic,” then?

Yes. Certainly that. I *can't* imagine myself living apart from these trees, from this snow, from these hills. So, in that sense--in terms of that strong sense of *place*--absolutely.

So it doesn't *necessarily* have to be on Canadian soil for you.

No. I don't feel that--in my innards--as other people obviously do, those who are active politically and feel the importance of belonging to a national entity. For me, it's always a sense of place, something below those political turmoils, and something less complicated than that. For instance, I haven't belonged to the Writer's Union of Canada for many years; I was there when it started, and did belong for many years, but I found that I couldn't--I just *couldn't*, for the life of me--share many of the concerns of the other people. That became more and more true, and finally, I just slipped out.

What kind of problems, or concerns, would they have been perceiving themselves to have been having that you didn't feel you wanted to be a part of?

Well, to be fair, they were *all* valid. Often they were lobbying endeavours, organizational arrangements around political activities; in latter years, they became increasingly polarized, it seemed to me: questions of race, nationality, sex. They seemed to me to increasingly occupy the organization, and I listened intently, but I just couldn't maintain an interest in it.

The Barclay interview also mentions that you knew, almost immediately after graduation, that you “wanted to write the *Great Canadian Novel*”(21). I know what my opinion is, but do you consider either or both of these works as having accomplished that dream?

Oh, God, no, no. It's been *years* since I thought that way. I don't think in terms of competition anymore; I don't like competitions, prizes. I don't think that it's the right attitude to take towards art. You know, it's like saying, “The Highbush cranberry is *certainly* far better than the birch on the side over there (pointing out bay window to trees), and *certainly* far better than that dogwood over there.” It just seems to me to be sort of silly. People make art according to their lives, and beauty is diversity. The idea that something like the Booker Prize, or even the Nobel Prize, can mean a whole lot, seems so wrong-headed because it is like

saying one expression is better than another, don't you think?

Of course . . . and along the same line, in the Barclay article you mention that after the publication of *The Wabeno Feast* that though they were "generally favourable," you "didn't need the reviews"(21). Has your attitude changed much, if at all, since then?

Did I say that (laughter)? It's probably true. . . true. Unless people have sent them to me, I haven't read *any* reviews of *Halfway Man*, I just have no interest in them. It's something that . . . it's *not* something that's fundamentally going to interest me. Going back to the *process* that you alluded to, there are many ways of describing it, but there is a point in the process in which the work reveals what it wants to be. Perhaps that is a mystical way of alluding to it, but nevertheless it's true. At some point, you can *see* what that thing should be; it may be ten miles away, and difficult to work to, and you are going to have to cut half of what you have written, maybe. You just discover that half is a scaffolding of some kind and that it has got to go, but you can see what it is going to be and, at that point, other people just cannot help. It's an entirely personal thing.

Does the same hold true of the movie novelizations?

It's perhaps less true of commissioned works or those *intended* for broad consumption or publication--I could *not* say the same, for example, of movie novelizations, of which I've done four. It's just not true because you see at the beginning just what it *has* to be--it *has* to match. Usually, you have an early screenplay, so that as you're working the subsequent revisions are coming off, and that can happen for any number of reasons--the actor is not comfortable with the lines, can't handle the scene the way it's written, or they just can't shoot that scene for some reason . . . a thousand things. So the scripts change. But fundamentally, from the beginning, you have the story, and you're usually allowed infinite latitude and so it's possible to invent other characters, or if something on screen is not going to work in fiction, because people have more time to think, so you've got to change the plot. Normally, you have great latitude to do that. But what you do *not* have is *time*--these things have to be written at breakneck speed. It's a matter of weeks.

What makes a story interesting for you?

Oh, *finally* an easy one (laughter)--ambivalence! It has to be sufficiently moving on different levels, with a great deal of uncertainty that gets expressed in many ways. I don't know that that's true of my own books, but that's the kind of novel that engages me and my imagination. Not just an overt mystery, mind you: I always feel *tricked* by mystery writers. Something much more subtle grabs me,

something like a book I'll recommend to you, *Snow Falling From Cedars*, an absolutely exquisite novel. There, too, the environment is a character, which, for me, has to be a part of it.

Do you discover things about your characters that you didn't know when you started out? Have you ever abandoned a character during the creative process because you couldn't seem to get him or her "just right"?

Yes to the latter and *always* to the first. That's one of the best parts of the whole process, that sense of giving birth to--and doing it over and over--a fictional person. They reveal themselves to you throughout, and you're never sure where they'll take you. Sometimes you realize, "Here's my character today, and now look what he's said. He's said this and gone and changed the whole god-damned novel and now I've got to go back over all this" (much laughter).

Is writing, to you, a way of keeping your sanity?

Hmmm . . . that's really an excellent question. I don't think so. If it was true at any time I don't think so anymore. I probably feel saner *not* writing, for some of the reasons we've already discussed: the sense of compulsion, the absorption of time, and so on. I did, at one time, feel that it was important to write in order to define oneself or to achieve something--that manifestation of ego, you know--but I just don't want to feel that way anymore.

Tom Marshall (*Twelve Voices* 78) says that the artist has a "child-like consciousness" in many ways. Is writing an expression of play for you?

Oh, yes, it has been that. It has been *great* fun, especially when you are writing certain passages that you *know*, or at least hope you know, will give people certain pleasure because they give you pleasure right there and then. You find yourself chuckling, crying--being *moved* in some way--at something that just fell out of you from somewhere, and you hope that others will connect with it the same way.

Do you have any heroes? What do you consider to be a hero's qualities? Is Travis a hero, and can anybody be a hero?

Yes, he is, I think, and I think anybody can be a hero, depending on circumstances (long pause) . . . the men I knew, in 1939 and 1940, who walked out of classroom or out of a machinist shop . . . and put on a uniform . . . every damned one of them was a hero. And that moves me. *Profoundly*. I can't watch, on November eleventh, a ceremony that doesn't move me deeply, just thinking about it. It's a certain ordinariness--a humanity that rises to the occasion. Joseph Campbell will define it in terms of certain stages of a hero's journey, and for me, I

think that that can be anybody. The ordinary person who does what is clearly necessary--*that* has always moved me the most. I've taught many heroes, many kids for whom it is an act of heroism to get on the bus that morning, and I have *great* respect for that. Immense.

What do you hope that people will take away from your novels, and from you?

A sense of the importance of mystery. I feel that everything that I have done--the little that I have managed to do, perhaps, which is of real importance--has to do with stressing the importance of mystery. I really think that we must somehow begin to accept the mystery that is within us and around us, to be content with it and not be afraid of it.

You say, through Travis: “there are many things we could never understand, should never understand” (23), and “mystery is either an emptiness that they [Whites] must fill or a cloud they must disperse, and if they can't destroy it they'll hide it, pretend it isn't there, give it another name” (24).

Yes, and I think that *Halfway Man* addresses itself to that, that the trilogy addresses itself to that, and that that's what Paul and Liv come to accept in *The Wabeno Feast*. I think we need to accept how it--mystery--manifests itself in all things. There's a connection between the physical and psychological worlds, and we're it. You know, we began our conversation talking about science, and the importance in science that one can indeed know, and can indeed discover, and will always want to discover--there will *always* be this self-driven thing to discover--the unknown. But in doing so, we always narrow, and rarefy, what ought *not* to be quantified and, perhaps, discovered. For us, it's restraining ourselves now--*that's* the big project for us now, in my mind--and that's what my novels have addressed themselves to. We can't go back, but we can slow down.

Wayland Drew passed away in December 1998 from Lou Gehrig's Disease, known formally as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

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