

Sara Bédard-Goulet and Daniel Chartier (eds)

# The Northern Forest



Isberg

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# THE NORTHERN FOREST

## *LA FORÉT NORDIQUE*

Edited by

*Dirigé par*

Sara Bédard-Goulet and Daniel Chartier

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# **Introduction: The Place of the Northern Forest<sup>1</sup>**

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Translated from French by Siavash Rokni

*A French and an Estonian version of this introduction follow at the end of the book.*

## **Defining Northern Forest**

The French dictionary<sup>2</sup> defines forest as an area covered with trees as well as the collection of trees that occupy this space. Older references specify that trees are planted for exploitation, that they can be the object of the state's surveillance, and that their enjoyment is reserved for the sovereign. However, the etymology of the term refers more to the outside, meaning 'outside of the place' where humans live, more so than a place of practice. This ambivalence corresponds well to the ideas of the forest as a familiar and frequented place and, conversely, as

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<sup>1</sup> This publication is first and foremost supported by the ASTRA PER ASPERA project at the University of Tartu and is financed by the European Regional Development Fund. Secondly, it is supported and financed by the Faculty of Arts and Laboratoire international de recherche sur l'imaginaire du Nord, de l'hiver et de l'Arctique at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM) as well as by the Centre de recherche sur la littérature et la culture québécoises (CRILCQ), the UQAM Foundation and Énergir. We would like to thank these organisations for their support.

<sup>2</sup> Littré, *Trésor de la langue française*, Le Petit Robert, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.

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an unknown, out of the world, and wild place. It also shows the complexity of our reflection on the representation and images of the Northern Forest, a reflection that we would wish to be inclusive and that implies diverse fields of knowledge, as we will see in the contributions to this book: literary, theatrical, folkloric studies, semiotics. In the same way, the Nordicity of the forest includes a vast geographic area where the forest ends at the northern end of certain geographical areas, as we will find several examples in this book: Finland, Estonia and Livonia, the United States, Quebec, Acadia, and British Columbia.

The essential characteristic of the forest is that it contains trees. However, the forest's geographically mapped inventory varies based on the criteria adopted to define the trees that it contains (according to their space, the area that they cover, their density, etc.). In addition, we sometimes leave trees that have their growth restricted by climate out of this forest inventory, as it is the case with the Nordic regions, the topic of our interest, where the borders of temperate and boreal forests are found. Rather than limiting its interest to trees, botany considers forests as plant communities where other species of plants live in relation to the trees, a relationship that is so essential that the latter cannot exist without the former. Ecology systematises these relationships by describing forests as ecosystems, sets of living beings that interact in and with an environment. These various apprehensions of the forest by natural sciences show the extent to which it is a complex, relative, and multifaceted environment. By extension, because of its extraordinary ability to regenerate by preserving what rots as a reservoir of memory, the ecological system of the forest can become a model of thought for other fields.

Cultural representations of the forest relay the ambiguity between the verticality of trees, symbol of a hierarchy for some<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup> Kentigern Siewers 2014

## INTRODUCTION

and the “communal” horizontality of their associations with concepts such as the rhizome<sup>4</sup>, or the vegetariat<sup>5</sup>, something to be managed and exploited for some and protected and preserved for others, a familiar habitat or foreign place. If these representations sometimes simplify the forest and posit it as opposed to civilization – except in the case of Aboriginal cultures, which perceive it as a social, spiritual, cultural, and natural whole – they also correctly indicate that it is “a place where the logic of distinction goes astray”<sup>6</sup>. In this way, they join the ecological perspective that considers the intermingling of living species of the forest so intertwined that it is difficult to extract a representative representation from the forest – unless we adopt the modern scientific position which seeks to create distinct objects of knowledge and of which Bruno Latour has shown the lure<sup>7</sup>. Let us mention a single example of this multispecies alliance: the link between trees and fungi, whose joint evolution has been the subject of numerous studies<sup>8</sup>. Forests thus lead us to think about assemblages, which the various approaches contained in this book echo, particularly by showing the extent to which representations of the forest are linked to the forest itself. The entanglement of the processes of representation and those of the living<sup>9</sup>, put forward by semiotics and ecocriticism<sup>10</sup>, is more visible in the Nordic regions, where the hardships of the climate have, at least until recently<sup>11</sup>, led to a form of privileged attention to the environment. On the one hand, these reflections are ultimately based on a definition

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1980

<sup>5</sup> Sandilands 2017: 22

<sup>6</sup> Pogue Harrison 1992: x

<sup>7</sup> Latour 1991

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Simard and Durrall 2004

<sup>9</sup> “[C]onnection between representational processes ... and living ones” (Kohn 2013: 7).

<sup>10</sup> Iovino and Oppermann 2014

<sup>11</sup> “evolving toward a differential denordification” of the North (Hamelin 1975: 121. We translate.).

of the Nordic space as imaginary or as discourse<sup>12</sup>, and on the other hand as a semiotic, cultural, and physical reality.

## Usage, History, and Images of the Northern Forest

Contrary to the Mediterranean forest, which was entirely exploited by the Greeks and later the Romans<sup>13</sup>, Europe's Northern Forest was largely intact at the beginning of the Middle Ages. It opposed the agglomerations that survived at the decline of antiquity and was associated with the people in the margins of the society that it sheltered and distanced from the law, known as Pariahs, madmen, bandits, lepers, guerrillas, fugitives, etc.<sup>14</sup> The Christian church that dominated this era was hostile to the forest and considered it outside the human space and the last refuge of paganism. However, the hermits and saints who wished to live away from the corruption of society and closer to God also took refuge in this forest. In novels about knights, those who served religion were certainly searching for adventures in the forest to prove their courage but also to find their future there, guided by the forest's agency<sup>15</sup>. In a similar vein, the forest continued to be a place of transformation for fairy tale characters, a favourable space for their evolution if they knew how to decipher the signs<sup>16</sup>.

In the following period, the pastoral understanding of the forest turned it into a refuge of peace for humans suffering from the turmoil of civilisation<sup>17</sup> instead of a foreign place that gave refuge

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<sup>12</sup> Chartier 2018: 157

<sup>13</sup> Attenborough 1987

<sup>14</sup> Pogue Harrison 1992

<sup>15</sup> Cohen 2014: v

<sup>16</sup> Zipes 1987: 73

<sup>17</sup> This is particularly the case of Gabrielle Roy's hero, Alexandre Chenevert: "He imagined a deep forest. He went, making his way in perfect silence. He found an abandoned cabin. [...] There were no newspapers, no radio, no alarm clock. Alexander calmed down. His hands were beginning to loosen. His mouth wrinkled

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to the marginalised. The wild and dark side that was attributed to the forest before now finds its place in society and in people's hearts as they now should appreciate the tranquillity of the woods. However, as the state develops forest management and systematises the utilitarian objectification of trees as ligneous resources, forests become increasingly managed in Europe. Distanced by the modern paradigm which abstracts (human) observers from their environment, forestry goes hand in hand with a domesticated representation of nature and the forest<sup>18</sup>. In the same way, we conserved protected areas by creating parks and delimiting reserves for logging, which to this day contributes to the free spirit of the forest in favour of its integration into the Cartesian framework of border, law, and order. This epistemological framework and the "disenchanted" world that it created<sup>19</sup> have had a lasting effect on the relationship with the forest. The pastoral, which presents it as a source of harmony and serenity, is contrasted with the efforts of Romanticism to 'reenchant' the woods by emphasising the obscure and dark side. In this romantic context, the Northern Forest serves as a landmark: "The North is nostalgia, dark feelings, infinity."<sup>20</sup>

While the forest was still considered as unlimited as nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it becomes finite, fragile, useful, and desirable in the following century in parallel with the awareness of the effects of human activity on the environment. Although nature remained an external constraint that must be abolished to obtain autonomy<sup>21</sup>, many realise that individual and collective freedoms are dependent on the health of its ecosystems such as forests. However, in this, all forests are not on equal grounds.

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a little. The trees in the forest were shaken by the wind." (Roy, 1964: 24. Translated by the translator.)

<sup>18</sup> Latour 1991

<sup>19</sup> Bennett 2001

<sup>20</sup> Guéguan 1995: 12

<sup>21</sup> Charbonnier 2020

If the destruction of tropical forests has and is still garnering lots of attention, the same is not true for Northern Forests. Thus, while the fires that burned Amazonian, Australian, and Californian forests were largely mediatised in 2019 and 2020, the millions of hectares of Siberian Forest that burned during the same period faced indifference. Furthermore, the contemporary imaginary of the Northern Forest is attributed to its transformation: in many places, the primary forests have disappeared for the most part to leave space for tree planting. Consequently, this has reduced the diversity of these spaces and the capability of the forest to survive and regenerate. On top of environmental concerns, these hybrid natural areas<sup>22</sup> require humans and non-humans to negotiate new ways of living together. Numerous contemporary fictions participate in the elaboration of an intimate ecology that allows the development of a unique sensibility to spaces that populate the forest, which suffer from “the crisis of our sensibility to the living word”<sup>23</sup> as much as to the narrative of continuous growth.

### **The Semiotic and Cultural Realities of the Northern Forest**

The Northern Forest can easily be represented as what Michel Foucault calls “heterotopias”, places outside of civil society, delimited spatially, where the singular division of time can exist in many modes.<sup>24</sup> The indistinction that reigns there can constitute the forest, like spaces of mediation, as “spaces of (re) creation and appropriation of experience by inscribing us in the exchange”.<sup>25</sup> If it is the case that the forest is often represented as a place for testing or floating identity, it also allows for the emergence of a particular experience thanks to “its *virtual, open*

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<sup>22</sup> Mäekivi and Magnus 2020

<sup>23</sup> Zhong Mengual and Morizot 2018: 87

<sup>24</sup> Foucault 2009

<sup>25</sup> Klein and Brackelaire 1999: 68

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*and unfinished character*”, “its articulatory character at many levels” and its “*autopoietic character*”.<sup>26</sup> By envisioning the forest in its material and pragmatic dimensions, we notice that the forest creates possibilities for situations in which indetermination can be momentarily resolved, and present entities identified.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, and by remembering that one can only obtain a situated knowledge of the Northern Forest, the representations of the forest must be considered as parts of a phenomenon that includes observers and enunciators. The contributions in this book trace the terms of a poetic of the Northern Forest by particularly addressing the words used to name it, the sensory experiences it brings to life, and the effects it evokes. As we will see in these studies, experiencing the forest is not limited to sight, a sense that, depending on the season, is not always best suited for understanding the diversity of the forest. It largely involves the sense of smell, hearing, touch, and even taste (when we examine the varied food sources found there). In the same way, the various languages of the north are known for expressing the quality of the silence of the forest, the light that filters (or not) through the canopy, and the size and scales of different elements (including the opposition between the infinitely small and infinitely large). We could thus identify a way of describing the characteristics of the forest and make stories from it by pushing the Northern Forests to its limits. These include the geographic – where does the Northern Forest stop? –, as well as ontological – “I live in a forest without trees”, writes the Innu poet Joséphine Bacon; “The forest as deserted rooms of silence”, writes the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer. The forest possesses its own ways of doing and communicating, by an ensemble of interconnected signs that are both constant and variable.

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<sup>26</sup> Klein and Brackelaire 1999: 72-73. Italics in the original.

<sup>27</sup> Barad 2007

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Representations of the Northern Forest often include the humans who inhibit or pass through it: hikers, hunters, indigenous communities, loggers, etc. Through them, different discourses (cultural, ecological, economic, etc.), practices, and relationships with the forest are presented. As a natural and yet social space, the forest is also a gendered space, mainly accommodating men<sup>28</sup>, or conversely, sheltering women<sup>29</sup> and participating in the differentiated symbolisation of nature. The Northern Forest is also represented by its non-human inhabitants, who pose as obstacles or as support to human protagonists, sometimes occupying the core of a story, and favouring a representation of the forest and its elements from their perspective.

### ‘Right’ to the Forest<sup>30</sup>/‘Right’ of the Forest

The transformation and destruction of forest habitats, the consequent reduction in forest areas and biodiversity, the harmful effects of global warming, and the increasingly frequent and larger forest fires affecting the Northern Forest are warnings about its situation as well as its ability to regenerate and survive. While these forests seemed until recently to be infinite, their decline makes them a valuable good as an industrial or recreational resource and for their intrinsic value. These forests also become an identity marker for certain Nordic cultures which, as in the case of Estonian culture, perceive themselves as particularly attentive to the forest and value a distant and mythologised past that makes them ‘people of the forest’. This symbolism thence gives rise to new forms of interest in the forest that are no longer limited to its defence for ecological

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<sup>28</sup> As is the case, for example, in German children’s literature featuring the Canadian forest (see Sifert 2017).

<sup>29</sup> This is particularly the case in the novel by Marie Le Franc *Hélier, fils des bois* (LeFranc 1930).

<sup>30</sup> To use the title of the essay by the Inuit environmentalist from Nunavik Sheila Watt-Cloutier here: *The Right to Be Cold* (Watt-Cloutier 2015).

## INTRODUCTION

purposes or exploitation but are also motivated by a legitimate ‘right’ to the forest, as well as the ‘right’ of the forest as a legal entity. Various indigenous nations from the Nordic countries – whether it is the Atikamekw, who consider themselves “the blood of the forest”<sup>31</sup>, or the Yakuts of the Republic of Sakha, who claim to be its guardians – are also at the centre of this debate, since they have long promoted the importance and value of the forest by denouncing its overexploitation.

Historically perceived as places that require specific know-how necessary for survival, the Northern Forests are part of a heritage to be (re)discovered and preserved. Meanwhile, we see the proliferation of the portraits of trees<sup>32</sup>, artistic performances that value their singularity and individuality by identifying them as quasi-persons<sup>33</sup>, and scientific<sup>34</sup> and popular<sup>35</sup> books that become best sellers insisting on the intertwined collaboration of species and forest and on the connection between forests and the world. In both cases, we re-establish an attention for trees and the relationship between forest and its plural vitality, in which we participate. Replacing humans in this way as a simple element within the complex multispecies community formed by the forest would make it possible to think about the ‘law’ of the forest and suggests a symbolic reorganisation of the world where humans are no longer at the centre and where relationships take on their full meaning.

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<sup>31</sup> For example, see the play by playwright Véronique Basile Hébert, *Notimik, là d'où vient notre sang* (created for the Présences Autochtones Festival in 2021).

<sup>32</sup> To name at least one example: David Suzuki and Wayne Grady, *Tree: A Life Story* (Suzuki and Grady 2007).

<sup>33</sup> For example, the works by Annette Arlander:  
<https://meetingswithtrees.com/>.

<sup>34</sup> Tsing 2015

<sup>35</sup> Wohlleben 2016

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This book is organised into four main orientations that let us think about the forest in the context of the plural North: *Thinking the Forest*, *Forests of Emotions*, *Forests of Thought* and *Forests of Representations*. We wanted to put forward the continuous and intrinsic relationship between the living, the non-living, and the forest as well as the possibility of seeing the forest as a model of thought that evokes emotion and affects, induces ways of thinking, and which can be seen both as a representation and the source of cultural representations. We asked Timo Maran and Rachel Bouvet to reflect on how to think about the forest, something that they both did in a complementary way. Through the analysis of literary works, Bouvet reflects on the figure of the refuge, allowing her to trace the contours of an imaginary forest. Based on the romantic works of Marie Le Franc, Sylvain Tesson and Audrée Wilhelmy, she shows that the refuge – or the cabin – represents an intermediate space that allows the possibility to inhabit the forest, or at least interact with it, by creating a place of comfort and safety. Maran wishes to push semiotic towards eco-semiotic using the forest as a point of reflection, allowing him to get away from usual concepts linked to culture and communication. According to him, the forest is an ecosystem that can be used to define semiotic characteristics. He suggests that the forest as a system, through the surplus that it generates beyond its active processes, can serve as a model in other fields (for example in cultural and social studies). Reflecting on the forest thus appears to be a way of thinking about the order of the world and proposing models based on foundations other than those that we find in human activity.

The forest can also inspire emotion, affection, and even love. Sven Blehner opens the section on *Forests of Emotions* by looking at the affective relationship between humans and the forest. Based on analysis of Emily Fridlund's novel *History of Wolves*, he suggests that different types of forest can elicit different affects.

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He notes that contact with them can allow humans to evolve and change their behaviour. Using research-creation, Monique Durand explores the powerful symbolic charge conferred on the forest by humans, something that sometimes motivates them to write. According to Durand, the “inner forests”, deep and buried in different modes of thinking, open a universe that is both sacred and profane, both enchanting and dangerous, revealing stories and legends. Raili Marling is interested in a story where the forest is no longer a setting. On the contrary, it is both a character and a blank page. Analysing Richad Powers’ *The Observatory* allows Marling to see that a literary work can take a tree as a model with a network of threads in a complex root system that follows the growth rate of the forest. Finally, Rūta Šlapkauskaitė examines how the plant world could be a simultaneous source of inspiration, use, memory, and struggle in the work of the Canadian painter Emily Carr, as seen in Susan Vreeland’s novel that is dedicated to her, *The Forest Lover*. Carr, influenced by indigenous thought, developed a subjectivity that allowed her to construct a relationship with the plant world.

In the *Forest of Thought* section, Luule Epner and Anneli Saro study how the forest, which plays a detrimental role in the perception of the self and the world among Finno-Urgic people, and particularly among Estonians, could be represented on the theatre stage as image, landscape, and environment. Anne-Marie Dionne tries to see if the representations of the forest in stories about deportations of Acadians can have an influence on the contemporary conceptions of the forest amongst the youth. In both cases, the authors explore the link between perception and cultural representation of the forest. Ene-Reet Soovik observes, by studying two poems by Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinki, that the eco-semiotic link can also be modulated by other external fields using examples such as economic exploitation of the forest or the political situations. Finally, the literary representations of

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the forest can reveal seminal modes of thinking, as Žila Dalibor shows by exploring the mentality of the garrison in a new novel by Christian Guay-Poliquin that casts the forest as a dangerous space and an isolated house as a space of protection.

Finally, in the section on *Forests of Representations*, Jane Remm looks at landscape painting to capture the spirit of an era and an attitude towards nature. In reviewing Estonian paintings of the forest, she notes that they have above all been represented from far away, perhaps because, among other reasons, it obstructs the overall view that presides over the idea of the landscape from the inside. In the case of interior representations, however, the examined paintings summon a multisensory experience. By studying the videographic work of the Finnish Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Sara Bédard-Goulet notes that the artist questions the anthropocentric representation of the forest and that she proposes another way of living with the forest that allows modification of the human nonhuman relationship. For her part, Merili Metsvahi suggest that this relationship has evolved over time. By analysing the werewolf and its representation over the last five centuries, she observes that the state of mind towards nature has changed and that human relationships with the rest of the living world were more harmonious historically.

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THINKING THE FOREST  
PENSER LA FORêt



# Deep Ecosemiotics: Forest and Semiotic Modelling<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – Many concepts used in semiotics today are derived from linguistics, philosophy, literature studies and other fields. For a genuinely ecosemiotic approach, we need to develop modelling tools that go beyond imagery based on human culture and communication. In this chapter, I develop an ecosemiotic research model that uses ‘forest’ as its primary ground. For this, first modelling as an analytic method is introduced based on the Tartu–Moscow school of cultural semiotics. Thereafter I describe properties of the forest as an ecosystem as well as its experiential meaning for humans. Deriving from this basis, five key features of the forest as a semiotic model are brought forth: 1) meanings and codes are shared partially in variations; 2) tolerating meanings is a basic type of semiotic relation; 3) a basic unit of analysis in the forest is a knot or focal point; 4) qualities of the forest have a strong ontology and history; 5) there is a surplus of semiotic material beyond the semiotic processes currently active. As a model, the forest is considered to be locally shaped and regulated, accidental and overwhelming, but at the same time well integrated. The forest model can be applied in studying common objects of ecosemiotics, but it can also be mirrored to the objects of general, cultural or social semiotics. The chapter concludes with suggestions on developing the forest model in the practical research.

**Keywords** – Arne Naess, ecosemiotics, ecological codes, forest ecology, Jakob von Uexküll, modelling systems, Estonian nature writing, semiotic modelling, surplus of signs, tolerance of meanings

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A distinctive feature of semiotics compared to other disciplines is its potential for self-reflectivity. Semiotics is suitable not only for describing semiosis and structures in human culture but it also allows for critical analysis of the very methods, premises and practices that it uses for research. The methods of the semiotic discipline themselves consist of sign processes, and therefore they themselves can be included among the objects of semiotic research. If our aim is to broaden the scope of semiotics with new subject matter, to shift it from the study of language, literature and other human cultural phenomena towards the study of sign exchange in other species, environments and ecosystems, then such ability for self-reflection becomes essentially important. The attention to methodology is necessary, as concepts used and questions asked will always partly constrain the later results of the study. On the positive side, self-awareness and the ability to self-reflect give semiotics greater flexibility to actively develop its methodological approaches to scatter across new territories.

Describing the nature–culture relation from the semiotic perspective appears to be challenging because available methods, concepts and their premises are generally derived from the study of human semiosis and sign systems. The major conceptual tools of semiotics have origins in linguistics (for example distinction of content/form), information theory (for example communication, code), logic (for example proposition, reference) or literary theory (for example text, narrative). Each and every one of these concepts is encumbered by the specific set of premises and presumptions of the respective parent disciplines, for instance notions of code and communication derived from the practical research in technically mediated communication in the 1940s, where a main challenge was developing informational codes that would be resistant to noise and errors in telephone communication.<sup>2</sup> These codes and communications presume

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<sup>2</sup> Shannon and Weaver 1963

similitude of the sender and the receiver, one-directional communication, and a single channel separate and isolated from other possible channels of communication.

A major discrepancy between ecosemiotics, which aims to study the semiotics of ecosystems and culture–nature relations, and the conceptual framework of general semiotics results from the logocentrism and linguacentrism of the latter. Concepts in general semiotics often operate as discrete units, oppositions, typological distinctions or categorisation devices. Applying such concepts to ecosemiotic subject matter does not take into account that much of our semiosic relations with humans, with representatives of other species and with the environment is pre-linguistic and multi-modal. Matching rich, multi-layered and fuzzy pre-linguistic semiosic relations to formal concepts is highly reductive and produces a simplified and twisted understanding of ecosemiotics' subject matter.<sup>3</sup> My discernment here is in line with the “Ecosemiotic principles of deep ecology” that were developed in the early 2000s in Tartu by Kalevi Kull and colleagues:

Diversity, or heterogeneity, is a fundamental value. It is more general than any measurable value. Diversity results from the capacity of living beings to make a difference, to recognise, to distinguish. [...] Although culture is a powerful system for generating diversity, it has, especially during Modernity, extensively eradicated heterogeneity and increased uniformity. Fewer different forms are used in the action of building and reshaping than were found in what these activities replace. Additionally, the broad application of measurable values results in the proliferation of unification

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<sup>3</sup> See semiotic criticism of framing nature in Augustyn 2013.

and standardisation, with a corresponding reduction in diversity.<sup>4</sup>

Proclaiming *deep eosemiotics* thus emphasises the recognition that for a fruitful eosemiotic analysis, it is not enough to apply existing semiotic concepts to environmental topics and problems, but the methodology itself needs transformation. *Deep eosemiotics* makes an allusion to Arne Næss's deep ecology movement<sup>5</sup> in order to indicate that what is needed is the revision of semiotic theory and methodology. For a truly eosemiotic research framework, we need to anchor our modelling in a very different type of conceptual ground.

Many of our relations with the environment do not require linguistic mediation. Our encounters with rain, wind, the ground and other elements rely on the long evolutionary experience of human ancestors, and meanings in these relations will be attributed quickly and naturally. As we look for the passage in the dense forest undergrowth, our legs search for the firm ground in moss and our bodies adjust themselves in search for better balance. That is, our meaning making in the environment largely derives from the historical connections in and between our bodies, our Umwelt, the physical environment and other living organisms inhabiting the same environment.<sup>6</sup> At the non-verbal level, meaningful correspondence will be achieved between our Umwelt and surrounding environmental structures in a rather similar way to what happens in other animal species. Thomas A. Sebeok has described such a pre-linguistic semiotic process as zoosemiotic modelling, in which perceptions in a species-specific Umwelt will be fitted with suitable actions or behaviours.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kull 2011: 71

<sup>5</sup> Næss 1989

<sup>6</sup> See Abram 1996 and Ziemke et al. 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Sebeok 1991a: 57

Another central biosemiotic insight is that meaning making takes place in numerous layers of our body, each having its own semiotic agency and competence. Thomas A. Sebeok has indicated this process by the concept of ‘semiotic self’<sup>8</sup>, which is a configuration of sub-selves formed by compartments of our body that are equipped with some sign systems able to handle, store and retrieve information: genetic system, immune system, neural system, etc. The processes in these different semiotic systems may combine and accumulate. For instance, when going outdoors and into sunshine, our skin starts synthesising vitamin D. T-cells and leucocytes that are part of our immune system start interpreting pollen and other organic compounds of the inhaled air. The pineal gland increases the production of melatonin. Semiotic processes at the biochemical level lead to the rise of our activity and mood, and at some point, we may be able express our positive feelings in words. This corresponds to what Michael Polanyi has called “tacit knowledge” – a sign process in which a number of sign entities that remain below the threshold of our attention pile up to form a discretely perceivable sign.<sup>9</sup> In Polanyi’s thinking, such a from-to sign structure is common in making our linguistic knowledge – which remains a mere surface reflection of the richer experiential, bodily or environmental knowledges.<sup>10</sup> Our perception of the surrounding environment is also intrinsically multisensorial and compound; we perceive colours, patterns, forms, sounds and smells as well as dynamics and rhythms in all these media. Such perception of the environment is often synesthetic or synchronic, and it can even be said that in environmental relations the human is engaged as a swarm of semiotic subjects.

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<sup>8</sup> Sebeok 1991b

<sup>9</sup> Polanyi 1966: 18

<sup>10</sup> Polanyi 1958: 71; 1967: 315

The present chapter is motivated by the recognition that eco- semiotic processes are not adequately understood today, and that there is lack of conceptual and methodological tools for analysing these. The potential of semiotics for self-reflection could, however, make such theory development possible. My aim in these pages is to consider the forest as a possible model for a semiotic analysis and to ask what kinds of possibility and property such a modelling image could bring forth. Thus my interest is in finding new modelling devices or methodological tools for ecosemiotics through analogy-based reasoning. My concern is not to treat the forest as a semiotic system – which I think it is – but rather to ask if we use the forest as a semiotic model to analyse some other object, what new perspectives would such an approach bring? The approach taken here may at first glance resemble Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *rhizome*<sup>11</sup>, which was also inspired by a botanical entity. There are, nevertheless, crucial differences between their and my approach. While *rhizome* assumes the univalence of all the points: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be”,<sup>12</sup> in the forest model this is not the case as the points or places in the forest are ontologically different. In addition, for Deleuze and Guattari the negative antipode of rhizome is a tree, whereas in my view a tree as an integral part of the forest has positive meaning. Another close conceptual model of literary and cultural theory is Umberto Eco's ‘text as forest’.<sup>13</sup> In “From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation” especially, Umberto Eco advocated a web-like approach to conceptual networks that provide an “open-ended conception of knowledge”.<sup>14</sup> The forest as model can be used beyond the common objects of ecosemiotic analysis and can be mirrored to the typical objects of general, cultural or social

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<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1987

<sup>12</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7

<sup>13</sup> Eco 1998

<sup>14</sup> Eco 2014: 55. See also Campbell 2016.

semiotics. Analysing literary texts or human society through the lens of ‘semiotics of the forest’ could indeed provide some fresh understandings.

## Modelling as a Semiotic Method

Semiotic processes are often equated with modelling: Juri Lotman and his colleagues in the Tartu–Moscow semiotic school described natural language and other human sign systems as modelling systems; Thomas A. Sebeok reinterpreted Uexküll’s Umwelt as a model.<sup>15</sup> Later, Sebeok and Danesi defined modelling as the use of forms for comprehending and processing perceived information in a species-specific way.<sup>16</sup> Modelling in semiotics has a relatively wide meaning, as a process of making sense of some process or phenomena, with the help of (internal or external) representations that are at least partly based on analogies.<sup>17</sup> Models retain a certain type of iconicity or analogy-based relation with their object and therefore have a capacity of representing this object and thus can later be applied back to the object. Ladislav Tondl writes that a “model is able to substitute for the original . . . [and] permits some important functions of decision-making or evaluations concerning the original”.<sup>18</sup> Models can be considered tools of making sense of or handling more complex semiotic objects of the world. An easily accessible type of model on the linguistic level is metaphor; and we may note the plenitude of metaphor-based concepts in biosemiotics (for example *scaffolding*, *code maker*, *semiotic animal*). This is probably not mere coincidence but has to do with the complexity and strangeness of the biosemiotic objects that guide the biosemiotics paradigm towards using concepts based on figurative resemblances instead of precise formal concepts.

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<sup>15</sup> Sebeok 1986: 80

<sup>16</sup> Sebeok and Danesi 2000: 5-6

<sup>17</sup> Lotman 1967: 130

<sup>18</sup> Tondl 2000: 85

Modelling takes place in the semiotic realm on very different levels of semiotic complexity. We can consider a mental map of a migratory bird to be a model which incorporates inherent and experiential knowledge, the image of certain landmarks, and the position of the sun and the constellations, among other sources of environmental information; this mental map can be thought of as a model of its migratory route. More complex forms of modelling are present in human culture either in the form of ‘technical modelling’, in which the model is created based on strict algorithmic relations and has systemic correspondence with an original,<sup>19</sup> or as ‘artistic modelling’, where a loose set of codes is used to create a poetically organised and complex image (for example figurative artworks, literature adaptations for stage or cinema). In this chapter we are interested in the modelling that takes place on the meta-level, that is, the possibilities of semiotics to use modelling as a method in analysing objects under study.

On the meta-level, at least three types of modelling device can be distinguished. Models can be built on the basis of:

1. artistic or specialised language (that is, languages of a discipline, languages of a cultural era, idiosyncratic languages of an author);
2. conceptual systems or typologies (for example terminologies of Greimassian or Peircean semiotics);
3. analogies or metaphoric relations to dominant cultural topics (anthropomorphism, technomorphism, linguamorphism<sup>20</sup>).

These different types of model represent their objects not in all aspects but in a certain respect, and the specifics of this relation have semiotic significance and meaning. “The model represents a homomorphic representation, i.e. not identical to the original. It means the representation in the sense of the Latin ‘pars pro

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<sup>19</sup> For example architectural drawings, strength calculations, see Rosen 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Komarek 2009: 108 ff

toto,’ the part instead of the whole’.<sup>21</sup> It is in this relation between the original and the model where the language, the cultural tradition, the discipline, the code and so on of the interpreter, become involved and make the difference. Consequently, there is a reason to distinguish and analyse *grounds of modelling*. On meta-level, semiotics would allow us also to critically attend and modify these grounds that we use for making sense of the objects of our study. We may also develop new models by playfully modifying the existing grounds of modelling.

When creating and using modelling in semiotic inquiry, we should be aware that this ground of modelling is never neutral (as it is selected consciously or unconsciously by us). For instance, if we depict material processes based on narrative logic, then our depiction belongs to the sphere of anthropomorphic modelling.<sup>22</sup> Narrative assumes the involvement of language, since the description of a sequence of events requires syntactic elements. Such a modelling approach could be beneficial, as it accumulates and highlights the causality of the process (for instance, human involvement in environmental degradation) and may introduce empathy in humans, which would help them understand and appreciate environmental processes. At the same time, it should be recognised that narrative description is a part of symbolic interpretation and is therefore itself alien to the material world. Applying narrative logic in such a case will introduce distortion of the described material processes.

## **Forest as an Environment**

In the following, I will carry out a thought experiment by taking the forest as a ground for modelling semiotic systems. For this, I will first consider the forest as an environment from

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<sup>21</sup> Tondl 2000: 83

<sup>22</sup> See longer discussion in Maran 2014.

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the perspectives of scientific ecology and phenomenological experience. My analysis is based on the knowledge of naturally-grown temperate forests. There are many other and more exotic forest ecosystems on Earth (tropical rain forests, mangrove swamp forests, etc.), and taking one of these as a point of departure would probably yield somewhat different argumentations compared to the present one. In addition, cultivated and monocultural tree plantations taken as a model of thinking would lead us to a very different type of reasoning. A natural forest is a type of ecological community or consortium<sup>23</sup> that has a specific structure and dynamics. In ecological vocabulary the main autotrophs and primary producers of biomass in a forest are trees, which provide ecological niches for many other organisms. A specific component of a forest ecosystem is the decay cycle with different decomposers (insects, worms, fungi) and a bulk of fallen leaves and woody debris that provides nutrients to insects and other invertebrates, fungi, rodents and many other creatures living on the forest floor.<sup>24</sup> A large amount of biomass in forests is below ground (up to 60 %<sup>25</sup>).

For an ecological view, a characteristic of the forest is the presence of several interconnected structural layers. These can be mapped spatially, temporally or structurally, as different layers of the vertical structure in vegetation, different stages of succession or different levels of the ecological pyramid. Natural forests are characterised by the presence of trees of different ages and different species: there are always young trees, overgrown trees, fallen trees as well as an under-bush and herb layer with seedlings. Such layering provides structural or spatial diversity, in the sense that due to differences in microgeography, development of trees and the effect of wind and fire, forests are

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<sup>23</sup> Kull 2010

<sup>24</sup> Chapin et al. 2011: 183 ff

<sup>25</sup> Lukac and Godbold 2011: 26

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usually patterned or patchy. The large amount of biomass and patterned structure create suitable living conditions for many species that belong to the higher levels in the ecological pyramid. It also provides conditions for many different ecological niches and living strategies as well as space for a complex network of interspecies relations.

As with many other ecosystems, forests are also autopoietic entities in the sense that they are capable of renewing themselves and restoring themselves after natural or human-induced disturbances.<sup>26</sup> Many forest ecosystems are resilient to quite significant change (for example clearings caused by storms or forestry management), and some are even dependent on the physical effect of elemental forces (for example forest fires, floods) in their rejuvenation.<sup>27</sup> As an ecosystem, forests significantly modify their own conditions; for instance, temperature and humidity in forests can be much different compared to the surrounding open environments. Such dynamics are not based on any fixed or hierarchical control system but are a result of the abundance of living matter in forests and of the local regulatory feedback cycles between different species.

In the human phenomenological perspective, forests are often perceived as greater wholes or contexts that surround the individual human agency. There appear to be two contrasting interpretations of how this perception can develop: 1) becoming a member of the forest as a community, or 2) dissolving into the forest. In the forest, humans tend to become subjected to the intentions and agency of other beings and natural forces. This is a basis of multispecies ethnography as initiated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro<sup>28</sup> and elaborated by Eduardo Kohn<sup>29</sup>,

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<sup>26</sup> Messier et al. 2013

<sup>27</sup> Peh et al. 2015

<sup>28</sup> Castro 1992; 1998

<sup>29</sup> Kohn 2013

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Phillipe Descola<sup>30</sup> and others based on the experience of anthropological studies in South America. In American Indian forest communities, other species tend to show their agency towards humans in a way that results in the interplay of different human and more-than-human perspectives. Transformations, metamorphoses and role-reversals are the integral parts of this semiotic web. Multispecies ethnography apparently comes close to Jakob von Uexküll's (1982) understanding of *Nature* as an intertwined web of different Umwelts, whereas in this web species become reflected in the eyes of others and become objects of meanings attributed by other animal subjects.<sup>31</sup>

Perception of the forest as a multispecies web presumes, however, that humans are able to distinguish between species, to know their identity and behaviour. If this is not the case, the agency becomes abstract and the forest as a whole animated. A precise metaphoric concept for this overwhelming livingness of the forest was proposed by the Norwegian deep ecologist Arne Næss. In his critical essay of infrastructure development in forests, he uses the concept 'heart of the forest' to denote this wholeness:

Many cultures express awe of the heart of the forest. To be in the heart of the forest has been, and still is, considered something very special, something quite different from merely walking along its outskirts or knowing or feeling the direction in which you should walk to reach the edge of the forest. [...] "distance" here has much to do with our imagination: you look one way, forest, forest, forest ...; you look another way, forest, forest, forest, FOREST. The forest fills

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<sup>30</sup> Descola 2013

<sup>31</sup> von Uexküll 1982

your mind; you are not a subject and the forest is not an object. The dualism is overcome.<sup>32</sup>

The forest as an animated whole tends to overwhelm the human and dissolve his/her individual identity. In cultural interpretations, this can be played out in a positive way as a romantic desire to become one with the forest or in a negative way as a fear of losing one's identity and becoming lost in the forest. Both imaginations are, in my understanding, related to the ecological properties of the forest, i.e. its ability to transform any agencies and matter due to its autopoietic capacities and overwhelming decay cycle. A negative accent of the encounter with the forest is present in many descriptions of going astray in the forest. For instance, the Estonian nature writer Juhan Lepasaar has described his experience of losing his way in the large forests of Alutaguse in eastern Estonia:

Go to the great woods of Alutaguse and look up as you walk, towards the tops of the trees branching out; leave the ground unnoticed, never pay attention to it. Minutes go by, the weather is windless and cloudy, the winter has shaped the trees uniformly, so similar to one another, so alike in appearance. And henceforth, without you noticing, Alutaguse has caught you in its web. [...] Even some fear creeps into the chest as images of vague danger become stronger and reality recedes. We wade through the snow for yet another kilometre or so, then I start feeling a cramp in my left leg from overexertion. I am stumbling along with difficulty now. No, I cannot remain in the forest, I have to go on. My hat and my fur coat are stiff from the cold and covered

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<sup>32</sup> Næss 1997: 258-259

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with frost like the trees of the forest, the only difference seems to be that the forest is standing still, while I, in my coat and hat, am trying to move on at all costs<sup>33</sup>.

In such literary interpretations, a certain shift tends to take place between the subjectivity of the protagonists. The author is willing to denounce his position as a specialist with good knowledge, as he acknowledges his restrictions and admits the possibility of making mistakes. The difference between the human and the forest diminishes as the human becomes “covered with frost like the trees of the forest”, the only distinguishing feature being his will to move on. To conclude, in human experimental relations with the forest, the usual agency relations tend to be transformed, something that this has to do with the ecological and semiotic richness of the forest as an ecosystem.

### Forest as a Semiotic Model

Taking the forest as a ground for semiotic modelling could identify and highlight properties of the analysed objects that more conventional semiotic models would overlook. In the following discussion, I will juxtapose the ecological and experiential features of the forest with ecosemiotic theory to show five key properties of the forest as a semiotic model:

#### 1. Diverse and distributed communication codes

Forests are inhabited by a great number of species with different physiologies and Umwelts. These species also use different communicative means – sign systems and communication codes – yet at the same time they are able to communicate with one another and give positive or negative feedback to one another.

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<sup>33</sup> Lepasaar 1989: 119. I translate.

What makes such partial communication possible are particular, local and place-specific communicational conventions that can be called *ecological codes*.<sup>34</sup>

Ecological codes are not general rules but distributed conventions: every participant has a partial variation of a code. An example of such ecological codes are the common warning colour patterns. In insects, yellow and black patterning, which signifies poisonousness and inedibility exists, in many different variations, and different insectivorous bird species are able to interpret this to different degrees.<sup>35</sup> Thus, warning coloration has a shared meaning to a number of species, although only partially, and in variation.

The same principle of ecological codes can be broadened to the forest as a semiotic model. When you move in the forest, the environment that surrounds you changes. With every step, new views and perspectives will open up, and the previous views, experiences and options will close. You will move from partial variations of the semiotic code to new variations. There is no single background system, but the semiotic rules or codes themselves change. Using the forest as a semiotic model would thus emphasise that every location has its own semiotic character or quality. Situatedness in the forest is the case by default, and the neutral position of the observer is a special condition.

## 2. Tolerance of meaning

The forest is rich in ecological relations between different species. In these relations, two or more species – which often have very different life habits and life necessities – interact. It would follow that meaning relations are mutual, i.e. meanings are not

<sup>34</sup> Maran 2012; Kull 2010

<sup>35</sup> See discussion in Maran 2017: 123-137.

just perceived and interpreted but also attributed, and on behalf of the communication partner, accepted and carried. These two sides of the semiotic relationship develop simultaneously and reciprocally. When you walk into a forest, you may notice different birds, recognise their species and attribute meanings to them. At the same time, other living organisms perceive your presence and attribute meanings to you based on their Umwelt structures. Let us recall here again Arne Næss' "heart of the forest". His phenomenological intuition appears to be based on the meaning attribution by a number of living organisms in the forest. Næss writes:

To meet a big, wild animal in its own territory may be frightening, but it gives us an opportunity to better understand who we are and our limits of control: the existence of greatness other than the human. The same applies to meeting the greatness of the forest. We are not in control.<sup>36</sup>

Even tragic encounters, such as Val Plumwood's experience of a crocodile attack,<sup>37</sup> could transform the perception of our relatedness with the environment to become more mutual and inclusive.

What is specific about the forest as a semiotic model is this general architecture of relations. Every species is in relation to the manifold relations to other inhabitants of the forest, and therefore the acceptance of or submission to meanings tends to outweigh the outbound semiotic activity of the subject. This process, which Jakob von Uexküll calls the *tolerance of meanings* (*Bedeutungserduldung*),<sup>38</sup> is a dominant form of the semiotic

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<sup>36</sup> Næss 1997: 259

<sup>37</sup> Plumwood 1996

<sup>38</sup> von Uexküll 1982: 59-62

activity in the forest. The tolerance of meaning appears to be a central notion to understand human involvement in any complex semiotic systems. It is not enough to know the sign systems and codes to be used in a semiotic system, but the more crucial question is, to what degree do semiotic subjects of a given system endow a human with meaning? Ecosemiotician Riin Magnus expresses a similar thought:

The organism's existence as both a subject and an object (qua phenomenon) is revealed in its functioning in the ecosystem as an actor and an acted-upon, consumer and consumed, and, last but not least, as having meaning and as being a generator of meanings.<sup>39</sup>

In regard to the forest, the meaningful relation between the human subject and the forest depends on how other living beings perceive us, how they make sense of us and our activities and how they act upon us. Even the mosquito that bites me in a forest endows some meaning to me.

To illustrate this principle, I would like to recall here an old friend, an amateur naturalist, who tends to take long walks in the forests around his home cottage. His slow movements were always accompanied by the clinking sound of the keychain that he carried around his neck and by mumblings of the rich repertoire of old folk songs that he continued without beginning or end. And amazingly, he saw more animals from closer distances than any other nature enthusiast. My hypothesis is that animals of the surrounding forests were so used to his presence that they recognised him by the sounds he made and endowed him with the meaning of a strange but relatively harmless creature of the forest. How different this approach is from the attitude of

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<sup>39</sup> Magnus 2012: 159

the modern man, who, by being always worried about his/her individuality and by showing little tolerance of the meanings attributed to him/her, sentences him/herself to solitude and alienation from the rest of the environment.

### 3. Local diversity of sign structures

Deriving from the two previous points, in the semiotic model of the forest, the basic unit of analysis should be a knot, a focal point where semiotic activities of different participants and local conditions meet and actualise. The focal points in the forest are distributed unevenly and have different qualitative properties. They are active, creative and poetic, and the meanings that grow in them cannot be deduced from the surrounding conditions or from the inner properties of the involved organisms of objects. This understanding comes close to the notion of ‘lifelines’ developed by British anthropologist Tim Ingold:

The lifelines of organisms issue from the sites of their symbiotic connection, but in a direction that runs not from one to the other but forever in between, as the river flows between its banks in a direction orthogonal to their transverse connection. The life of the spider thus runs in counterpoint to that of the fly: to the melodic line of the first, the second figures as a refrain.<sup>40</sup>

In the forest, the lines of semiotic histories run between the many participants, and therefore a knot where multiple lines intertwine would be a more precise mental image to think about the semiotic organisation of the forest. A knot is considered here to be a local point of encounter, a merging and interaction of the multiple participants or semiotic agencies of the world. It

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<sup>40</sup> Ingold 2011: 84

is not an exaggeration to say that the forest grows through these knots, or, to put it a different way, the local configurations in the forest-like semiotic model change and recreate the reality of the forest as a broader system.

The knot as a basic unit of analysis also indicates that describing the forest in its entirety is not possible. This is on one hand due to the local creative dynamics and on the other hand due to the limitlessness of the forest. In its entirety, the forest is more complex, the number of different possible relations more vast, than any possible description of the forest. This is due not only to the limited scope of human measurement capacity, but also, and even more so, to the fact that our language-based modelling devices themselves are too simple and reductive to represent a huge variety of possible relations. Some years ago I expressed the same idea in more poetic language:

Forests represent a type of phenomenon in the world that has its own existence, and which the human cannot bring under his/her control, and not perhaps even describe or understand fully. The forest represents this principle. I have used the term ‘forest-sacredness’ [*metsapiüha* in Estonian] to denote this, by indicating the type of sublimeness of the ancient forest, the feeling that it has its own story that frames you more than anything you can possibly say or write about it.<sup>41</sup>

The forest as a system also surrounds and contextualises any specific organism or entity in the forest, turning it inevitably into a locality or knot. The same logic appears to be valid in regard to large semiotic systems of humans, such as culture or language, as their all-encompassing description is also problematic. It

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<sup>41</sup> Vabar 2008: 1085. I translate.

is important to recognise that the capacity of the forest-like semiotic system to exceed the limits of our description is a fact with great importance. It is this very resistance to descriptions made in any single code that allows cultures, languages and forests to self-organise and be resilient to the disturbances.

#### 4. Strong ontological presence

In forests, features, meanings and qualities are not just accidental and ephemeral phenomena but strong ontological properties of the living beings and the environment. Meanings and qualities do not derive from the subjects' interpretations, but meaning potentials are embodied in the bodies of animals and in the physical structures of the ground. The forest as an environment makes possible certain interpretations and constrains others. The presence of a strong semiotic ontology of the landscape was described as "perceptual affordance" by J. J. Gibson.<sup>42</sup> To make a practical example, if you take the wrong turn in a forest, you are in danger of getting lost. An animal that is not attentive enough to its surroundings is in danger of being caught and preyed upon. The forest gives quick and effective feedback to the perceptions, interpretations and actions of a semiotic subject.

The strong ontology is related to the historical dynamics of the forest. It is partly there due to certain temporal and spatial logics of how different plant and tree species replace one another in the process that ecologists call ecological succession. On the other hand, the strong ontology allows us to interpret the history of the forest – to the professional eye, the forest is an open book about growth of trees, about past clearings and human actions, forest fires and wind damage. Such interpretation would not be possible without a certain reality in the forms of the landscape. For the forest as a semiotic model, this means that

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<sup>42</sup> Gibson 1986

semiotic structures are motivated: the content and form of the meaning units are related to each other, and arbitrariness is rare, occasional and constrained. Instead of arbitrariness, the forest model is abundant with history of forms. The essential sign type in the forest-like semiotic system is not a symbol but an indexical sign that denotes its own descendants. Understanding of that type of sign is characteristic to Finno-Ugric semiotic thought as well as to other indigenous cultures that still have a living tradition and memory of hunting activities in the forest.<sup>43</sup> This sign type can be called *jälg* in Estonian, *jälki* in Finnish ('trace' or 'track' in English); the same ancient word root has given the general notion of the sign *jel* to Hungarian, which is a third large Finno-Ugric language.

## 5. Surplus of semiotic material

The forest in an ecological sense is characterised by many decay chains, the existence of abundant debris and dead organic matter. Also in the forest as a semiotic model, semiotic processes flourish and overwhelm, and there is a surplus of semiotic material. Various signs and texts are used simultaneously, in support of one another or in a contradicting or comparative way. This overflow of the signs is another reason why the forest as a semiotic model cannot be formal or arbitrary – forms and contents are in loose relation and do not build a unified semiotic system.

The forest as a semiotic model also consists of a lot of semiotic material that is not actively used or interpreted in a given moment but that is in a passive stage or is forgotten, or that remains in various stages of degradation and decay. Unused and forgotten semiotic sources have a huge potential to be reused, reorganised, filled with new meanings and put into use in new relations, in new knots of the forest as a system. Emphasising

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<sup>43</sup> See Voigt 1999.

the relevance of the decay change would also mean that reuse, adaptation and remodelling are common strategies of such a semiotic system: emerging signs co-opt earlier semiotic structures, which can be remainders of the previous semiotic material or can have a foreign origin.<sup>44</sup> To apply forest-based semiotic modelling to other semiotic phenomena (texts, cultures, languages), the creative potential of the partial, incomplete and decaying semiotic material needs to be taken into account (recently Donna Haraway, too, has argued for the “compost” and “compost-ist” as suitable terms to describe human creative effort in the Anthropocene to overcome boundaries of culture, species and kin<sup>45</sup>). This would also mean blurring binaries: the borders of the forest, life and dead matter, culture and nature.

In conclusion, let us now sum up the basic properties that were introduced when describing the forest as a semiotic model. I have claimed that in the forest as a semiotic system, meanings and codes are shared partially in variation; being in the forest means tolerating meanings and becoming an object of meaning attribution; the basic unit of analysis in the forest is a knot or focal point where semiotic activities and local conditions meet; characters, meanings and qualities have strong ontology and history; and there is a surplus of semiotic material beyond the semiotic processes currently active. To provide an even shorter description, the forest as a semiotic model would describe an object of analysis as heterogeneous, locally regulated and accidental, but at the same time well integrated.

## A Way Forward

My claim in this chapter has been that to develop an ecologically sensitive semiotics, a principal change in our conceptual tools

<sup>44</sup> See semiotic co-option in Kleisner 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Haraway 2016

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is needed. I have also praised semiotics for a capacity of self-reflection, emphasised modelling as a central methodological tool for semiotic research and sketched an ecosemiotic research model based on the image of the forest ecosystem. Now it is possible to make some preliminary suggestions about applying forest-like semiotic models in the research.

Using forest-like semiotic models is not limited to the study of real forests, landscapes and other common ecosemiotic objects. It can also be used to study literature and other cultural artefacts and phenomena with promising results. A preliminary attempt to apply this type of methodology in literature research was carried out two years ago in a study of Estonian nature writing focusing on two essayists, Juhani Lepasaar and Edgar Kask, both from the Alutaguse region in eastern Estonia. We made an attempt to map the heterogeneity of their writing beyond any formal dichotomies of author/text, culture/nature, content/form, etc. I provide here a longer quotation from the published results of this study as it may help to illustrate the possible applications of the forest as a semiotic model:

The books of both authors have recognisably similar structures: they are extremely heterogeneous collections that include reflections about the Alutaguse landscapes, the various components, species, and places of these; stories of local people, their opinions and folklore; chapters dedicated to different wild animals and encounters with them; observations on phenological data and environmental change; recollections of personal experiences, poems and autobiographical information. Different storylines involving people, culture, and nature run parallel in these books, the text as a whole creates a meshwork out of the

individual story lines. As such, the structure of the books represents the artistic modelling and marks a sensitive relation to the local conditions. The authorial position manifested in such structures is characterised by the lack of binary oppositions in positioning human and animals, nature and culture, the past and the future. [...]

In the case of nature writing about the Alutaguse region by Kask and Lepasaar, the dominant feature appears to be the local diversity of the environmental experience and the meshwork-like-connections between the Alutaguse wilderness and the people living there. By having an intense local experience, the author, his life, recollections and style of expression are turned into a medium and a bridge between the reader and the environment, understood as a meshwork of culture and the diversity of nature, memories of the past and potentials of the present. The authors' personae are manifested in different stories, experiences and localities to the degree that the distinction between the author, the text and the referent, i.e., the natural environment, appears to dissolve.<sup>46</sup>

Our experience in this analysis as well as in other eosemiotic case studies has been that pre-established ontological categories are often too limiting to describe the distinctive features of the object analysed. As indicated before, *the forest of semiotic relations* is always larger and more comprehensive compared to an observer. Therefore it is rather difficult to find the neutral position of the by-stander, a viewpoint from which to make

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<sup>46</sup> Maran and Tüür 2017: 295-296, 298

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an objective description. A more fruitful way to work with the forest as a semiotic system would be through the participatory approaches. Participatory involvement is necessarily partial and has temporal and spatial localisation. But how could this help us to gain any understanding about the forest-like semiotic systems in their entirety? The answer would be, through repetition. Go into the forest, become a knot and describe the meanings around you. Or dive into culture, or into text. If possible, describe the meanings that the forest attributes to you. Change the position, change a role and repeat. Take another focal point and repeat. Take samples, wander around, a bit like a field ecologist. Do not work with general concepts but dig into semiotic decay, study fragments and rudiments of signs. In its applications, deep ecosemiotics would mean getting one's hands dirty, becoming involved and going deep into the forest, literally.

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# Forêts et cabanes. Les figures du refuge<sup>1</sup>

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**Résumé** – Ce chapitre examine les différentes figures du refuge liées à l'imaginaire de la forêt afin de comprendre la dynamique qui les sous-tend. Trois récits sont analysés tour à tour : le roman *Hélier, fils des bois* (1930) de Marie Le Franc, écrivaine d'origine bretonne installée au Québec, se déroulant dans la forêt laurentienne; *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* (2011) de l'écrivain voyageur français Sylvain Tesson, relatant un séjour près du lac Baïkal; *Blanc résine* (2019) de l'auteure québécoise Audrée Wilhelmy, prenant place dans une forêt boréale imaginaire. La cabane apparaît comme la seule manière d'*habiter* la forêt en raison du contact étroit avec la nature, de la porosité des cloisons, des matériaux utilisés, issus de la forêt, du sentiment de sécurité et d'intimité qui se dégage de cette « architecture sauvage ». L'attention se porte d'abord sur la figure du rebelle fuyant la civilisation, une figure s'étant formée dans l'imaginaire occidental et faisant écho à la tradition érémitique. Le chapitre s'intéresse ensuite à l'expérience de l'« immensité intime » rendue possible par l'immersion dans l'« immensité sur place » que constitue la forêt. Enfin, la figure de la tanière, ayant les traits de l'abri animal, révèle un rapport d'intimité très étroit avec l'environnement forestier, sa flore et sa faune.

**Mots-clés** – Forêt, refuge, cabane, tanière, rebelle, immensité intime, Marie Le Franc, Sylvain Tesson, Audrée Wilhelmy

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Rachel Bouvet, « Forêts et cabanes. Les figures du refuge », Sara Bédard-Goulet et Daniel Chartier [dir.], *The Northern Forest. La forêt nordique*, Montréal et Tartu, Imaginaire | Nord et University of Tartu Press, coll. « Isberg », 2022, p. 63-92.

Selon la législation québécoise, une « forêt refuge » est un écosystème forestier exceptionnel, un espace protégé qui « abrite une ou plusieurs espèces végétales menacées ou vulnérables », autrement dit un espace dans lequel la faune et la flore ne sont pas soumises à l'exploitation<sup>2</sup>. D'un point de vue historique, c'est aussi un territoire en marge de la société, où se retrouvent les pauvres, les hors-la-loi, les rebelles de toutes sortes, ainsi que l'illustre bien le volume publié par le Groupe d'histoire des forêts françaises (GHFF) sur le thème de la « forêt refuge<sup>3</sup> ». Dans l'hémisphère Nord, la forêt constitue un territoire hostile dans lequel certains se retrouvent malgré eux, mais elle accueille aussi des êtres menant une quête particulière, spirituelle ou existentielle, ou encore des individus ayant choisi, comme d'autres communautés avant eux, d'habiter la forêt. Dans ce chapitre, j'approfondirai la réflexion sur ce sujet à partir de trois textes littéraires dans lesquels la forêt boréale fait office de refuge.

Avant d'examiner de plus près l'imaginaire de la forêt, rappelons que celui-ci est déterminé de manière géographique et qu'il met en jeu : 1) une *dynamique* particulière, qui peut être celle de l'altérité, de la médiation grâce à un tiers ou de l'intimité, selon le type de rapport que le sujet entretient avec l'univers forestier; 2) des *pratiques spatiales* singulières, parmi lesquelles on distinguera le paysage, le parcours, la carte et l'habiter – chaque récit privilégie en effet certaines pratiques de l'espace en mettant l'accent sur

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<sup>2</sup> Selon le ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec, les forêts refuges sont des écosystèmes forestiers exceptionnels, qui « abritent une ou plusieurs espèces végétales menacées ou vulnérables (y compris les espèces susceptibles d'être ainsi désignées). On peut y trouver, selon le cas, une espèce d'une grande rareté, au moins trois espèces menacées ou vulnérables ou encore une population remarquable d'une espèce menacée ou vulnérable » (« Les écosystèmes forestiers exceptionnels : éléments clés de la diversité biologique du Québec », en ligne, <https://mffp.gouv.qc.ca/les-forets/connaissances/connaissances-forestieres-environnementales/>, consulté le 12 mai 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Micheline Hotyat, Charles Dereix, Pierre Gresser et François Lormant [dir.], *Forêt refuge*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2018, 407 p.

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la description des paysages, les mouvements des êtres vivants, la cartographie des lieux ou encore sur la manière de les occuper<sup>4</sup>; 3) des *figures* particulières (l'arbre, la cabane, le bûcheron, etc.), qui s'actualisent différemment selon les récits examinés. J'examinerai plus particulièrement la figure de la cabane, figure de l'habiter par excellence, car elle entretient un rapport métonymique avec la forêt. En effet, l'immensité invite à une dialectique entre le grand et le petit, entre le dehors et le dedans. La cabane, ou l'abri, apparaît comme la seule manière d'*habiter* la forêt en raison du contact étroit avec la nature, de la porosité des cloisons, des matériaux utilisés, issus souvent de la matière ligneuse, du sentiment de sécurité qui se dégage de cette « architecture sauvage<sup>5</sup> ». Je montrerai qu'elle possède plusieurs variantes : la cahute de l'ermite, le *cottage*, la hutte du coureur des bois, la tanière.

La première partie du chapitre sera centrée sur le récit intitulé *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* de l'écrivain voyageur français Sylvain Tesson, paru en 2011 et relatant un séjour près du lac Baïkal<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Étant donné que l'espace littéraire ne peut être analysé d'un seul tenant, j'ai proposé une méthode consistant à le déplier une dimension à la fois en associant les catégories mathématiques (point, ligne, surface, volume) à des pratiques spatiales : le *paysage* s'élabore à partir d'un *point* d'ancrage, il se transforme à mesure que le point se déplace; le *parcours* dessine une *ligne* qui contourne ou transgresse les frontières; la *carte* – intégrée, narrativisée ou mentale – se présente comme une *surface* de projection; lire un récit revient à s'immerger dans un univers comprenant un certain nombre de demeures fictives, autant de *volumes à habiter*. Voir mon essai *Vers une approche géopoétique. Lectures de Kenneth White, Victor Segalen et J.M.G. Le Clézio*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2015, 290 p.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul Loubes, *Traité d'architecture sauvage*, Paris, Éditions du Sextant, 2010, 176 p. Voir aussi son article intitulé « La cabane, figure géopoétique de l'architecture », Bernard Brun, Annie-Hélène Dufour, Bernard Picon, Marie-Dominique Ribéreau-Gayon [dir.], *Campements, cabanes et cabanons*, Châteauneuf de Grasse, Éditions de Bergier, 2000, p. 89-105, en ligne [http://www.ecologie-humaine.eu/DOCUMENTS/SEH\\_Cabane/Cabane\\_10\\_Loubes.pdf](http://www.ecologie-humaine.eu/DOCUMENTS/SEH_Cabane/Cabane_10_Loubes.pdf), consulté le 12 mai 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvain Tesson, *Dans les forêts de Sibérie*, Paris, Gallimard, 2011, 266 p. Désormais, les citations extraites de ce livre seront suivies d'une parenthèse indiquant les numéros de page, précédés de l'abréviation D.

Je commencerai par rappeler quelques faits historiques concernant la tradition érémitique et quelques textes fondateurs de la « philosophie de la forêt<sup>7</sup> », un détour nécessaire pour comprendre comment la figure du rebelle fuyant la civilisation s'est formée dans l'imaginaire occidental. La deuxième partie se focalisera sur le roman *Hélier, fils des bois* de l'écrivaine d'origine bretonne installée au Québec Marie Le Franc, un roman publié en 1930 et se déroulant dans la forêt laurentienne<sup>8</sup>. La pratique spatiale prédominante étant celle du paysage, j'expliquerai comment les paysages sylvestres, qui sont des paysages de l'immensité, de l'extrême, des confins<sup>9</sup>, créent une sensation d'agrandissement et donnent l'occasion de faire l'expérience de l'« immensité intime<sup>10</sup> ». L'analyse des parcours permettra de montrer que le rapport de la protagoniste à la forêt est médiatisé par le guide métis, autrement dit par la rencontre avec l'autre qui vit dans une hutte qu'il a lui-même construite en plein cœur de la forêt et qui s'oppose au *cottage* destiné aux villégiateurs, situé au bord du lac. La troisième partie sera consacrée à *Blanc résine*, de l'auteure québécoise Audrée Wilhelmy, un roman publié en 2019 et prenant place dans une forêt imaginaire dont les traits sont ceux de la forêt boréale<sup>11</sup>. L'habiter se fonde dans ce récit sur un rapport d'intimité très étroite avec la forêt, que l'héroïne considère comme sa « maison taïga ». La cabane possède ici tous

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth White, « Philosophie de la forêt », *Carnet n° 1*, Bruxelles, Atelier du Héron, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Marie Le Franc, *Hélier, fils des bois*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, coll. « Jardin de givre », 2011 [1930], 287 p. Désormais, les citations extraites de ce livre seront suivies d'une parenthèse indiquant les numéros de page, précédés de l'abréviation H.

<sup>9</sup> Voir à ce sujet les articles sur la forêt dans l'ouvrage collectif *Géopoétique des confins*, dirigé par Rachel Bouvet et Rita Godet (Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018, 216 p.).

<sup>10</sup> Gaston Bachelard, « L'immensité intime », *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2009 [1957], p. 168-190.

<sup>11</sup> Audrée Whilelmy, *Blanc résine*, Montréal, Leméac, 2019, 347 p. Désormais, les citations extraites de ce livre seront suivies d'une parenthèse indiquant les numéros de page, précédés de l'abréviation BR.

les traits de la tanière, du refuge animal, sa fonction principale étant celle de l'abri. Autrement dit, mon analyse suivra un ordre croissant en ce qui concerne le rapport de proximité avec la forêt puisque j'observerai d'abord l'altérité radicale, puis la médiation grâce à un tiers pour finir avec l'intimité.

### La cabane de l'ermite

Comme le rappelle Pierre Gresser, « [m]arginalité spatiale et sociale vont souvent de pair<sup>12</sup> ». En effet, la forêt constitue un espace en marge de la civilisation, prêt à accueillir les personnes contraintes par la guerre, par la famine ou désirant échapper à l'emprisonnement, à la loi, à toute forme d'oppression. Il arrive aussi que certains individus choisissent la forêt comme lieu de résidence, qu'ils l'élisent comme refuge soit pour mener une quête singulière, soit parce que c'est le seul lieu où il leur est possible de s'épanouir véritablement<sup>13</sup>. Cela rejoint la démarche propre à l'ermite, dont je rappellerai dans un premier temps les traits principaux.

### La tradition érémitique

C'est dans les déserts du Proche-Orient, premières terres d'élection des moines, que s'est développée la tradition érémitique. L'anachorète, ce mode de vie fondé sur la solitude et la spiritualité, était déjà présente chez les Grecs, parmi les philosophes néoplatoniciens, mais c'est en Égypte qu'elle a pris son envol. Comme l'explique bien Jacques Lacarrière dans son ouvrage sur *Les hommes ivres de Dieu*, le terme d'« anachorète » n'avait pas une connotation chrétienne au début :

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<sup>12</sup> Pierre Gresser, « Introduction », Micheline Hotyat, Charles Dereix, Pierre Gresser et François Lormant [dir.], *Forêt refuge*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2018, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cette acceptation a été moins étudiée dans l'ouvrage dirigé par Hotyat *et al.*, peut-être parce qu'elle concerne moins des communautés que des individus.

Le mot *anachorèsis* signifie un départ, une fuite hors du monde quotidien. Il s'agit avant tout d'un choix antisocial qui ne prendra que bien plus tard une signification religieuse. Des centaines de paysans, d'esclaves, de voleurs qui, dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine, fuyaient dans les déserts pour échapper au fisc, à leur maître ou à la justice, on disait qu'ils pratiquaient l'anachorèse. Ils prenaient en somme le désert, comme on dit de nos jours qu'un partisan prend le maquis. Et ce mot d'anachorèse ne perdra jamais tout à fait, même lorsque, bien plus tard, il s'appliquera uniquement aux ermites et aux saints, ce sens originel de réfractaire, de « maquisard » des hommes ou de Dieu. Attitude négative en apparence puisqu'elle est d'abord une fuite, un refus, une rupture radicale avec toute société organisée<sup>14</sup>.

La vie solitaire et contemplative dans le désert a des origines multiples, à la fois grecques, bibliques, égyptiennes et même hindoues<sup>15</sup>. Les Pères du désert ont seulement radicalisé en la poussant à l'extrême une pratique déjà existante. Pour eux, le désert apparaissait à la fois comme une terre à l'écart de la civilisation, difficile à habiter, et mettant continuellement le corps et l'esprit à l'épreuve, autant d'atouts pour rendre l'expérience spirituelle particulièrement intense. Le développement du monachisme au Proche-Orient au cours des premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne a attiré de nombreux voyageurs, des religieux venus d'Europe cherchant à se familiariser avec ces nouveaux modes de vie. De retour dans leurs pays, ils ont consacré les

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *Les hommes ivres de Dieu*, Paris, Fayard, 1975, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Voir à ce sujet l'article de Marie-Madeleine Davy, « Le thème du désert dans le monachisme chrétien », *Cahiers de l'Université Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*, n° 8, « Le désert et la queste », 1982, p. 45-70.

forêts comme lieu privilégié pour les quêtes spirituelles. Comme l'écrit Jacques Brosse dans *L'aventure des forêts en Occident* : « Des déserts, il n'en existait point en Europe occidentale, les forêts sauvages en tinrent lieu<sup>16</sup>. » Celles-ci étaient d'ailleurs considérées à l'époque comme de véritables *déserts* étant donné qu'au départ ce terme signifiait « lieu inhabité »; il désignait autant la forêt que tous les autres « confins »<sup>17</sup>.

Ce n'est qu'à partir du milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle que le vocable *désert* a pris le sens géographique qu'on lui connaît aujourd'hui. Jusqu'à cette époque, il recouvrait entièrement le concept géographique d'« érème » qu'Élise Lepage présente ainsi : « [...] le concept géographique d'“érème” [...] insiste sur l'absence totale de présence humaine. L'érème désigne un lieu solitaire, désert, non investi par l'homme, autrement dit une terre non anthropisée et qui correspond à ce que l'anglais désigne par le terme de *wilderness*<sup>18</sup> ». L'érème s'oppose donc à l'écoumène, le lieu habité; selon Augustin Berque, il se distingue des deux autres modalités du paysage que sont le rural et l'urbain. En quittant la ville ou le village pour le désert, ou pour la forêt, l'anachorète parvient à la limite de son monde, dans un « hors monde<sup>19</sup> ». Espaces de l'extrême, les déserts, les toundras, les forêts incitent à la recherche d'absolu, à la méditation, à la quête spirituelle, philosophique ou scripturale. Habités par des populations très parsemées et de faible densité, souvent nomades ou semi-

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Brosse, *L'aventure des forêts en Occident*, Paris, J. C. Lattès, 2000, p. 271.

<sup>17</sup> Il reste des traces de cette histoire de la langue dans la toponymie de certaines régions françaises, comme St-Guilhem-le-Désert, Louvigné-du-Désert, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Élise Lepage, « Émergence d'une subjectivité des confins. Les premiers recueils de François Turcot », Rachel Bouvet et Rita Godet [dir.], *Géopoétique des confins*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018, p. 146. Voir aussi son ouvrage *Géographie des confins. Espace et écriture chez Pierre Moreny, Pierre Nepveu et Louis Hamelin*, Ottawa, Éditions David, 2016, 318 p.

<sup>19</sup> Augustin Berque, « Le rural, le sauvage, l'urbain », *Études rurales*, n° 187, vol. 1, 2011, p. 51, en ligne, <http://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-rurales-2011-1-page-51.htm>, consulté le 12 mai 2020.

nomades, ils se situent en marge des territoires occupés par la quasi-totalité des êtres humains<sup>20</sup>.

### Les figures de l'ermite et du rebelle dans l'imaginaire

De manière analogue à l'ermite, le rebelle qui a « recours aux forêts », pour reprendre le célèbre titre d'Ernst Jünger, *Le traité du rebelle ou le recours aux forêts*<sup>21</sup>, est un être solitaire ayant délibérément fui la civilisation et cherchant comme lui la solitude, la paix, le moyen de vivre l'immensité de manière intense. Dans un essai intitulé *Philosophie de la forêt*, Kenneth White rappelle que le terme allemand *waldgänger*, traduit en français par *rebelle*, signifie littéralement « celui qui s'en va dans la forêt » (*wald* veut dire « forêt ») : « [C']est quelqu'un qui, "hic et nunc", veut échapper aux contraintes d'une vie hypersocialisée et sortir des conventions établies, des dogmes, de l'enlisement aux idéologies<sup>22</sup>. » La forêt devient donc un refuge, un lieu à l'écart de la société, un endroit où l'on peut vivre la solitude. Devenu une figure mythique de cette veine, Henry David Thoreau explique bien dans son célèbre *Walden ou la vie dans les bois* à quel point la solitude lui importe :

Près de quoi désirons-nous le plus habiter? Sûrement pas auprès de beaucoup d'hommes, de la gare, de la poste, du cabaret, du temps, de l'école, de l'épicerie, de Beacon Hill, ou de Five Points, lieux ordinaires d'assemblée, mais près de la source éternelle de notre vie, d'où en toute notre expérience nous nous sommes aperçus qu'elle

<sup>20</sup> Comme le montrent les études rassemblées dans l'ouvrage collectif *Géopoétique des confins* (Rachel Bouvet et Rita Godet [dir.], *op. cit.*), les écrivains issus de ces territoires les envisagent comme des zones habitées et non comme des confins.

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Jünger, *Le traité du rebelle ou le recours aux forêts* [*Waldgang et Am Kieselstrand*], trad. Henri Plard, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 1995 [1951], 170 p.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth White, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

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jaillissait, comme le saule s'élève près de l'eau et projette ses racines dans cette direction<sup>23</sup>.

Dans son cas, l'éloignement favorise l'écriture, la proximité de la nature devient propice à l'inspiration; en élisant domicile dans la forêt ou dans les bois, dans une simple cabane, l'écrivain rejoint la figure de l'ermite. Comme l'écrit Thierry Pardo dans sa *Petite géographie de la fuite. Essai de géopoétique* :

La motivation viscérale de l'ermite et de sa fuite dans les bois est d'essence naturaliste. La forêt est pour lui l'image non déformée de ce que devrait être le monde [...] Sa forêt est tout simplement le monde premier, archaïque et beau de la violence de ses orages à la douceur de sa pluie. C'est dans cette nature primordiale que l'ermite laisse pousser les mots de sa poésie. Arrivés à maturité, il les cueille et leur donne une place dans le poème de sa vie. Son recueil de poèmes est l'herbier de ses randonnées méditatives<sup>24</sup>.

Alliant solitude et fuite hors du monde civilisé, la quête de l'écriture semble bel et bien s'inscrire dans le prolongement de la quête érémitique. Voici par exemple comment un auteur québécois contemporain, Jean Désy, évoque ses séjours en forêt :

Vous vivez dans une cabane. Vous vivez entre quatre murs que vous avez vous-même façonnés, dont la structure est faite de billes de bois écorcées, devant une rivière qui coule un peu pour vous et à

<sup>23</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden ou la vie dans les bois* [*Walden or Life in the Woods*], trad. Louis Fabulet, Paris, Gallimard, 1990 [1854], p. 133.

<sup>24</sup> Thierry Pardo, *Petite géographie de la fuite. Essai de géopoétique*, Montréal, Éditions du passage, 2015, p. 47-48.

laquelle vous vous abreuvez. Vous vivez en forêt, dans une cabane, en attendant le prochain voyage, le prochain départ. Là, vous trouvez le temps de penser, vous avez tout le loisir d'être seul, de jouir et de souffrir dans la solitude, mais aussi d'écrire et de rêver, de vous préparer à recevoir les vôtres. Ailleurs, le temps est une rareté. Ailleurs, la course pour la vie devient folle trop souvent<sup>25</sup>.

La forêt offre une pause étant donné que la perception du temps change, s'affine, se mesurant seulement à l'écoulement de la rivière et non au rythme effréné de la ville, et procurant la solitude indispensable pour l'écriture.

### L'ermitage de l'écrivain

La figure de la cabane est déterminante dans le récit de Sylvain Tesson, *Dans les forêts de Sibérie*, au point où la pratique de l'habiter semble presque éclipser les autres pratiques de l'espace (parcours, paysage, carte). Étant à la fois écrivain et géographe, Tesson a expérimenté plusieurs façons de voyager (le tour du monde à vélo, la traversée de l'Himalaya à pied, les steppes d'Asie centrale à cheval, l'escalade des murs en ville<sup>26</sup>), avant d'élaborer le projet d'expérimenter la solitude en Sibérie et de se soumettre aux rigueurs du climat nordique. Ayant élu domicile en plein hiver dans un refuge situé au bord du lac Baïkal, l'écrivain en profite pour réfléchir à sa situation dans le monde<sup>27</sup>. Comme

<sup>25</sup> Jean Désy, *Du fond de ma cabane. Éloge de la forêt et du sacré*, Montréal, XYZ, 2003, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Voir ses récits publiés chez Robert Laffont : *On a roulé sur la terre* (avec Alexandre Poussin), 1996; *La marche dans le ciel : 5 000 km à pied à travers l'Himalaya*, avec Alexandre Poussin, 1998; *La chevauchée des steppes : 3 000 km à cheval à travers l'Asie centrale* (avec Priscilla Telmon), 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Comme l'explique bien Hannes de Vrieses, de nombreux parallèles peuvent être faits entre les textes de Tesson et de Thoreau, même si le rapport à l'écologie diffère grandement entre ces deux auteurs (« On the Meaning of Being Alone with Nature:

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l'explique bien Halia Koo, « [i]l s'agit d'une attitude de repli qui oscille entre résistance et reddition, alors même que l'espace sylvestre finit par s'imposer comme un lieu de régénération physique et de reconquête intérieure<sup>28</sup> ».

L'immensité des lieux invite à une dialectique entre le grand et le petit, entre le dehors et le dedans :

L'épigraphe de l'Hypérion : « Ne pas se laisser écraser par l'immense, savoir s'enfermer dans le plus étroit espace, c'est en cela qu'est le divin. » En somme, après la promenade, après s'être gorgé de la grandeur du lac, penser à adresser un clin d'œil à un petit serviteur de la beauté : flocon, lichen, mésange. (D, 75-76)

Se réfugier dans la cabane apparaît donc comme une manière de réagir face à l'infini de la forêt. Face à l'immensité, le réflexe est de se blottir au creux d'un espace restreint, chaud, intime, ce qui rejoint la réflexion bachelardienne sur l'immensité intime, sur la solitude : « L'immensité est en nous. Elle est attachée à une sorte d'expansion d'être que la vie refrène, que la prudence arrête, mais qui reprend dans la solitude<sup>29</sup>. » Pour exprimer son rapport à l'environnement sylvestre, l'écrivain géographe n'a pas recours à la description de paysages, comme le font d'autres auteurs, mais aux aphorismes qui placent la forêt en opposition avec la ville : « Il est temps de quitter la ville et de tirer sur les discours le rideau des forêts. [...] La forêt resserre ce que la ville disperse »

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Sylvain Tesson's Ecocritical Sincerity and Ecopoetic Sensuality in *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* », Daniel A. Finch-Race et Stephanie Posthumus [dir.], *French Ecocriticism. From the Early Modern Period to the Twenty-First Century*, Francfort, Peter Lang, 2017, p. 231-249).

<sup>28</sup> Halia Koo, « Une esthétique de l'esquive : stratégies de résistance et de retrait dans l'espace sylvestre de Sylvain Tesson », *Voix plurielles*, vol. 16, n° 2, « L'imaginaire de la forêt », 2019, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

(D, 43). La fonction de certains éléments de la maison, comme la fenêtre, servant habituellement à se protéger des intempéries, tend à s'inverser : « Usage de la fenêtre : inviter la beauté à entrer et laisser l'inspiration sortir » (D, 43). La cabane génère en effet une véritable exploration du sens de l'habiter : « Une quête? Trop grand mot. Une expérience? Au sens scientifique, oui. La cabane est un laboratoire. Une paillasse où précipiter ses désirs de liberté, de silence et de solitude. Un champ expérimental où s'inventer une vie ralentie » (D, 48). C'est donc un autre rapport au monde qui est inauguré par le truchement de cette vie à l'écart, dans cette cabane fondu dans l'immensité de la forêt. L'écrivain jouit de la liberté à l'instar de Youra, un ermite russe installé non loin de la cabane de Tesson : « Sur l'île, il jouit des deux ingrédients nécessaires à la vie sans entraves : la solitude et l'immensité » (D, 92). La cabane de l'ermite est une « solitude centrée », pour reprendre l'expression de Bachelard :

La hutte [...] apparaît bien comme la racine pivotante de la fonction d'habiter. Elle est la plante humaine la plus simple, celle qui n'a pas besoin de ramifications pour subsister. Elle est si simple qu'elle n'appartient plus aux souvenirs, parfois trop imagés. [...] La hutte de l'ermite [...] doit recevoir sa vérité de l'intensité de son essence, l'essence du verbe habiter. Aussitôt, la hutte est la solitude centrée<sup>30</sup>.

En plaçant ainsi la cabane de l'ermite au cœur de son récit, Tesson s'inscrit dans une certaine tradition, où

l'artiste solitaire [...], devant l'immensité d'une nature qui le dépasse, est poussé à des considérations métaphysiques et philosophiques, à

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

solliciter son intériorité pour tenter de comprendre la place de l'homme dans la nature<sup>31</sup>.

Or, comme le souligne Jean-Xavier Ridon, il s'agit d'une « certaine forme de romantisme qui instrumentalise la solitude comme signe de l'intensité de l'instant vécu mais aussi comme garantie d'une épreuve intérieure<sup>32</sup> ». L'immersion dans l'immensité constitue en effet l'un des éléments déterminants dans la construction du paysage de la forêt.

### Habiter l'immensité : au cœur des paysages sylvestres

De l'immensité sur place à l'immensité intime

Les paysages de l'immensité possèdent une faculté assez particulière, celle d'engendrer une sensation d'agrandissement. Comme l'a expliqué Gaston Bachelard dans sa *Poétique de l'espace*, le caractère démesuré de ce qui est contemplé permet au sujet de déplier une grandeur intérieure, un phénomène qui l'a mené à proposer le concept d'« immensité intime ». Une tension se forme, qui va de la perception de l'immensité du lointain à l'intime<sup>33</sup>. Grâce à l'adoption d'une posture dynamique consistant à s'ancre dans un paysage pour mieux l'apprécier, l'individu est à même de « *vivre le paysage* », pour reprendre le

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Xavier Ridon, « Sylvain Tesson, de l'extrême comme nostalgie conquérante », *La revue des lettres modernes*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, série « Voyages contemporains », n° 3, Gilles Louÿs [dir.], 2019, p. 72. Dans les faits, la solitude est toute relative, étant donné que Tesson reçoit des visiteurs et va lui-même rencontrer d'autres personnes autour du lac.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Cette réflexion sur le paysage rejoint les principes de la géopoétique dans la mesure où celle-ci place au premier plan de ses préoccupations l'exploration physique des lieux, *in situ*, l'interaction concrète avec l'environnement, la perception intime des paysages, le cheminement singulier d'un individu immergé dans le monde. À cette disposition de l'esprit et des sens vient s'ajouter la connaissance concrète et scientifique des lieux.

titre de l'essai de François Jullien : « Encore s'agit-il moins de contempler le paysage que de s'*ancrer* en lui et de l'*habiter*<sup>34</sup>. »

Lorsque l'acte de paysage s'amplifie, le sujet se laisse déporter au-delà de sa zone de confort habituelle et se trouve du même coup au contact d'éléments et de « tonalités atmosphériques<sup>35</sup> » autres. L'immensité provoque une rêverie de l'infini puisque l'imagination n'assigne pas de limites précises au site :

Dans cette méditation, nous ne sommes pas « jetés dans le monde » puisque nous ouvrons en quelque sorte le monde dans un dépassement du monde vu tel qu'il est, tel qu'il était avant que nous rêvions. Même si nous sommes conscients de notre être chétif [...] nous prenons conscience de la grandeur. Nous sommes alors rendus à une activité naturelle de notre être immensifiant<sup>36</sup>.

Si certains paysages ont pour effet d'« immensifier » l'être, de distendre ses limites habituelles pour le projeter dans une rêverie de l'infini, il faut bien voir qu'il n'en a pas toujours été ainsi. Autrefois, les forêts, les déserts et les mers étaient connus pour provoquer la peur et l'angoisse chez ceux qui s'en approchaient ou qui les traversaient; il a fallu que la sensibilité se transforme pour que l'on soit capable de ressentir autre chose au contact de ces paysages.

Les romantiques associaient en effet la forêt au sublime, au même titre que l'océan ou le désert : « La forêt originale, la forêt vierge, c'est-à-dire ce que les romantiques nomment encore

<sup>34</sup> François Jullien, *Vivre le paysage ou L'impensé de la raison*, Paris, Gallimard, 2014, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Sansot, « L'affection paysagère », François Dagognet [dir.], *Mort du paysage? Philosophie et esthétique du paysage*, Seysell, Champ Vallon, coll. « Milieux », 1982, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

*le désert*, est l'expérience privilégiée de ce ressourcement<sup>37</sup>. » Le désordre, le chaos qui émanent du végétal, de l'aquatique (pensons aux cataractes), du minéral (les amoncellements rocheux) et de l'aérien (le volcan en éruption), tous ces éléments naturels sur lesquels l'homme n'a pas de prise suscitent le sentiment du sublime : « Le paysage naturel du sublime est alors essentiellement appréhendé comme énergie chaotique<sup>38</sup>. »

Par ailleurs, si l'on se penche sur l'évolution du concept de nature dans la langue française, on s'aperçoit que la forêt en constitue un élément clé. Jacques Brosse rappelle en effet dans *L'aventure des forêts en Occident* que « [n]atura, c'est la nature sauvage, celle de la forêt. "Sauvage" est issu du latin *salvaticus-silvaticus*, comme l'anglais et l'allemand *wild*, "sauvage, féroce, bestial" de *Wald*, la forêt<sup>39</sup> ». L'anglais possède aussi les termes de *wilderness* et de *wildness*, que certains ont traduit en français sous le terme de « sauvageté », notamment en philosophie de l'environnement<sup>40</sup>. Ce qu'il importe de souligner, c'est le fait que le caractère sauvage était au départ associé à la forêt. Autrement dit, est considéré comme sauvage ce qui vient de la forêt. En l'occurrence, les « Sauvages » ont été nommés ainsi par les Français lors de leur arrivée au Canada parce qu'ils vivaient dans les forêts; il n'y avait pas au départ de connotation péjorative, au sens de « primitif » ou « barbare »<sup>41</sup>. Faisant partie du même champ lexical, le terme *sylve*, qui vient du latin *siha*, tout comme le terme *sauvage*, désignait

<sup>37</sup> Yvon Le Scanff, *Le paysage romantique et l'expérience du sublime*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 2007, p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Brosse, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>40</sup> Dans son article intitulé « La sauvageté : un principe de réconciliation entre l'homme et la biosphère » Julien Delord explique que le terme de « sauvageté » provient du vieux français. Son but est de « redonner au sauvage une dimension de civilité et d'autonomie fondamentale qu'il avait perdue avec le dualisme moderne » (*Natures Sciences Sociétés*, n° 13, vol. 3, 2005, p. 318).

<sup>41</sup> Voir à ce sujet le livre de Pierre Monette, *Onon:ta'. Une histoire naturelle du mont Royal*, Montréal, Boréal, 2012, 377 p.

lui aussi les « vaste étendue de terrain couverte d'arbres<sup>42</sup> ». Si le terme *forêt* a fini par s'imposer dans la langue française, c'est peut-être parce qu'il possédait au départ une valeur juridique; il s'agissait en effet d'un « territoire soustrait à l'usage général et dont le roi se réserve la jouissance ». Observons maintenant de quelle manière le paysage sylvestre se manifeste sur le plan littéraire.

### La marche en forêt et la polysensorialité des paysages

Dans le roman de Marie Le Franc *Hélier, fils des bois*, la découverte de la forêt se fait principalement de manière déambulatoire grâce à un habitué des lieux, Hélier, un guide métis coureur des bois qui fait figure de médiateur pour le personnage principal, Julienne, une jeune femme française dont le rapport à la forêt se transforme considérablement tout au long du récit. Publié dans les années 1930, ce roman constitue la première incursion littéraire féminine dans la forêt laurentienne. D'abord considérée du point de vue d'une jeune femme étrangère à l'univers forestier, ne connaissant que les forêts cultivées de l'Europe, la forêt est ensuite perçue par les yeux de Hélier, personnage associé si étroitement au paysage sylvestre qu'il en semble parfois l'émanation. Plus on avance au cœur de la forêt laurentienne, plus la dimension polysensorielle augmente et tend vers la synesthésie. En effet, les paysages décrits mêlent souvent les registres visuel et auditif :

On écoutait le chuchotis des feuilles que les lèvres essayaient machinalement d'imiter. Le regard montait et descendait la gamme des nuances sur les arbres dont chacun avait sa couronne propre dans la masse, s'appuyait sur les verdures ainsi que les doigts sur un clavier, forçait à s'enfoncer

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/forêt>, consulté le 12 mai 2020.

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sous sa pression les couleurs légères, tandis que les plus sombres lui résistaient, prêtes à rebondir, et il semblait que le cercle de la forêt rendît un son coloré qui s'adressait à la fois à l'oreille et à l'œil.  
(H, 96-97)

Alors que le corps est immobile, à l'écoute et à l'affût des perceptions, la description fait appel à un regard en mouvement. L'imagination renvoie les touches de vert aux notes musicales, comme s'il suffisait de se laisser aller à la contemplation pour devenir le témoin privilégié d'un spectacle magique alliant les verdures et les chuchotis. Le rapport au réel engendre des perceptions auditives et visuelles d'une grande délicatesse, l'observation des arbres faisant appel à un registre sonore assez élaboré. L'absence de ligne d'horizon place le paysage sous le signe de la proximité. Même quand les personnages se trouvent face à un vaste horizon, après être montés en haut d'une colline, cela ne donne pas lieu à une vision en perspective<sup>43</sup>. De fait, la forêt, comme le dit si bien Bachelard, constitue une « immensité sur place » : « Comment mieux dire si l'on veut “vivre la forêt” qu'on se trouve devant *une immensité sur place*, devant l'immensité sur place de sa profondeur. [...] Elle amasse sur place son infinité<sup>44</sup> ». Le caractère infini et chaotique de l'environnement forestier est marqué par son aspect touffu, impénétrable, les défricheurs n'ayant pas encore atteint les zones dans lesquelles les personnages évoluent. Quand Julienne arrive dans la forêt laurentienne, elle est non seulement pourvue d'un esprit cartésien, mais elle fait face pour la première fois à une forêt sauvage. Il n'y a aucune place ici pour le « chemin en ligne droite » de Descartes, dont les principes ont guidé l'aménagement des forêts françaises :

<sup>43</sup> Selon Philippe Hamon, dans la vision en perspective, généralement face à un panorama, l'œil balaye tout l'espace suivant des axes qui lui sont propres (haut/bas; proche/lointain); voir *Du descriptif*, Paris, Hachette, 1993, p. 175.

<sup>44</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

L'algèbre et la géométrie, bases de la méthode cartésienne de recherche de la vérité indubitable, deviennent les bases de cette nouvelle science de la forêt. Grâce à cette méthode, la forêt cesse d'être le lieu de l'errance hasardeuse pour devenir un échiquier ordonné. [...] Les lignes droites de la géométrie pénètrent dans les forêts des Lumières, et les chemins de la méthode l'emportent<sup>45</sup>.

Dans la forêt que parcourent Julienne et son guide, où les obstacles s'avèrent à la fois nombreux et variés, il n'y a même pas de chemin. Sans guide, il est impossible de survivre : d'ailleurs ceux qui se sont « écartés » auparavant ont trouvé la mort. Impitoyable pour les non-initiés, composée d'une nature brute, sauvage, la forêt n'en contient pas moins des ressources inépuisables pour qui se laisse transporter par ses splendeurs bien cachées, par son silence inquiétant.

### Du cottage à la hutte

Dans le cottage<sup>46</sup> qu'elle a loué, Julienne est environnée la nuit par une myriade de sons en tous genres :

Elle était allongée dans son lit, les yeux clos, mais l'oreille étrangement tendue, dispersée, *d'une puissance de perception inconcevable, allant recueillir les sons au cœur même de la forêt*. Quoi qu'on fit, on ne pouvait ramener l'ouïe à son point de départ. Le silence entourait la maison ainsi qu'une mousse épaisse sur laquelle les bruits s'avançaient à pas feutrés [...] Le moindre souffle était pesant [...] Chaque son avait son écho. (H, 74; je souligne)

<sup>45</sup> Robert Harrison, *Forêts. Essai sur l'imaginaire occidental* [Forests: the Shadow of Civilization], trad. Florence Naugrette, Paris, Flammarion, coll. « Champs », 1992, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> C'est le terme utilisé dans le roman.

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Ainsi que le rappelle Jean-Paul Loubes dans son *Traité d'architecture sauvage*, « [I]a cabane a ceci de particulier qu'en elle demeure réduite la distance entre l'homme-habitant et le monde. Elle est par là même une figure géopoétique<sup>47</sup> ». La nuit dans le cottage permet en effet à Julienne d'intensifier son rapport sensible à la forêt, dans la mesure où tous les sons lui parviennent à travers les cloisons poreuses, qui laissent passer les bruits des animaux et du vent. Le cottage répond bien à cette définition que donne Loubes de la cabane :

Parce qu'elle est une forme pratique du rapport au monde, une des plus simples, premières, elle constitue un objet privilégié pour explorer ce rapport du moi avec le monde, du dedans avec le dehors<sup>48</sup>.

Un vers de Cowper gravé sur le mur de son logis, « *O for a lodge in some vast wilderness!*<sup>49</sup> » (H, 73), semble donner le ton au séjour de la jeune femme. Un ton qui rappelle celui de l'écrivain des bois, l'écrivain ermite profitant de la solitude pour écrire dont il a été question dans la section précédente. Sans qu'elle l'ait prémedité, c'est en effet la nature sylvestre, sauvage, le *wilderness*, qui lui permettra de retrouver une harmonie avec le monde :

Ce n'était pas la première fois qu'une femme prenait parti contre le monde et décidait de sa destinée, mais le plus souvent en vase clos, à l'abri d'une chambre, d'une ville, à l'abri d'elle-même.

Ici, elle n'avait pas à se cacher. Les arbres distri-  
buaiient une infinité d'approbations. (H, 262)

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Paul Loubes, *Traité d'architecture sauvage*, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 93-94.

<sup>49</sup> « Oh, qui me donnera une cabane dans quelque vaste région sauvage! » Je traduis.

La libération permise par la forêt reste malgré tout conditionnelle à la présence d'Hélier, qui joue ici le rôle de médiateur. Seule en forêt, Julienne est incapable de se retrouver, de survivre. Lorsqu'elle visite la hutte d'Hélier, une cabane qu'il a construite lui-même près du lac Vert, elle réalise que ce lieu révèle l'intimité du personnage, inaccessible jusque-là. Comme l'indique Jean-Paul Loubes,

*l'édification d'une cabane est sa projection [pour l'enfant, le chasseur, le randonneur, on pourrait ajouter ici le guide métis] dans le monde. Une des premières pour l'enfant, la première modification d'un espace qui devient alors un lieu. Un lieu constitué. Il y a là un acte de créativité, donc un engagement de l'être. Habiter c'est être sur terre*<sup>50</sup>.

En reprenant la célèbre citation de Heidegger, l'auteur insiste sur le fait que la construction de la cabane constitue un acte fondateur. La dimension créative est renforcée dans le roman de Le Franc par la mention des sculptures d'animaux qu'Hélier réalise avec le bois des alentours et qui à elles seules constituent les éléments décoratifs de la hutte. Si la cabane d'Hélier semble incarner la solitude, elle ne s'inscrit pas dans la tradition érémitique – Hélier n'écrit pas, il ne mène pas de quête spirituelle, il a appris à vivre en forêt grâce à ses origines autochtones, notamment. Ce personnage se situe même à l'opposé du mode de vie répondant aux normes de l'époque : plutôt que de vivre en société et de faire des incursions momentanées en forêt, il habite au cœur de la forêt et se rend de temps à autre en société, pour son travail notamment. Étant donné que la solitude d'Hélier est troublée par l'arrivée de Julienne en ce lieu, par le lien amoureux qui se

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<sup>50</sup> Jean-Paul Loubes, *Traité d'architecture sauvage*, op. cit., p. 96. L'auteur souligne. La citation en italiques provient de l'essai « Bâtir, habiter, penser » de Martin Heidegger, *Essais et conférences*, trad. A. Préau, Paris, Gallimard, 1958, p. 170-193.

développe entre les deux êtres, la fin du roman laisse à penser que cette cabane perdue au fond de la forêt permettra à la quête de la jeune femme d'aboutir dans la mesure où elle réussira enfin à habiter le monde. En ce sens, la cabane apparaît moins comme un refuge solitaire, sur le modèle de l'ermitage, que comme une manière d'habiter le monde autrement, une façon d'« élargir » la fonction d'habiter, pour reprendre l'expression de Marielle Macé dans *Nos cabanes* : « [f]aire des cabanes [...] pour élargir les formes de vie à considérer, retenter avec elles des liens, des côtoiemens, des médiations, des nouages. [...] Faire des cabanes, donc, pour habiter cet élargissement même<sup>51</sup> ». C'est aussi cet élargissement à d'autres formes de vie qui apparaît dans le roman de Wilhelmy, sauf qu'il s'agit principalement dans ce cas de formes de vie animales.

### **Immersion dans l'univers végétal et animal**

#### **La maison taïga**

Dans *Blanc résine*, un roman s'inscrivant dans un cycle dans la mesure où l'intrigue réinvestit certains lieux décrits dans deux romans précédents, *Oss* (2011) et *Le corps des bêtes* (2017), tout en augmentant considérablement la géographie de l'univers imaginaire, la forêt constitue l'environnement primordial. Même si Daâ vit au début dans un couvent, sa naissance est associée aux mouvements des animaux : « La forêt grouille d'animaux qui vêlent. Il fait nuit de taïga, de lune ronde, basse [...] Seuls les murs me séparent de ma fratrie mammifère. » (BR, 13) Très jeune, l'enfant fait de la forêt sa véritable maison, c'est là qu'elle se réfugie, loin des humains :

Autour de Sainte-Sainte-Anne, ma *maison taïga*  
s'étire en pessières et pinèdes, talles de lichens,  
de lédon, misartaq, quajautiit, pingi, qurliak, en

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<sup>51</sup> Marielle Macé, *Nos cabanes*, Paris, Verdier, 2019, p. 30.

tourbières, en roches qui deviennent montagnes  
à mesure qu'on s'éloigne.  
(BR, 22; je souligne)

Le recours au vocabulaire inuktitut<sup>52</sup> et au vocabulaire spécialisé de la botanique (*pessière*, *lédon*<sup>53</sup>) pour nommer les plantes permet de situer l'espace romanesque dans le Grand Nord et de montrer que la protagoniste est immergée dans son environnement, dont elle connaît les moindres végétaux. Pour la lectrice ou le lecteur peu familier avec cet espace nordique et avec la langue qui y est parlée, cela crée un effet d'étrangeté. Très vite, la jeune fille quitte le couvent pour vivre seule, dans les arbres, ce qui explique pourquoi l'appartenance à la forêt constitue la première composante de son identité : « Je suis brune, rouille et noire, *fille de la forêt*, de la mine [...] » (BR, 33; je souligne) Ses occupations principales consistent à cueillir des fruits pour se nourrir, à récolter des écorces pour confectionner des paniers : « Moi, nue et terreuse et vorace sur un roc de clairière, je mange des bleuets minuscules, nés déjà rabougris sur les tiges. J'ai consacré le matin à tisser des écorces en paniers, l'après-midi à la cueillette [...] » (BR, 72) Habituelle à vivre dehors durant l'enfance et l'adolescence – « Je vis dehors. J'habite la canopée de ma taïga, j'écoute ses histoires de lichen et de mousse, je m'encoraiace à force d'éraflures sur les écorces, les rochers » (BR, 75) –, Daâ passera pourtant sa vie de femme au sein d'un village. Ayant été secourue par Laure, un médecin albinos, après une

<sup>52</sup> Une annexe donne la traduction des termes provenant des multiples langues utilisées dans le récit (wendat, innu-aimun, inuktitut, gallois, irlandais, abénaquis, atikamekw, russe, etc.). Dans cette citation, ce sont uniquement des mots en inuktitut : *misartaq* : thé du Labrador; *quajauittit* : tripe-de-roche; *pingi* : mélèze laricin; *qurliaq* : épinette noire. L'auteure se réfère à l'ouvrage *Le savoir botanique des Inuits de Kangiqsualujuaq* (Alain Cuerrier, Westmount, Institut culturel Avataq, 2011, 88 p.) pour la traduction de ces termes.

<sup>53</sup> La pessière est une plantation d'épinettes; le lédon, une espèce caractéristique des tourbières.

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mauvaise chute, elle se rétablit dans la maison de ce dernier, où elle a l'impression d'être ensevelie vivante :

Je suis dans une tombe.

C'est ce que je dis à Laure.

Tombe lambrisée aux tentures fleuries. Le matelas mou du lit a la gueule béante, il m'avale entière. J'ai la carcasse faite pour les sommeils de mousse, de terre battue, de fourrures, d'urjuq, d'aiguilles d'épinettes<sup>54</sup>. (BR, 168)

Au contraire des villageois qui sont habitués à leurs chambres décorées de tapisserie, à leurs lits confortables, Daâ considère la forêt (*la maison taiiga*) comme la seule maison habitable, car son sol enrichi d'humus, de matière végétale et animale est le seul support qui convient à son corps. On constate donc que dans ce récit, la figure du refuge tient davantage de l'abri, de la tanière, et qu'il comporte une dimension animale.

### La figure de la tanière

Au cours de ses pérégrinations dans un bois près du village, la protagoniste en viendra à ériger peu à peu une tanière, pour mettre au monde son troisième enfant, le seul qui lui survivra :

En sept ans j'ai érigé une *tanière* de troncs et de vase séchée; perdue entre les arbres, on y vit toujours un petit peu penché. D'un côté, son sol est recouvert d'un matelas – camarine noire, duvet, plumes de toutes les poules mangées – que j'ai enveloppé des livrées chaudes de bêtes trouvées mortes parfois.

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<sup>54</sup> *Urjuq* : racomitre laineux.

## THE NORTHERN FOREST / LA FORêt NORDIQUE

C'est un repaire sans porte pour qu'y entre la faune : j'y suis ronde étendue entre une très vieille louve qui ouvre seulement un œil puis retourne à sa mort et une famille renarde – femelle et vénérée – qui a trouvé sous le toit un abri de saison. Une corneille s'y glisse pour sécher son plumage. J'entends, perchée au-dessus de mon front, une aiglonne qui graille en guettant les corbeaux.

Laure a insisté pour que j'accouche dans le lit où je procrée : j'ai refusé de mettre bas comme une femme domestique. Pour l'enfantement de celle qui est de mon engeance, je *vêlerai* dans l'antre partagé par mes sœurs des bois. (BR, 251; je souligne)

Comme on le voit, cette tanière emprunte au registre animal toutes ses composantes : assemblage de troncs et de vase séchée, comme la hutte du castor; ajout de plumes comme l'oiseau le fait pour édifier son nid; qui plus est, il est conçu pour accueillir les animaux : une louve, une famille de renards et une corneille, ses « sœurs des bois », comme elle les nomme. Quant au verbe *vêler*, déjà utilisé au début du roman, il met bien en évidence le caractère animal de la mise bas, de la mise au monde. Autrement dit, cet antre illustre bien la primitivité du refuge, pour reprendre les mots de Bachelard :

Ainsi le bien-être nous rend à la primitivité du refuge. Physiquement, l'être qui reçoit le sentiment du refuge se resserre sur soi-même, se retire, se blottit, se cache, se musse. En cherchant dans les richesses du vocabulaire tous les verbes qui diraient toute la dynamique de la retraite, on trouverait des images du mouvement animal, des

mouvements de repli qui sont inscrits dans les muscles<sup>55</sup>.

L'abri construit par Daâ reflète le désir de se musser, le repli nécessaire pour que le corps puisse donner la vie, le besoin de protéger les petits. Mais cette fonction de protection n'empêche pas l'ouverture, comme on le voit avec la présence des animaux, ni la porosité des cloisons. D'ailleurs, l'abri ne réussira pas à jouer jusqu'au bout son rôle protecteur. En effet, les deux aînés, ayant connu jusque-là uniquement l'intérieur chaud et confortable de la maison du village, ne seront pas assez prudents – ils quitteront la tanière pour explorer les environs – ni assez résistants pour survivre au froid glacial de la forêt. C'est l'enfant née dans cet abri rudimentaire, celle qui a ouvert les yeux dans la « maison taïga », qui s'avérera la plus forte des trois enfants.

### Conclusion : les différents modes d'habiter la forêt

Parmi les multiples manières possibles d'habiter la forêt, trois d'entre elles ont été ici examinées, qui donnent chacune au refuge un sens différent. Certains se réfugient dans une cabane, dans la solitude indispensable à la quête existentielle, afin de mettre en œuvre une démarche d'écriture s'inscrivant en partie dans la tradition érémitique. D'autres découvrent la forêt grâce aux sens, à la marche, à un guide connaissant bien le milieu sylvestre, ce qui rend possible un autre rapport à l'environnement, fondé sur la connaissance intime des lieux, la rencontre amoureuse devenant le prélude à l'apprentissage d'une autre manière d'habiter le monde. D'autres encore s'immergent complètement dans la forêt en acceptant la part animale de leur être, en instituant un rapport de fraternité avec les autres habitants de la forêt, les animaux notamment, en construisant un logis au milieu des bois, un abri favorisant l'intimité la plus grande. Des images qui

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<sup>55</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, op. cit., p. 93.

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évoquent la figure du nid, de la tanière, et qui font du refuge une troisième « peau<sup>56</sup> » (après l'épiderme et le vêtement) qui protège les corps tout en laissant la porte grande ouverte aux autres habitants de la forêt. Ces peaux collées les unes sur les autres qui évoquent aussi les liens intimes unissant une femme et son nouveau-né donnent au refuge son sens le plus fort.

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<sup>56</sup> Le peintre Hundertwasser proposait de distinguer cinq peaux : 1) l'épiderme; 2) le vêtement (d'ailleurs, le peintre confectionnait des vêtements à partir de matériaux divers); 3) l'habitation (toute une partie de son œuvre consiste à élaborer des architectures nouvelles); 4) l'environnement social (la famille, le quartier, la ville, la société); 5) la peau planétaire (l'œuvre s'inscrit dans le cadre d'une réflexion écologique, où le lien à la nature notamment est crucial). Voir l'ouvrage de Pierre Restany, *Hundertwasser, le peintre-roi aux cinq peaux*, Paris, Taschen, 2003, 95 p.

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FORESTS OF EMOTIONS  
FORÊTS D'ÉMOTIONS



# Affective Forests in Emily Fridlund's *History of Wolves*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – This chapter explores human-forest relations in Emily Fridlund's *History of Wolves* in order to understand the affective role the forest has in human lives. Combining affect theory and ecocriticism and using affective close reading, the chapter scrutinises what kinds of forest elicit affects and how humans are situated in relation to these forests. The chapter first examines passages of the novel through the prism of ordinary experiential intensities of lived realities, as well as feeling with and knowing through the forest in the process of becoming, shifting and changing with the forest. The chapter further looks at how and why the forest elicits different affects in insiders and outsiders and how the changing of the environment and the self causes solastalgic distress. The analysis shows that phantasmatic, ontic, and ontological forest bleed into each other and elicit different affects of various intensities depending on one's physical and emotional proximity to and experience of the forest, of being part of the forest. The forest's affective agency plays an equally important role in determining the affective responses it evokes.

**Keywords** – Affective forest, land affect, solastalgia, Fridlund, *History of Wolves*

## Introduction

Scholars in several fields have taken up affect theories to better understand, for example, the structures and effects of power and

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(bio)politics, human and non-human interactions and relations, and survival in the contemporary world. In *Affective Ecocriticism*, Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino claim that “environments too direct how we process information” and that “place profoundly shapes our emotional lives”.<sup>2</sup> Northern forests are one such environment.

What do we think of when we encounter the word “forest”? We may think of wild and dangerous places we cannot control, places where we lose at least some of our power or agency and surrender to the power of these forests. Or we may envision romantic images of ancient forests, not too overgrown and messy, with dappled sunlight on verdant undergrowth, birds chirping away blissfully, and flowers emitting intoxicating perfume. Indeed, from afar, forests are often felt as inhospitable and dangerous wild places or romanticised as abodes of beauty and harmony.

Both of these accounts are affective and speak of human anxiety, fears, and hopes, projected onto the ontic forest.<sup>3</sup> But the forest also affects us directly, as a body or, to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s terms, a “multiplicity” or “a body populated by multiplicities” (a multiplicity of multiplicities)<sup>4</sup> composed of “elements”<sup>5</sup> that may be both human and non-human entities situated in time and space and interrelating with each other. Following Henri Bergson’s and Elias Canetti’s ideas, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two main types of multiplicity: molar and molecular. In this chapter,

<sup>2</sup> Bladow and Ladino 2018: 2

<sup>3</sup> Here, “ontic forest” refers to the forest as it is. In contrast, “mythical” or “phantasmatic forests” refer to how forests are thought of, and “phenomenal forest” names the forest one perceives through immediate sense experience. The word, “phantasmatic” refers to something that is imagined but thought of as knowledge. Phantasms preform affectively.

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 8-9, 30-34

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 27, 30

## AFFECTIVE FORESTS

the term ‘multiplicity’ refers to molecular multiplicities. The elements of such a multiplicity are “particles; their relations are distances; their movements are Brownian; their quantities are intensities, differences in intensity”.<sup>6</sup> Thus, as Elizabeth Grosz says, multiplicity is not a pluralised identity (identity multiplied by  $n$ ) but an “an ever-changing, non-totalizable collectivity” defined “not by its abiding identity or principle of sameness over time, but through its capacity to undergo permutations and transformations, that is, its dimensionality”.<sup>7</sup>

However, even if the first two accounts are phantasmatic, this does not make the affects and effects of these phantasmatic forests unreal. Further, it may be argued that even while physically in the forest, the phantasmatic (or “textual”) forests do not become irrelevant. They keep exerting an influence on how we perceive the forest, on how the forest affects us. Thus, if we consider that affect is ecological and “operates at the confluence of environments, texts, and bodies”,<sup>8</sup> it is a useful tool for examining human-forest relations to understand the affective role and dimension these forests have in human lives and vice versa.

Although since the so-called affective turn<sup>9</sup> affect theory has been widely explored by authors in the social sciences and humanities to understand human experience (including social and bodily ones) in a world in which, according to Patricia Ticineto Clough, “ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism” have become symptomatic events that critical theory is challenged to analyse,<sup>10</sup> very little has been

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 33. See also Bergson 1950: 87-96; and Holland 2013: 94-95.

<sup>7</sup> Grosz 1993: 170. See also Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 8-9, 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> Bladow and Ladino 2018: 8

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Massumi 1995 and Clough 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Clough 2007: 1

written about using affect theory for a practical analysis of literature, even if various texts are used to illustrate the theory.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the American novelist Emily Fridlund's novel *History of Wolves*.<sup>11</sup> The novel is saturated with vivid descriptions of nature (forest), which plays an important role in the lives of most of its characters. Reading the novel from the viewpoint of affect theory and ecocriticism, the analysis explores whether affects are elicited by the ontic, ontological, phantasmatic, or the anthropomorphised/mythical forest,<sup>12</sup> as well as the relevance of seeing-feeling the forest as distant or close, wild or ordered. It also examines how the level of anthropomorphisation and the specificity of descriptions reflect on the intensity of affects and whether the forest itself has agency. Thus, combining affect theory with ecocriticism, this chapter aims to contribute to furthering our understanding of affective relationships between human and non-human entities and their environment as well as using affect theories to analyse entire works of literature.

## Affect

A lot of work has already been done on the role of emotions in moral and ethical choices, the ethical and political dimensions of emotions, and the importance of art in eliciting emotions (see, for example, Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler). However, affect theory combined with ecocriticism has the potential to shed light on how representations of nature affect us more viscerally and are thus potentially a means of creating a relevant impact.

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<sup>11</sup> Fridlund 2017

<sup>12</sup> “Ontological forest” refers to various ways of the forest’s nature of being may be theorised.

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The term ‘affect’ in affect theory requires closer scrutiny. Indeed, even though much of contemporary affect theory can be traced back to Gilles Deleuze’s ideas, it seems that each scholar has a (slightly) different understanding of what affects entail.<sup>13</sup> Affect takes many forms, as Brian Massumi<sup>14</sup> claims: “[t]o get anywhere with the concept [affect], you have to retain the manyness of its forms. It’s not something that can be reduced to one thing”. Broadly, affect is the power to affect and be affected.<sup>15</sup> Affect is about intensity.<sup>16</sup> Affects have to do with events, situations, encounters; they are relational and interactional.<sup>17</sup> Affect is (proto-) political in that it alters power relations.<sup>18</sup> Affect is contagious and sticky in that it sustains the connection between ideas, values and objects.<sup>19</sup> Affect is not emotion but is not completely separate from it either; emotion is an expression of affect or the means by which objects create impressions in a shared space.<sup>20</sup> Affect is pre-personal, pre-linguistic and precedes consciousness.<sup>21</sup> Affect is ecological “by nature”, as it operates at the junction of bodies, environments, and texts.<sup>22</sup>

Considering the various accounts of affect, as well as their criticism,<sup>23</sup> I position myself among Lauren Berlant, Sara

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg’s description of affect is so broad that it may make the term an empty signifier that loses specificity through the proliferation of different meanings attributed to it. See Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 1-25, Laclau 1996: 36-46.

<sup>14</sup> Massumi 2015: 47

<sup>15</sup> Massumi 2015: ix

<sup>16</sup> Massumi 2015: 5-6; Stewart 2007: 128

<sup>17</sup> Berlant 2011: 13-15, 79; Bourassa 2002: 66; Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 2; Stewart 2007: 2-4, 128

<sup>18</sup> Massumi 2015: ix; Stewart 2007: 15-16

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed 2010: 230; Tomkins 1995: 57

<sup>20</sup> Massumi, 2015: 4; Ahmed 2010: 13-14, 27

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed 2010: 27-28; Ahmed 2014: 40; Bourassa 2002: 64-65; Lichtenberg Ettinger 2002: 229; Murphie 2002: 196-197; Seigworth 2005: 161

<sup>22</sup> Bladow and Ladino 2018: 2

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Leys 2011: 434-472.

Ahmed, Kathleen Stewart, and Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino in my understanding of affect. In particular, following Ahmed, I will not make a sharp distinction between emotion and affect. Following Berlant and Stewart, I consider affects as having a political dimension and having to do with events, situations, encounters: there is an impact, an interruption or pause, and a reconfiguration or realignment (which may not be that different from what was before). Echoing Ahmed and Berlant, I view affects as sticky, contagious, and potentially socially determined. Further, affect is not exclusive to humans, as it operates at the junction of bodies, environments, and texts.<sup>24</sup>

## Methodology

I employ close reading in order to analyse *History of Wolves*. As a formalist practice, close reading aims to be objective and empirical and does not consider cultural context or ideology. Further, a close reading requires a relatively short text, which makes it unusable for analysing an entire novel. Unable to closely read the entire novel, I need to find and choose passages relevant to forest and affect for closer examination. I also have to glean from these passages how and why the entities of the narrative world are affected. However, this is impossible without considering the cultural context and ideology of the narrative world and the author's contemporary world because affects are relational and political, and any text is a product of its time. Further, finding and understanding the affects of a story world is as much a matter of content as of form.

Susanna Paasonen argues that “close reading has never been close enough”, for it has always contained the ideal of readerly

<sup>24</sup> Ahmed 2010: 13-14, 27, 230-231; Berlant 2011: 5, 13-15, 79, 158-159; Stewart 2007: 1-4, 128; Bladow and Ladino: 2018: 2

mastery.<sup>25</sup> She further posits that the reader's experience of the text is impossible to tell apart from acts of interpretation. Thus, one cannot separate affect, which is subjective, from close reading, which aims to be objective.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, Eugenie Brinkema makes a case for reading for form and reading affects as having forms to avoid solipsism in affective readings. She further posits that "affective force works over form" and that "forms are auto-affectively charged".<sup>27</sup> I thus propose that my method of reading *History of Wolves* is affective close reading, which involves both looking for formal qualities as well as considering whether and how the text affects me as a reader.

The textual markers that are particularly relevant for my analysis are, for example, words denoting strong emotions, passages in which characters change their mind or direction or orientation, unusual juxtapositions suggesting emotional turbulence or imbalance, and passages with sudden unexpected or impulsive actions. Following Epp Annus's argument on flashbacks and flashforwards creating internal tension centres in a story,<sup>28</sup> I follow these gravitation points, as they are likely to mark an affective event.

## Land Affect

*History of Wolves* is mainly set in a nearly abandoned hippie commune in the rural northern Minnesota of the 1990s. It is a first-person narrative, a coming-of-age story, told as a sort of fractured memoir. The main character, Madeline (Linda) Furston, grows up in a small house by a lake in the middle of the forest. Her attachment to and close relationship with the forest opens her up to be affectively attuned to the forest. In Nicole

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<sup>25</sup> Paasonen 2010: 62

<sup>26</sup> Paasonen 2010: 62

<sup>27</sup> Brinkema 2014: 27-46

<sup>28</sup> Annus 1997: 44-45

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E. Merola's words, her body is "open to being reverberated by its environment in physiologically fundamental ways".<sup>29</sup> The following excerpt is one example of such attunement.

As the bus angled north, as we left the city behind, I watched the leaves on the trees through the window go from deep green to pale mint to nothing. I watched snow appear in banks on the roadsides again, and somewhere along the way—despite myself—I started to feel a sleepy, sweet, intoxicating calm. [...] But the wash of calm also came from seeing the lakes frozen over again at the shorelines, patches of bluish snow on the ground, black fields gone white and empty.<sup>30</sup>

Linda's evident attachment and attunement to the forest raises several questions. Is the object of her attachment an anthropomorphised forest or an ontic forest of twig and bark, rock and soil, snow and ice? Does it make a difference in the affects she experiences? What kinds of affect does the forest elicit and why? A useful concept for thinking about the last question is Jobb Arnold's term 'land affect'. Arnold defines land affects as "nontechnologically mediated experiences of affective energy that cause people *to feel with the land*".<sup>31</sup> He argues that "[i]ntense experiences of land affect [...] mobilize and transmit latent ecological energies, innervating the connective tissues that exist between interdependent webs of human and other-than-human life" and that "[a]lthough land affect is always already present, it is seldom registered in modern human awareness until the power of the land is mobilized and brought to bear upon embodied subjectivities".<sup>32</sup> In other words, as human

<sup>29</sup> Merola 2018: 38-39

<sup>30</sup> Fridlund 2017: 254

<sup>31</sup> Arnold 2018: 96

<sup>32</sup> Arnold 2018: 96

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and other-than-human life is connected in an environment, life forms both affect each other and are affected by other objects in the given environment. Yet often elusive an imperceptible land affects only become keenly felt when catastrophic event takes place.

What Arnold calls “the ability to feel with the land”<sup>33</sup> is in line with Kathleen Stewart’s understanding ordinary affects, which she defines as

[A] surging, a rubbing, a connection of some kind that has an impact. It’s transpersonal or prepersonal—not about one person’s feelings becoming another’s but about bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities: human bodies, discursive bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of water.<sup>34</sup>

Ordinary affects are things that happen,<sup>35</sup> they are affects of day-to-day life.<sup>36</sup> Thus, drawing together Stewart and Arnold, “land affects” can be thought of as ordinary “experiential intensities of lived realities in relation to ecological forces (for example, fire, flood, wind) that are primarily ‘nonconscious, noncognitive, nonlinguistic, noncoherent, nonrational, and unpredetermined’”.<sup>37</sup>

The following short passage gorgeously demonstrates such an affect:

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<sup>33</sup> Arnold 2018: 97-98

<sup>34</sup> Stewart 2007: 128

<sup>35</sup> Stewart 2007: 1-2

<sup>36</sup> Arnold 2018: 98

<sup>37</sup> Arnold 2018: 97-98

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I crunched along the snow-packed trail, felt the wind come off the lake in blasts, heard the pines groan and creak overhead. Halfway up the hill, my lungs started to feel raggedy. *My face changed into something other than face, got rubbed out.*<sup>38</sup>

The wind effaces. It is no mere physical numbness caused by cold wind. It is feeling with the land, becoming an element of the forest multiplicity. The word “becoming” is relevant here. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, de-territorialised<sup>39</sup> intensities, becoming something other than human, is what multiplicity is.<sup>40</sup> Becoming implies a flow; movement without set purpose, culmination, or subject; incorporeal transformations.<sup>41</sup> In other words, in this instance, Linda has the potential to become otherwise, to transform and shift with and within the multiplicity.

In Arnold’s terms, this affect registers as “ fleeting experiential and relational sensation grounded in land-based, embodied way-of-being and knowing that exists between human and other-than-human agents”.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the forest has agency, it acts and affects<sup>43</sup> either as a whole or through its elements, as confirmed by Neil Campbell, who argues that objects are connected through material and immaterial forces and lines of affect.<sup>44</sup>

Another similarly affective instance is described in the novel when Linda sneaks out of the house at night. While she considers her father hearing the thump she made jumping on the roof of their shed, she thinks “It was nothing. I was

<sup>38</sup> Fridlund 2017: 22. My emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Here, the term “de-territorialization” specifically refers to moving away from the “territory” that may be called essentially or normatively human.

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 32

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 274, 503, 507; Grosz 1993: 175-179

<sup>42</sup> Arnold 2018: 98

<sup>43</sup> Bladow and Ladino: 2018: 7

<sup>44</sup> Campbell 2018: 76-77. See also Azzarello 2018: 191-192.

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nothing".<sup>45</sup> The second “nothing” neither refers to her ceasing to exist nor suffering from inferiority complex. Rather, it refers to becoming; a changing of her role in the forest multiplicity. She changes from a human entity to a non-human one, she becomes part of the wilderness, and thus the sounds she makes are of no concern to the man who is her father.

In the first example, the affect is brought about by the very real existing phenomena in the forest. Yet, the forest is also somewhat anthropomorphised. The pines creak and groan. The wind and the pines are both active and reactive. It is as if the cold winter wind has a power that affects the rest of the forest, including Linda, and which can move the elements in the forest multiplicity and thus force them (and itself) to become something other, to shift their positions.

Another two examples of affects elicited by the inevitable power of nature are as follows: “we watched a storm blow ice in monstrous crusts off the limbs of trees—so that was part of it, too, the slow-motion sense of catastrophe”<sup>46</sup> and “Last night’s rain gave the sunny woods a squinty newborn look. It seemed fizzed, fermented—everything shimmering and throwing lights.”<sup>47</sup> In these cases, Linda seems to stand apart from, and be connected to, the forest simultaneously. She looks at the forest and is affected because she is still close (too close for comfort?) and connected.

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<sup>45</sup> Fridlund 2017: 170

<sup>46</sup> Fridlund 2017: 15

<sup>47</sup> Fridlund 2017: 91

## Insiders and Outsiders

Even though Linda is more loosely connected to the forest in the last two examples, she is not an outsider. While it is difficult to draw a concrete line between forest insiders and outsiders in the novel, the characters who have a deeper and more personal connection to the forest usually experience forest-related affects that are different, or are of different intensity, to those arriving from outside. However, as *History of Wolves* is a first-person narrative, we do not see into the minds of other characters and thus the accounts of the affects they experience are filtered through Linda. Thus, the reader depends on Linda's powers of observation and interpretation.

The ability to feel with the land is epistemologically important in Linda's case. She knows and understands things in relation to the forest. For example, she makes sense of a telescope by comparing it to a heron. She notices clouds, trees, plants, and animals and knows their names. The forest makes life intelligible for her. She moves, thinks, changes, and comprehends in relation to other elements of the forest multiplicity. This may be a reason why the woods are so often mentioned in the text, even when it is not strictly necessary for the narrative to work. Further, these descriptions intermediate her affects to the reader.

However, as is evident from the above examples, the way Linda is affected by the forest is not merely because of "land-based-ways of knowing".<sup>48</sup> Rather, drawing together Deleuze and Guattari's concept of multiplicity and Alexa Weik von Mossner's analysis of *Love in the Anthropocene*,<sup>49</sup> the way the forest affects Linda is strongly connected to her "lived, embodied experience".

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<sup>48</sup> Arnold 2018: 98

<sup>49</sup> Weik von Mossner 2018: 58

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In this connection, Arnold explains that “such land-based-ways of knowing have been dimmed” for “many people who live in modern industrialized urban societies” and land affects register strongly only when they “directly impinge upon one’s bodily senses”.<sup>50</sup> This dimming, Arnold argues,<sup>51</sup> results from people having very little meaningful connection to the land and from having only mediated proximity that “allows people to disconnect from the affective intensity of place-based realities, stifling our ability to emotionally ‘know’ what these experiences actually entail”.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, embodied experiences and ways of knowing often contrast with phantasmatic or with ‘flat’ ones (in which nothing much registers as special). This contrast lets the former get under one’s skin, push and pull, or make one stand still with their intensity.

One example of experiencing the forest differently is the scene in which a family of tourists offer Linda a ride.<sup>53</sup> The man, thinking Linda lost, shows her his map and tries to explain that there is nothing but forest and lakes for fifty miles. For him, this is a dangerous place that is interesting to visit only with the safety of maps and transport. Linda, however, is irked by the tourist’s assumptions.

In addition, one of the children in the car has a notebook with two lists: *Plans* and *Memories*. These lists further exemplify a romanticised idea of the forest as a museum or tourist attraction where you go and see things, perhaps take a picture or two, and go back home. In a way, these tourists never left the city.

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<sup>50</sup> Arnold 2018: 98

<sup>51</sup> Arnold 2018: 96,98,107

<sup>52</sup> Arnold 2018: 96, 98, 107

<sup>53</sup> Fridlund 2017: 266

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Indeed, this is often the case if all goes according to plan. But if there is glitch – an extreme weather event, an accident, a strange encounter – a range of different and far more intense affects may emerge. We get a glimpse of that when the tourists get anxious because Linda seems to lead them into the middle of the forest. Interestingly, both of these accounts are phantasmatic. Linda, however, experiences the car ride offered by the tourists quite differently. For her, the forest seems to have more agency than the car with the people in it. For her, the trees and animals are more real.

Another similar contrast emerges when Patra asks Linda, “is it too dark to walk in the woods by yourself?” to which she answers “nope”.<sup>54</sup> For Patra, the dark forest is a source of (primal) fear, unease. For Linda, however, the same ontic forest is a place she knows and understands (to an extent). Unlike the outsiders, she neither confuses clouds and darkness with danger nor has a rosy outlook of the forest as somehow benign and ordered.<sup>55</sup>

Aside from the relatively harmless tourists and the neighbours the Gardners, there is another type of outsider who comes to the forest: the developer. The developers taking over and destroying the lakeside forests in *History of Wolves* is similar to the process Arnold describes when discussing the burning tar sand in Canada.<sup>56</sup>

The twenty acres of land on the east side of Still Lake. That's what I knew. That's the one thing I'd always assumed I'd understand. I knew the red and white pine on the hilltop, the quaking aspen

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<sup>54</sup> Fridlund 2017: 45

<sup>55</sup> Fridlund 2017: 45, 72, 94

<sup>56</sup> Arnold 2018: 96

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and birch closer to shore. I knew the honeysuckle and chipmunks and sunset views of the lake that weren't worth very much in the end to developers.<sup>57</sup>

The developers have very little meaningful connection with the forest and only value it in economic terms. Instead of trees they see logs, instead of lakeside habitats they see land that can be built on and sold for profit. Theirs is an extractive process.

It follows that there is a possibility none of these forests – the mythical, the romanticised, the ontic – will be enough to ensure preservation. The forest must become ‘more’ through embodied experience, through relationality. One could say that in order to be fully valued there needs to be a kind of ontological forest. In other words, the forest needs to be understood as a combination of ontic and phenomenal spaces to avoid what Andrew Woolford describes as ontological destruction.<sup>58</sup> To put it simply, ‘developing’ the wild forest is made easy by not emotionally or affectively knowing what the experience of living in the forest entails and how easy it is to disrupt an environment that can provide that experience.

### Solastalgia

The destruction of a forest, in turn, may lead to anxiety and solastalgia. Following Nicole M. Merola, I understand anxiety as “a temporally doubled affect of nervousness and unease that infects both present and future.”<sup>59</sup> Solastalgia, a term coined by Glenn Albrecht, is environmentally induced anxiety or distress, a “homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home’” that is “caused by the lived experience of ongoing loss of solace and

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<sup>57</sup> Fridlund 2017: 127-128

<sup>58</sup> Woolford 2009: 81-97

<sup>59</sup> Merola 2018: 33

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the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one's home and territory".<sup>60</sup>

It is evident that Linda suffers from solastalgic distress due to the destruction of the forest of her childhood, the forest that used to provide coherence to her life. She is clear about the woods of her childhood not being the same as her contemporary woods. For her, the forest has become a suburb.<sup>61</sup>

Sometimes, when I sit with my mother outside the rehabbed cabin on what's left of our lot, I try to remember how the woods looked to me when I was younger. I know better than to be wistful. It was never magical to me: I was never so young, nor so proprietary, as to see it like that. Year by year, the woods just kept unfurling and blooming and drying up, and its constant flux implied meanings half revealed, half withheld—mysteries, yes, but mysteries made rote by change itself, the woods covering and re-covering its tracks. [...] I felt the power of the woods very keenly. I felt the way it chastised and corrected me, the way it always seemed to say: *See!*<sup>62</sup>

After a few pages, there is a further description of how Linda remembers the forest of her childhood. For her, every tree, every element of the forest was different, personal. There were things she knew about the woods, but always also things that were new to her. "The woods were a kind of nursery for not thinking, for just seeing and walking along."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Albrecht 2020: 10-11

<sup>61</sup> Fridlund 2017: 257

<sup>62</sup> Fridlund 2017: 258

<sup>63</sup> Fridlund 2017: 265

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Linda's intuitive, intense, and affective experience of the forest brings us back to the forest as a multiplicity. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the nature of multiplicities and their elements is rhizomatic and that "each element ceaselessly varies and alters its distance in relation to the others".<sup>64</sup> In Deleuze and Guattari's understanding, rhizome opposes roots and trees, they are stable and hierarchical structures organised into categories. Any point of a rhizome is connected to any other point, a broken piece of a rhizome can start up again in one of its old forms or in a new one. Indeed, a rupture in a rhizome causes a line of flight, a flow of intensity that causes a becoming, a change in nature and function.<sup>65</sup>

However, if a rhizomatic structure can start up again from any ruptured fragment, how can a forest as a multiplicity disappear? In a way, it does not. Yet, it can change until it seems unrecognisable. This makes being an element of a multiplicity a precarious position, for it means being at the edge of a 'crowd', at a periphery that is in constant movement following no specific rules or rhythm. Yet, letting go or going to the centre means dissolution.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, losing the forest to development is not the only cause of solastalgic distress for Linda. She changes. She lets go. Part of the letting go is moving to the city, part is losing her childlike attributes. She admits that the woods started to seem different to her for good.<sup>67</sup> In this way, the forest becomes less accessible for her. It may even be that in the Western cultural context, the forest cannot be inhabited permanently. It is as a wild time and place where we can but sojourn and, perhaps, long to return: "Where did people in a city go to feel less trapped?"<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 8-9, 30

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 3-25, 161

<sup>66</sup> Deleuze and Guattari: 2005: 29, 54-55

<sup>67</sup> Fridlund 2017: 269

<sup>68</sup> Fridlund 2017: 211

Indeed, Jack Halberstam emphasises that with wildness, when is just as important as where.<sup>69</sup> Wildness is a time and space of disorder, a challenge to the assumed order of things.<sup>70</sup> Further, taming or controlling wildness is impossible in that the very act of trying to do so obliterates it: a tamed wild space is no longer wild. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, this taming can be called stratification, making the forest multiplicity into an organism, a controlled place of tree and root. In other words, a stratified space is ordered, normalised, and has set goals.

However, even if the forest of a childhood or even the ontic forest itself is lost or in the process of being lost, it remains affective precisely through its (immanent) absence. It remains as a potential and this potential can be the piece of rhizome that causes its rebirth, albeit possibly in a different form. After all, if we give the forest a chance and let it be, it returns with vigour, taking over and changing structured space. Counterintuitively, for people to leave the forest to its own devices, there has to be an affective relationship with the forest.

### Concluding Words

Thus, my reading of *History of Wohes* shows that forests are indeed affective. How a forest affects a person, however, depends, among other things, on the person's embodied experience and memory of the forest. In terms of ecocritical concerns, experiencing with and within the forest is an important part of fracturing the anthropocentric worldview, of challenging human exceptionalism. This is why the concept of becoming is so relevant. Becoming an element of a forest multiplicity means being affected by and affecting other elements in that multiplicity, which can give an intimate understanding of the

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<sup>69</sup> Halberstam: 2020: 4-5

<sup>70</sup> Halberstam: 2020: 3

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forest and make it personally valuable, if not indispensable. However, as there can be any number of different potential becomings, not all of them are necessarily useful or positive from human or environmentalist perspectives.

Thus the difficult question is, what kinds of knowledge, experience, and affects are needed to leave the forest to its becomings? I do not ask about preserving the forest, for this could easily perpetuate human exceptionalism, the self-ordained role of being the ones destined to order the world, as well as make the forest seem an ossified object. After all, the forest is agentive. Not all its affects are human reflections. Intensities pass along non-human entities, humans, as well as all sorts of objects or elements of the forest multiplicity.

I am convinced, however, that exploring forest-related affects sheds some light on this question by showing how phantasmatic, ontic, and phenomenal forests meet and bleed into each other in various ways to elicit different affects and how intimate knowledge of the forest (including knowing names, natures, and forms of, and relations to, non-human entities) increases the forest's (positive) affective power without letting us stumble too deeply into the realms of fear or adoration.

The problem here is that not everybody can go and experience the forest the way Linda does, for there is relatively little forest left and what is there would be made unrecognisable by hordes of human visitors. This is where literature and its analysis play a pivotal role. For example, reading *History of Wolves* gives the reader vicarious experiences of what it means to live with and within a Nordic forest. These experiences should not be underestimated, for the affects the text represents as well as elicits are very real and influence our lives.

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In this regard, a closer attention to the range of affective experience and social relations with regard to other-than-human entities should prove productive in showing how and what texts depicting forests do. Unfortunately, this remains out of the scope of this chapter because of length limitations and is thus an important topic for a future study.

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# Forêts intérieures

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**Résumé** – De tout temps, les forêts produisent chez les humains un mystérieux effet d'attraction, elles qui sont porteuses d'une charge symbolique puissante. Le Québec a défriché son espace au cœur de la forêt. Celle-ci subsiste dans son imaginaire et marque son domaine littéraire aussi bien allochtone qu'autochtone. Dans ce chapitre, je pénétrerai dans la profondeur des forêts intérieures enfouies dans les psychés et la littérature. La forêt évoque un univers profane et sacré, enchanteur et dangereux, l'incarnation d'un autre rapport au monde, bouillon de récits et de légendes. La forêt porte un horizon et l'arbre, une écriture.

**Mots-clés** – Forêt, épinette, charge symbolique, effet d'attraction, sacré

Il y a des déserts d'eau salée et des déserts d'arbres. J'habite aux confins de deux déserts : une immensité d'eau, le golfe du Saint-Laurent ouvert sur l'Atlantique, et une immensité d'arbres nains, de mousse et de lichens, la forêt boréale. La forêt boréale qui traverse tout le nord du Canada et du Québec, d'où je viens, compte pour près du tiers des forêts boréales de la planète.

J'habite une contrée où les têtes d'épinettes ondoient sous le vent comme des champs de blé mûr. Où les mélèzes nous regardent les regarder avec leurs grands bras ballants. Où, quand arrive l'automne, des tempêtes de bleu, de rouge et d'orange s'abattent sur les paysages, présages d'autres tempêtes, de blanc celles-là.

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Monique Durand, « Forêts intérieures », Sara Bédard-Goulet et Daniel Chartier [dir.], *The Northern Forest. La forêt nordique*, Montréal et Tartu, Imaginaire | Nord et University of Tartu Press, coll. « Isberg », 2022, p. 119-129.

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C'est le temps de cueillir bleuets, baies d'argousier, chicoutais. J'habite une contrée où les merles et les jaseurs d'Amérique, pendus aux cormiers gelés, se saoulent, ivres de fruits fermentés. Oiseaux saouls, oiseaux fous.

De tout temps, la forêt produit chez les humains un mystérieux effet d'attraction, elle qui est porteuse d'une charge symbolique puissante. Elle trône, avec le froid et la neige, parmi les grands mythes fondateurs québécois. Le Québec a défriché son espace au cœur de la forêt et cette forêt subsiste dans son imaginaire. Chacun porte un peu d'elle, intériorisée. Chacun est un peu devenu forêt.

Dans ces immenses espaces forestiers vivaient des peuples autochtones depuis des temps immémoriaux. Nous sommes de sang mêlé avec nos frères et nos sœurs autochtones. Nous sommes de sang mêlé avec la forêt.

Il se vend, bon an mal an, au Québec plus d'un million de permis de pêche, de chasse et de piégeage sur une population de huit millions de personnes. Il est vrai que ce nombre est à la baisse depuis quelques années. Les jeunes générations semblent préférer profiter des bois autrement, en campeurs ou en randonneurs à pied, en canot, en kayak.

Mon chapitre s'intéressera tout particulièrement à quelques écrivains-phares, surtout des écrivaines, du domaine littéraire québécois d'expression française, dont l'existence et l'œuvre sont traversées de forêts, sinon fondées sur elles.

Il y sera fait référence à trois des plus grands poètes québécois, Anne Hébert, Gaston Miron et Hélène Dorion, ainsi qu'à trois écrivaines innues majeures, les poètes Joséphine Bacon et Rita Mestokosho, qui écrivent dans leur langue, l'innu-aimun, et se

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traduisent elles-mêmes en langue française, et leur cadette, la romancière Naomi Fontaine, écrivant en français.

Chacune de ces voix est le reflet d'une arborescence intérieure, dense et lumineuse, qui s'inscrit dans une géographie physique à la fois enchanteresse et dangereuse.

### Enchanteresse et dangereuse

Entrer dans l'intimité des arbres est une expérience bienfaisante, revigorante. C'est un peu comme rentrer chez soi. La forêt a l'heure de diminuer le stress, de calmer l'anxiété et de contrer la dépression. Prendre un bain de forêt ramène à soi et, curieusement, permet d'échapper à soi. Cette annulation de soi-même au milieu des arbres crée le sentiment d'une présence au monde à nulle autre pareille, une sorte d'exultation tranquille.

On comprend mieux l'infinie nostalgie de la forêt nourrie par les peuples autochtones., une nostalgie à laquelle ils n'ont jamais trouvé de remède. Dans *Un thé dans la toundra*, la poète Joséphine Bacon écrit : « Tu me promets une terre pure / Où tu existes / *Missinaku* m'abreuve / *Papakassiku* court avec moi / Le lichen me nourrit / La mousse soigne mes larmes<sup>1</sup>. »

Forêt enchanteresse, mais aussi dangereuse. Univers menaçant, où guette sans cesse l'idée de s'y perdre et de mourir de froid, de faim ou dévoré par une bête. Dans *Le tombeau des rois*, la poète Anne Hébert écrit : « N'allons pas en ces bois profonds / À cause des grandes fontaines / Qui dorment au fond<sup>2</sup>. » Les « grandes fontaines » évoquent chez Anne Hébert d'immenses

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<sup>1</sup> Joséphine Bacon, *Un thé dans la toundra. Nipishapui nete mushuat*, Montréal, Mémoire d'encrier, 2013, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Hébert, « Les grandes fontaines », poème d'abord publié dans *Le tombeau des rois* en 1953, repris dans *Œuvre poétique, 1950-1990*, Paris et Montréal, Éditions du Seuil et Éditions du Boréal, 1992, p. 15.

eaux surgies du tréfonds de la terre, et les « bois profonds », une forêt dense et noire, associée au danger.

Je suis encore hantée par l'histoire des frères Collin, Edgar et Wellie, deux trappeurs expérimentés partis au début de l'automne 1936 de Longue-Pointe-de-Mingan, village situé le long du golfe du Saint-Laurent, vers leur lieu habituel de trappage et la cabane qu'ils y avaient construite, 200 kilomètres plus au nord.

Ils prennent 34 jours pour s'y rendre. Le 30 décembre, l'un des frères se blesse à un pied. À compter de ce jour, ce sera la descente aux enfers. Plus de bois pour se réchauffer. Plus rien à manger. Plus la force de résister. Ils notent tous leurs faits et gestes dans un calepin d'écolier qu'une petite soeur leur a offert. Derniers mots écrits par Edgar le 26 janvier : « Je dis mon chapelet, je pleure, je soupire et je tremble de froid<sup>3</sup>. » Les frères furent retrouvés au printemps de 1937, tous deux statufiés par le froid.

### **Univers profane et sacré**

La forêt boréale est aussi un univers à la fois profane et sacré. Univers profane. Qui en est d'abord un d'hommes, du moins au Québec. Chasseurs, pêcheurs, trappeurs, mineurs, bûcherons, pilotes, missionnaires, explorateurs, les forêts et les lointains inentamés sont depuis toujours le domaine des hommes, leur entre-soi. Sauf pour les Autochtones.

Ayant accès à des activités professionnelles qui leur étaient autrefois interdites, les femmes québécoises s'investissent aujourd'hui dans la forêt boréale, s'appropriant sa science, la

<sup>3</sup> Wellie et Edgar Collin, *Deux héros-martyrs*, Longue-Pointe-de-Mingan, [s. é.], 1987, p. 21.

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familiarité avec elle et ses splendeurs. Elles sont devenues ingénieries, géographes, géologues, pilotes, conductrices d'engins de toutes sortes, guides d'aventure et de plein air.

Mais la forêt boréale est aussi et peut-être surtout un univers sacré. Elle est associée à la figure du caribou, le maître de la forêt dans la tradition et la spiritualité innues. La poète Joséphine Bacon écrit : « Je rêve aux lacs de ma terre. / Aux étoiles qui s'y mirent. / Tout est calme dans la Toundra. / [...] / Je suis seule avec ma prière / Je cherche l'étoile du caribou<sup>4</sup>. » Rita Mestokosho, poète innue elle aussi, écrit : « Je voudrais être vieille et avoir voyagé sur des terres de plénitude. / Comme la toundra, la montagne, la rivière et tous ces petits sentiers / où j'ai marché pour être caribou<sup>5</sup>. » Leur cadette, la romancière Naomi Fontaine, écrit à son tour :

Je voulais que tu voies la forêt vierge jusqu'à sa racine, que tu entendas le parfait silence de la brise à la brunante. Mais ce que j'aurais aimé partager, c'est cette indicible fierté d'être moi, sans maquillage et sans parfum, dans cet horizon de bois et de blancheur. De grandeur, qui rend humbles même les plus grands de ce monde. En suivant la route du caribou, tu aurais vu la ténacité des hommes devant le froid, plus vivants que jamais<sup>6</sup>.

Pour les Québécois non autochtones, la forêt boréale reste associée à la figure mythique de l'original, gibier fabuleux à l'imposant panache, incarnant puissance et endurance. Dans sa célèbre *Marche à l'amour*, le poète Gaston Miron écrit :

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<sup>4</sup> Joséphine Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Rita Mestokosho, « Être Atiku », lettre adressée à Denise Brassard, Laure Morali [dir.], *Amititau! Parlons-nous!*, Montréal, Mémoire d'encrier, 2008, p. 58-59.

<sup>6</sup> Naomi Fontaine, *Kuessipan*, Montréal, Mémoire d'encrier, 2011, p. 90-91.

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tu es mon amour / ma clameur mon brancement  
/ [...] / orignal, quand tu brames orignal / coule-  
moi dans ta plainte osseuse / fais-moi passer  
tout cabré tout empanaché / dans ton appel et ta  
détermination<sup>7</sup>.

La chasse à l'orignal fut longtemps chez nous un rite d'initiation des jeunes hommes. J'ai tenté de décrire cette expérience dans mon roman *Le petit caillou de la mémoire*, dont voici un extrait :

C'est quand il croit suivre la piste d'un orignal que l'adolescent connaît les plus grands enchantements. Il en oublie tout le reste. [...]

Tout son corps est tendu, devenu oreille pour entendre, nez pour sentir. Ses yeux perçants brillent du bonheur de se rapprocher sans cesse de ce qu'il cherche, enfiévré. Il progresse à pas feutrés, déposant un pied après l'autre avec d'infinies précautions.

Soudain la bête grandiose est là. Les tempes de William battent la chamade. Chaque fois, comme la première. Il est sur la terre pour ça, rien que pour ça. Pour ces instants-là. La beauté, c'est de voir, voir enfin. Et tirer. On fait comme ça depuis que le monde est monde. On a besoin de cette chair. On a besoin de manger son cœur encore chaud. On a besoin de vivre, de se sentir vivre. On a besoin de gagner sur quelque chose.

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<sup>7</sup> Gaston Miron, « La marche à l'amour », *L'homme rapaillé*, Montréal, L'Hexagone, 1994, p. 53.

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Alors les hommes pleurent. Ils tombent à genoux.  
Ils disent la prière rouge des arbres<sup>8</sup>.

### Un autre rapport au monde

La forêt boréale incarne un autre rapport au monde. C'est la figure de l'Autochtone, résidant millénaire de la forêt, attaché à la Terre-Mère, pour qui l'humain n'est pas au centre du monde mais partie du monde, tout comme l'épinette, la rivière, la lune ou le caribou. L'Autochtone, à la culture qui fut dépossédée d'elle-même. Joséphine Bacon écrit : « Mon arbre déraciné / S'étend à une forêt / Qui l'a vu grandir, / Comme un guerrier / Meurt sur une terre / Qu'on lui arrache<sup>9</sup>. »

C'est aussi la figure de l'ermite. On va se terrer en forêt pour rompre avec le bruit et la fureur du monde, se laver des salissures de la terre habitée, se guérir des ravages de la civilisation. La forêt devient l'occasion d'une renaissance, d'une rédemption.

C'est enfin la figure du coureur des bois. Le grand géographe québécois Louis-Edmond Hamelin, inventeur du mot *nordicité*, voyait dans le coureur des bois au nord du Nord l'archétype de l'homme libre. C'est l'irrépressible désir de liberté, prétendait-il, qui poussait les coureurs des bois toujours plus au Nord, avec leurs raquettes et leurs lignes de trappage. « Allons plus loin, là-bas, voir si c'est mieux, nous y serons plus libres », leur faisait-il dire. Louis-Edmond Hamelin est décédé le 11 février 2020. Je lui rends ici un hommage ému.

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<sup>8</sup> Monique Durand, *Le petit caillou de la mémoire*, La Tour-d'Aigues, Éditions de l'Aube, 2017, p. 31-32.

<sup>9</sup> Joséphine Bacon, « À Josée », lettre adressée à José Acquelin, Laure Morali [dir.], *Aimittau! Parlons-nous!*, Montréal, Mémoire d'encrier, 2008, p. 310.

## Symbole d'échappée, refuge d'alliances

La forêt est depuis toujours aussi symbole d'échappée, de résistance, de maquis. Dans les pays baltes, dont en Estonie, un groupe de résistants appelé « Frères de la forêt » s'y cacha pour tenir tête à l'occupant soviétique.

Les entrelacs forestiers et les sous-bois, l'enlacement des souches, des ramures et des feuilles sont également le refuge d'alliances secrètes, d'amours clandestines. Dans un poème intitulé *Forêts de l'âme*, l'écrivaine québécoise Hélène Dorion écrit : « Ces passions que l'on nomme amours comme des forêts indéchiffrables, des splendeurs d'âme et de sang qui surgissent pour s'évanouir aussitôt bues<sup>10</sup>. » « Je vois la forêt comme un horizon<sup>11</sup> », avance-t-elle encore. Un horizon déployé comme les vagues de la mer qui, inlassablement, roulent, grondent, remuent, bercent. « La forêt n'est pas opacité, poursuit-elle, mais une façon qu'a la lumière de travailler le paysage<sup>12</sup>. »

## Forêt porteuse d'une écriture

La forêt boréale porte un horizon, et l'arbre du Nord, une écriture. À même l'écorce de bouleau, sur laquelle on transmet un message, on dessine une carte, on avertit d'un danger. C'est le « bâton à message » de la tradition innue.

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<sup>10</sup> Hélène Dorion, « Forêts de l'âme », *L'Inconvénient – revue numérique*, n° 64, printemps 2016, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Mario Cloutier, « Hélène Dorion : nature humaine » [entrevue], *La Presse*, 17 octobre 2018, en ligne, <https://www.lapresse.ca/arts/livres/entrevues/201810/17/01-5200663-helene-dorion-nature-humaine.php>, consulté le 10 avril 2022.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

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*Bâtons à message.* La poète Joséphine Bacon a donné ce titre à un livre qu'elle a publié en 2009<sup>13</sup>, y faisant référence à un ensemble de repères qui permettaient aux nomades de s'orienter à l'intérieur des terres et de retrouver leur chemin dans l'écho des rivières et le battement du tambour :

J'amène mon bâton de parole / Et m'adresse aux étoiles / Je m'assois pour le repos de mes pieds / Je sais être seule pour entendre / Les aurores boréales / [...] / J'arrive enfin / À la terre qui espère / Ma venue<sup>14</sup>.

Je conclus cette communication sur une image, celle des os, qui revient chez Anne Hébert, Joséphine Bacon et Gaston Miron. Une image d'os dans laquelle il m'a semblé déceler, en une sorte de métonymie, la forêt intérieure qui habite les trois poètes :

Anne Hébert : « Je suis une fille maigre / Et j'ai de beaux os. / J'ai pour eux des soins attentifs / Et d'étranges pitiés / Je les polis sans cesse / Comme de vieux métaux<sup>15</sup>. »

Joséphine Bacon : « Je me suis faite belle / pour qu'on remarque / la moelle de mes os, / survivante d'un récit / qu'on ne raconte pas<sup>16</sup>. »

Gaston Miron, que je me permets de citer à nouveau : « original, quand tu brames original / coule-moi dans ta plainte osseuse<sup>17</sup> ».

<sup>13</sup> Joséphine Bacon, *Bâtons à message. Tshissinuatshitakana*, Montréal, Mémoire d'encrier, 2009, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> Joséphine Bacon, *Un thé dans la toundra. Nipishapui nete mushuat*, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Hébert, « La fille maigre », poème d'abord publié dans *Le tombeau des rois* en 1953, repris dans *Œuvre poétique, 1950-1990*, Paris et Montréal, Éditions du Seuil et Éditions du Boréal, 1992, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Joséphine Bacon, *Bâtons à message. Tshissinuatshitakana*, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Gaston Miron, op. cit., p. 53.

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J'ai cru voir dans ces images d'os des épinettes noires. Os saillant du grand corps de la forêt boréale d'où les trois écrivains, Hébert, Bacon et Miron, ont leurs origines. Épinettes noires aux rameaux rugueux, à l'écorce écailleuse, combattantes acharnées des climats rudes. Épinettes noires qui se contorsionnent sous le vent du Nord pour toucher au soleil.

## FORÊTS INTÉRIEURES

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# Thinking with Forests: Intra-active Entanglements in Richard Powers' *The Overstory*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) is a notable example of today's climate fiction, especially in its representation of trees as more important characters than humans. Powers' narrative is constructed to resemble a tree, with narrative strands linked with complex root patterns and adapted to the speed of wood. The novel is not so just about human characters but also historic events (settlement of the West, immigration, the Vietnam War, development of immersive computer games, etc.) that shape their lives and those of the nonhuman agents with which they exist in complex assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari 1978) or intra-active entanglements (Barad 2007). This makes Powers' attention to trees an excellent example of attempts to represent what Bennett (2010: 31) calls the “interplay of human and nonhuman forces”. The present chapter proposes a material-discursive reading of the novel, following the example of Barad in order to arrive at a better understanding of what Haraway (2008: 19) has termed “the world of becoming with”.

**Keywords** – Diffractive reading, intra-action, cli-fi, crisis ordinariness, Richard Powers

## Introduction

Today's world is characterised by a pervasive sense of inevitable, but at the same time invisible, crisis. Rob Nixon has called

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this presence of invisible crises “slow violence”. This type of violence is gradual, invisible, delayed, and, therefore, not necessarily recognised as violence in our media-saturated world. This poses the representational challenge of capturing and conveying something that lacks what we conventionally consider eventfulness.<sup>2</sup> We are intellectually all too aware of the restructuring of the economy, climate change or pandemics but because their violence is slow, we can ignore them and continue with our self-destructive behaviour. As Aldo Leopold already said, “we can be ethical only toward what we can see.”<sup>3</sup> We respond to what we feel strongly about, but what happens if the very nature of the processes refuses representation and, through that, eludes strong feeling? This is something that is a special challenge with Nordic landscapes, often depicted through the imagery of absence, lacking the drama of desertified landscapes or forest fires in climate imaginaries.

Vivid representation is hard when we are dealing with complex forest ecosystems, in view of the slow pace of natural adaptations of species. By the time we see withering trees, change might be irreversible. This is why Paul K. Saint-Amour argues that “ecological grief” is necessarily “*pre-traumatic* in its temporality”,<sup>4</sup> because the losses that we can grieve for at present are nothing compared to those to be incurred in the future. But how can we grieve for what we cannot see? We need to learn to see through different artistic representations that condense the signals from the surrounding atmosphere into coherent and emotionally engaging texts. Artistic and fictional representations are thus potentially potent resources for imagining slow violence and moving us to action.

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<sup>2</sup> Nixon 2013: 13

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Nixon 2013: 14.

<sup>4</sup> Saint-Amour 2020: 139

The challenge of representing the largely unrepresentable has been taken up by climate-change fiction (cli-fi).<sup>5</sup> However, as Katy Waldman has argued, this genre is somewhat counter-intuitive, as “literature has always been a humanist endeavor: it intrinsically and helplessly affirms the value of the species”, which creates a representational challenge when we are trying to show how we have “un-earthed ourselves” through our human egocentrism.<sup>6</sup> As Donna Haraway has argued, in a time that challenges our thinking and being so radically, we cannot once again make the mistake of thinking anthropocentrically.<sup>7</sup> Where does this leave us in the analysis of fiction? Fiction, by definition, is a human affair, built not just of language but of our histories, customs, and interiority. In the case of cli-fi, this poses a question about scale and perspective. How do we decentre the human if we are using the format of the novel, a genre closely tied to human experience?

Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018) is a notable example of today’s climate fiction, especially in its attempt to represent trees as characters almost more important than humans. Powers’ narrative is constructed to resemble a tree, with narrative strands linked with complex root patterns, and is adapted to the speed of wood. The novel is not so much about human characters as historic events (the settlement of the American West, immigration, the Vietnam War, the Timber Wars in the Pacific Northwest, the creation of immersive computer games, etc.) that shape human lives and those of the nonhuman agents with which they co-exist in complex assemblages. This makes Powers’ attention to forests an excellent example of capturing what Jane Bennett calls the “interplay of human and nonhuman

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<sup>5</sup> The potential of cli-fi for science communication has also been explored within narrative research. See Caracciolo 2019a for an excellent analysis of how scientific models are integrated into contemporary fiction.

<sup>6</sup> Waldman 2018

<sup>7</sup> Haraway 2016: 30-31

forces”.<sup>8</sup> The present chapter proposes a material-discursive reading of the novel, following the example of Karen Barad in order to arrive at a better understanding of what Haraway has called “the world of becoming with”.<sup>9</sup>

It also provides potential insights for thinking about Nordic imaginaries. Powers’ narrative largely takes place in the Pacific Northwest, that is, not in the North in the strict sense of the term, but his questions about the loss of rootedness in a place that would allow us to become with the environment are equally necessary for the circumpolar world.<sup>10</sup> There, too, patterns of migration and commodity culture have altered people’s ability to read and be with local landscapes as matrices of meaning. Powers’ attention to old-growth forests can help us hone our attention to the more modest plant ecosystems of the global North.

### Assemblages and Entanglements

The question of how to research our world as an assemblage of “different kinds of interacting and mutually constituting beings”<sup>11</sup> has puzzled scholars in different fields, from science and technology studies to anthropology, social sciences and the humanities. The question is not so much about the importance of doing such work but about how to do it without falling into the trap of New-Age romanticisation.

In the humanities, one of the dominant perspectives for tackling the complex interplay of human and nonhuman actants has for several decades already been Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a school of thought that has analysed the distributed agency of human and nonhuman, animate and

<sup>8</sup> Bennett 2010: 31

<sup>9</sup> Haraway 2008: 19

<sup>10</sup> Chartier 2018

<sup>11</sup> Kohn 2013: 5

inanimate actants.<sup>12</sup> Latour himself admits that his method provides freedom but at the cost of specificity, resulting in scholars “saying almost the same thing about all of them [law, science, the economy, religion]: namely that they are ‘composed in a heterogeneous fashion of unexpected elements revealed by the investigation’”.<sup>13</sup> This type of analysis does not seem to yield the sort of richness that literary research has tried to achieve. We need to find ways of considering fiction’s materiality while remaining attentive to what Hubert Zapf calls the “radical strangeness, alienation, and alterity” of fiction and view it, together with other arts, as one of the “explorative forms of cultural knowledge and creativity in their own right”.<sup>14</sup> In the context of political challenges outlined above, it is important to think specifically about what fiction can do, in addition to possessing a dispersed agency.

This is why, instead of the network, I turn towards the Deleuzian notion of assemblage, defined as

a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them across ages, sexes and reigns—different natures. Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of co-functioning; it is a symbiosis, a ‘sympathy’. It is never filiations which are important but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.<sup>15</sup>

As argued above, in the context where we cannot imagine slow violence because of its invisibility, we have to be specifically

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Latour 2005: 53.

<sup>13</sup> Latour 2014: 35

<sup>14</sup> Zapf 2016: 12

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 69

attuned to literature's imaginative and expressive capacities, which bring very particular agencies to the intra-active field. Literature is able to employ expressive devices to forge alliances and create affective responses that can be contagious. In Powers' novel, certain books move between characters who do not otherwise meet, and shift their lives. In assemblages, novels, too, are productive by suggesting new possible realities. Being viewed as parts of assemblages allows fiction to remain fiction, yet to also interact with other agentive forces, as Deleuze and Guattari show in providing different readings of fictional texts through their oeuvre (for example, Kafka to explain assemblages). After all, in Deleuze's own words, becomings "can only be contained in a life and expressed in a style".<sup>16</sup> Ridvan Atkins, building on Deleuze, stresses that narrative "ceases merely to be a form of human access to things (while also being that) and becomes expressive of being as such".<sup>17</sup> It is this connection to becoming that Powers' novel also strives to evoke.

As Deleuze argues, "in a multiplicity, what counts are not the terms of the elements, but what is 'between' them, the in-between, a set of relations that are inseparable from each other."<sup>18</sup> It is this relationality that I want to focus on, linking Deleuze's assemblages to Karen Barad's agential realism and, specifically, her notion of intra-action, which focuses on the dynamism of forces in which humans do not necessarily always play the most active role.<sup>19</sup> This type of decentring of the human is attractive in the context of climate change fiction.

I am drawn to the work of Barad, however, because, unlike some other new materialist thinkers, she maintains the relevance of the notion of discourse, but with the caveat that discourse should

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<sup>16</sup> Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 3

<sup>17</sup> Atkins 2016: 5

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Parnet 1987: viii

<sup>19</sup> Barad 2007: 141

not be viewed as a linguistic act but “that which constrains and enables what can be said”,<sup>20</sup> in other words, what determines what counts as meaningful and what not. This broader context is crucial in the case of literature that also operates in culturally determined norms of intelligibility and value. In the context of cli-fi, more specifically, we also need to have a language to discuss socio-economic power structures. For Barad, the material and the discursive are not separated. Discursive practices are, in this understanding, seen as intra-actions of different animate and inanimate agents in which “meaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility”.<sup>21</sup> Barad stresses that agents do not exist as coherent entities before they encounter each other. She draws attention to the constant exchange and relationships between entities, yet retains attention to their specificity.

This type of understanding of our universe and environment also calls for new models of reading. Barad suggests that we need to view the world through the prism of diffraction, “reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter.”<sup>22</sup> Barad is attentive to difference and at the same time to the potential for change. She stresses relational ontology based on intra-actions and the inevitable entanglement of objects. For her, the crucial notion is an “agential cut” that “enacts a *local* resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy”.<sup>23</sup> In this understanding, relationships exist before the related things are separable and they emerge as separate only in different intra-actions with each other.

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<sup>20</sup> Barad 2003: 819

<sup>21</sup> Barad 2003: 820-821

<sup>22</sup> Barad 2007: 71. This term had been used earlier also in Haraway 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Barad 2003: 815

This type of dialogue can lead to creative and unexpected encounters, among other things, between theory and fiction. The most challenging aspect of all of the different theories of new materiality and mattering is the question of representation. Eduardo Kohn, on the basis of his fieldwork, argues that, in addition to our “finitude”, what we share with nonhuman animals and other creatures “is the fact that how we represent the world around us is in some way or another constitutive of our being”.<sup>24</sup> Material ecocriticism has explored “the narrative aspects of agentic materiality as intermingled dynamic emergences and discursive forms”.<sup>25</sup>

I have a more modest aim. I would argue that instead of expending our limited energies on arguments about what representations say about reality, with its falsely rigid distinction between the representation and what is being represented, we should focus on intra-actions. The presence of these intra-actions has been amply conveyed in the case of our natural environment, but when translated to the page, they have had the tendency to become romanticised projections. Is it possible to escape this representational trap and to write diffractively, while remaining within the discursive confines of contemporary fiction? I argue that Richard Powers attempts this in his novel *The Overstory*.

### **Arboreal-human Entanglements and Tree-time**

Richard Powers has for several decades been considered one of the more significant living American authors, especially because of his exploration of the effects of modern technology, genetics, and artificial intelligence. His writing has also been characterised by different entanglements. For example, he has stated that “before I understood in literature that transformation into living

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<sup>24</sup> Kohn 2013: 6

<sup>25</sup> Oppermann 2013: 56

things, I was doing it in code. Type in a few lines of code, you create an organism.”<sup>26</sup> He has never been afraid to tackle grand themes, and many critics have pointed out that his novels are intellectually ambitious in his approach to topics ranging from music and genetics to birds, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality.

James Wood, however, also observes that Powers’ sophisticated ideas are often combined with relatively simple narrative techniques and lack “subtlety of insight into actual human beings”.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps this is true, but perhaps delving into the depths of human psychology is not Powers’ aim. In an interview, he argues that contemporary fiction has over-stressed the psychological and downplayed the social or ecological: “While the challenge to our continued existence on Earth has never been greater or clearer, literary fiction seems to be retrenching into an obsession with the challenges of private hopes, fears, and desires,”<sup>28</sup> possibly because of a loss of faith in the possibility of change. Powers does not always take human uniqueness very seriously. Already in one of his earlier novels, *Galatea 2.2* (1995), Powers’ characters were trying to create AI that could successfully pass the oral exam required of MA students of literature. In his previous novels he has also been interested in the human-machine boundary and, perhaps, we could even say his work overall has been attentive to intra-actions and assemblages (for example, he combines DNA and J.S. Bach in *The Gold Bug Variations* (1991)). In other texts he calls attention to the human inability to process assemblages. For example, the attempt to bio-hack musical patterns in *Orfeo* (2014) invites the unwanted attention of the Department of Homeland Security.

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<sup>26</sup> Eakin 2003

<sup>27</sup> Wood 2009

<sup>28</sup> Hamner 2018

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Everett Hamner has observed that Powers has had a tendency to zoomorphise his human characters, practicing biocentrism, not anthropocentrism.<sup>29</sup> This is visible in *The Overstory*, in which Powers attempts to map human interactions with trees. In the interview with Hamner, Powers admits that he would have loved to write the novel without humans as main characters, but that this was beyond his skills because humans, as he writes in *The Overstory*, “only see things that look like us.”<sup>30</sup> This idea is expanded in the opening section of novel in which the illegibility of forests to people is spelled out:

*That's the trouble with people, their root problem. Life runs alongside them, unseen. Right here, right next. Creating the soil. Cycling water. Trading in nutrients. Making weather. Building atmosphere. Feeding and curing and sheltering more kinds of creatures than people know how to count.*

*A chorus of living wood sings to the woman:* If your mind were only a slightly greener thing, we'd drown you in meaning.<sup>31</sup>

Powers' novel involves a compromise: he engages with communities of trees, be it in back yards or forests, and their relationships with humans.

The novel follows nine characters (a descendant of pioneers on the prairie, an autistic biologist, a Vietnam war veteran, a computer prodigy, etc.) each of whom is associated with a particular tree, and increasingly, with forest ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. The focus is less on the human characters than on their intra-actions with trees. In fact, the novel's chapter structure evokes

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<sup>29</sup> Hamner 2018

<sup>30</sup> Powers 2018: 114

<sup>31</sup> Powers 2018: 4. Italics in the original.

a tree. The first section, called “Roots”, introduces us to the human protagonists and their kindred trees. The next section, “Trunk”, brings together many of these human protagonists to fight the cutting of old-growth forests in Oregon. Instead of the individual trees of the previous sections, we get closer attention to forest ecosystems. In the following section, “Crown”, the remaining protagonists spread out, like branches of a tree, and the final section, “Seeds”, gives us different resolutions that range from death to enlightenment, suggesting a new cycle of (possible) growth for forests and, possibly, also humans.

The tree-centric approach is especially visible in the first section, in which we get to know less about the Hoel family than about the chestnuts that grew from the pocketful of seeds brought on the trip out West. In fact, generations, wars and economic cycles come and go on one page, with human beings as accidents, while the trees survive or at times die off. Several generations of the Hoels photograph the last chestnut each year. As the novel tersely observes about the resulting photos:

The photos hide everything: the twenties that did not roar for the Hoels. The Depression that cost them 200 acres and sends half the family to Chicago. The radio shows that ruin two of Frank Jr.’s sons for farming. The Hoel death in the South Pacific and the two Hoel guilty survivals. [...] The generations of grudge, courage, forbearance, and surprise generosity: everything a human being might call the *story* happens outside his photo’s frame. Inside the frame, through hundreds of revolving seasons, there is only that solo tree, its fissured bark spiraling upward into early-middle age, growing at the speed of wood.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Powers 2018: 16

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The transitory nature of human life is elsewhere compared to forest “rhizome mass too old to date even to the nearest hundred millennia”.<sup>33</sup> The novel, for most of its considerable length, retains this matter-of-factness about human life and its minor dramas, with few exceptions. Although we meet many calamitous human events – a suicide and miraculous survival, a stroke, war trauma, the perishing of a family due to a freak accident with a kerosene stove – they are not marked as special or given melodramatic significance next to the ebb and flow of life in the larger ecosystem. Human beings are just one – and not the most significant – partner in the intra-actions of life, often unaware of the liveliness of matter around them:

Out in the yard, all around the house, the things they have planted in years gone by are making significance, making meaning, as easily as they make sugar and wood from nothing, from air, and sun, and rain. But the humans hear nothing.<sup>34</sup>

Human knowledge is not unimportant, after all, one of the key characters is a biologist specialising in forests. It is just that grasping the interdependence of life needs more than just scientific proof: “Life will not answer to reason. And *meaning* is too young a thing to have much power over it.”<sup>35</sup> In descriptions like these, Powers avoids the anthropomorphising impulse and instead allows readers to experience the alterity of forests and their deep entanglements and intra-actions with them. The intra-actions are not just about peaceful co-existence, as we can also observe “trees and humans, at war over the land and water and atmosphere”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Powers 2018: 131

<sup>34</sup> Powers 2018: 168

<sup>35</sup> Powers 2018: 133. Italics in the original.

<sup>36</sup> Powers 2018: 133

The first part of the novel proceeds in tree-time, showing the human–forest entanglements. One of the characters, plant biologist Patricia Westerford, discovers that trees in the forest transmit signals to each other through their roots. The information about tree intra-action is among the few didactic elements in the novel that otherwise focalises the liveness of all matter. There is awe at this enriched vision of life and how it escapes human meaning-making:

it shocks him to realize, after a lifetime of looking at wood: He's staring at the seasons, the year's pendulum, the bursts of spring and the enfolding of fall, the beat of a two-four song recorded here, in a medium that the piece itself created.<sup>37</sup>

The language draws parallels to human stories and melodies, but does not project them onto the wood. Trees intra-act with us, but they remain silent. They live, die and regenerate life. When Patricia Westerford sees virginal forests, she observes that “death is everywhere, oppressive and beautiful” as forest “builds on death”.<sup>38</sup> The cycle of life and death in rich ecosystems is what the aggressive forestry management practices are destroying to make shingles and decks out of last North American primeval forests. The novel does not invite us to naïve tree-hugging, but calls attention to our wastefulness with the rich intra-actions around us. We can escape into immersive computer games, like the one created in the novel by the disabled computer genius Neelay Mehta, and reimagine rich forest ecosystems, but this is not an excuse for wasting the real ones that we still have access to. Capitalism is not going to save us from this conundrum, although it can help to numb us to the dying world around us.

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<sup>37</sup> Powers 2018: 155

<sup>38</sup> Powers 2018: 134, 141

The possibility of imagining alternatives brings us back to the question of fiction in this complex set of entanglements of forests, people and social forces. Powers' novel is not only about trees and their canopy—overstory—but also about stories. Powers comments on the role of fiction in this entangled assemblage through a character, Ray Brinkman, who becomes disabled and who finds solace in novels, but with a sobered perspective:

To be human is to confuse a satisfying story with a meaningful one, and to mistake life for something huge with two legs. No: life is mobilized on a vastly larger scale, and the world is failing precisely because no novel can make the contest for the world seem as compelling as the struggles between a few lost people. But Ray needs fiction now as much as anyone. The heroes, villains, and walk-ons his wife gives him this morning are better than truth. *Though I am fake, they say, and nothing I do makes the least difference, still, I cross all distances to sit next to you in your mechanical bed, keep you company, and change your mind.*<sup>39</sup>

The book itself pulls readers into an intense intra-action not just with the characters of the novel but the world they stand for. We are, at different times, reminded of different metamorphoses from Greek legends, such as the story of Cyparissus who is turned into a mourning cypress, and especially Philemon and Baucis, whose hospitality to the gods allowed them to spend eternity together, as an oak and a linden tree.<sup>40</sup> Although the heroic characters of the second section appear to be the eco-terrorists who seek to save primeval forests, if necessary, by resorting to violence, in the end the true heroism seems to be

<sup>39</sup> Powers 2018: 383. Italics in the original.

<sup>40</sup> Patricia Westerford invokes this legend in her work (Powers 2018: 151).

granted to those who “offer hospitality to the non-human”.<sup>41</sup> It is Patricia Westerford, and her research on forests, and perhaps most surprisingly, the suburban Minnesota couple, Dorothy and Ray, who let their back yard be re-wilded by different plant species, in defiance of city ordinances.<sup>42</sup>

Critics have accused Powers of providing a “politically entropic conclusion”,<sup>43</sup> but readers who expect political hope seem to forget that Powers attempts to write through forests, which have over centuries regenerated life from death. Life will go on, even without human beings. Nicholas Hoel, the last member of the Hoel family, which for generations co-inhabited with an American chestnut, ends up doing land art in the forest, visible only from space after trees have decayed and created new life. “*This will never end,*” are the final words of the novel.<sup>44</sup>

The endless litanies about our dying planet have not changed much in human behaviour. Powers does, however, retain hope for literature even in this context: “the best arguments in the world won’t change a person’s mind. The only thing that can do that is a good story.”<sup>45</sup> Powers suggests in his interview with Hamner that we might be able to overcome our “species loneliness”,<sup>46</sup> to use Robin Wall Kimmerer’s term for our estrangement from other beings and entities. We might embrace our entanglements with them. These stories might give us, like the idealists in the novel, the optimism necessary to go on “trying to bail out the ocean of capitalism with an acorn cap”.<sup>47</sup> There, efforts might and probably do fail, but the people making them have

<sup>41</sup> Saint-Amour 2020: 151

<sup>42</sup> Powers 2018: 499

<sup>43</sup> Saint-Amour 2020: 142

<sup>44</sup> Powers 2018: 502. Italics in the original.

<sup>45</sup> Powers 2018: 336

<sup>46</sup> Hamner 2018

<sup>47</sup> Powers 2018: 259

recognised the vitality of accepting our intra-connectedness with the environment.

## Conclusion

As Donna Haraway observes, if “we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism then we know that becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake”.<sup>48</sup> In the context of slow violence, we have to recognise our shared vulnerability and connectedness. This contact zone can be created with the help of fiction. Powers’ novel is such a zone, bringing together humans and trees, but also enabling the questioning of traditional anthropocentric perspectives. It produces a powerful sense of the entanglements that humans and trees exist in and become with. Instead of projecting our human stories onto them, we should respect their alterity, their liveliness, which we can attempt to intra-act with in our stories, without the hubris of assuming that the stories are theirs, too. It is only if we respect the difference of the lively matter around us that we can turn reality inside out, as Haraway hopes.<sup>49</sup> While Powers’ story takes us to the lush greenness of primeval forests, this connection-building is even more vital in the case of the more modest life-forms of the North, like grasses, shrubs, and lichens. Honing our attention to their presence and liveliness can make us grasp the Northern landscapes as “places in constant interaction”<sup>50</sup> or, rather, intra-action.

Literature, precisely because of its open-endedness, allows us to engage with the liveness of matter and to respond to slow violence. This type of expanded thinking allows us to fully

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<sup>48</sup> Haraway 2008: 244

<sup>49</sup> Haraway 2008: 160

<sup>50</sup> Chartier 2018: 28

grasp what Cora Diamond has called the “difficulty of reality” that is “resistant to our thinking of it”.<sup>51</sup> Literature is not just an illustration of what we know or a mode of transmitting ideas in a palatable fictional form. Some parts of reality resist our habitual styles of thought. Literature leaves space for this type of incomprehension and wonder. Fiction is able to capture the slipperiness and difficulty of reality without flattening it. As Marco Caracciolo argues,

perhaps the value of literary responses to the ecological crisis lies less in narrative’s role as a prompt for pro-environmental action and more in a certain kind of affective impact—namely in its capacity to model uncertainty and therefore color and deepen the reader’s acceptance of the fundamental ambivalence of our climate future. Crucial to that affective project is insight into humanity’s participation in a game of life on a planetary scale.<sup>52</sup>

This should open us to the slow violence that the trees are giving testimony to, but awaken us to a diffractive reading of the world where we fail to perceive the tree-time from our transitory human perspective, failing to see both the trees and the forest. Instead of our obsession with ourselves and with our mortality we should strive to be alive to the larger interconnectedness of matter that precedes and outlives us. *The Overstory* gives us the aesthetic experience of the joint processes of becoming in which we participate with the rest of the vibrant matter around us.

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<sup>51</sup> Diamond 2003: 2

<sup>52</sup> Caracciolo 2019b: 68-69

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# An Ecology of the Hewn in Susan Vreeland's *The Forest Lover*

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**Abstract** – This chapter addresses the significance of forests in the art of Canadian painter Emily Carr, as reimagined in Susan Vreeland's novel *The Forest Lover*. Following the conceptual pathways of the New Materialism, I attend to the ambivalence of the novel's figuration of the vegetal world as simultaneously a source of inspiration, practical use, cultural memory, and ideological strife. As it builds the arc of Carr's creative life in the turn-of-the-century British Columbia, the novel explores how the growth of her artistic subjectivity is predicated on her fellowship with the province's Indigenous people and the forests they inhabit. Seen through the material-semiotic lens of immersion as an ontological condition, the forests in Vreeland's novel may be read as cosmogonic actors, embedded in a series of transformations that connect European imperial expansion and avant-garde art to the destructive power of industrial modernity's protocols of ecology and race. Underpinning these conceptual links are the ideas of *cultivation*, *compost*, and *hewing*, which negotiate the narrative dialectic of nature/culture and Christianity/Indigeneity and call for a rethinking of the structural (dis)continuities that bring Canada's arboreal and human beings together into the colonial hermeneutics of survival.

**Keywords** – Totem pole, cross, forest, the hewn, compost, cultivation, immersion

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“O if we but knew what we do  
When we delve or hew –  
Hack and rack the growing green!”  
Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars”

## Thinking Plants, Planting Thoughts

To probe the possibilities of a narrative ecology of forests is to begin with an enquiry into the dominant templates of plant epistemology, where, relegated to silence and conceptual obscurity in most accounts of Western metaphysics, vegetal life withdraws from our hermeneutic grasp, rendering its forms simultaneously cryptic, enchanting, and vulnerable to material appropriation and technological abuse.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of forests, which, as Michael Marder attests in *Plant-Thinking*, have been consistently “treated as nothing more than wood, a mass of lumber ‘produced’ in a gigantic and infinitely stocked factory of planetary proportions.”<sup>2</sup> Such biopolitical interventions into the auspices of the vegetal world bring into relief the inadequacy of our “philosophical infrastructure”<sup>3</sup> for human encounters with vegetation and uncover the ways in which plants, to use Catriona Sandilands’ phrasing, have invariably served as “the vegetal foundations of capitalism and colonialism”, consolidating, in the process, “the systematic devaluation of vegetal life in Western thought”<sup>5</sup> and concealing the irony of how the expansion of capital, like vegetal growth, “has no internally necessary limit.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Marder 2013, 2014; Cohen and Duckert 2017; Mabey 2012, 2016; Chang 2019; Coccia 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Marder 2013: 30

<sup>3</sup> Marder 2013: 7

<sup>4</sup> Sandilands 2017: 25

<sup>5</sup> Marder 2013: 24

<sup>6</sup> Marder 2014: 35

## AN ECOLOGY OF THE HEWN

Marder and Sandilands are in no way alone in linking the critical role of plants in the cultural imaginary of Western industrial modernity to the material-semiotic circuits of European imperialism, the political and economic ambitions of which negotiated the logic and logistics of the global circulation and commodification of people and plants alike. As Mary Louise Pratt's work on travel writing and natural history has shown, the epistemological shifts in the protocols of nineteenth-century science, initiated by the "planetary consciousness"<sup>7</sup> of Europe's "seeing-man"<sup>8</sup>, had a profound effect on the Western conception of subjectivity and the global realignments of power produced by the social asymmetries of transculturation in the "contact zones"<sup>9</sup> of the ever-expanding colonial space. The recent ecocritical research in Allen MacDuffie's *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* and Dewey W. Hall's edited collection *Victorian Ecocriticism* similarly examines how the concern for the politics of resource consumption and conservation generated by nineteenth-century environmentalism made the planet visible through human and nonhuman affiliations. Underlying these analyses is the conceptual interlocking of the contradictory claims of innocence and hegemony in the discourse of European science as a form of metropolitan knowledge and nomenclature. At the same time, however, it betokens an equally important anxiety about the boundaries of modern subjectivity emerging out of the material-semiotic exchanges between imperial agents and the object (and often abject) world of the colonies. The work of cultural institutions in imperial centres solidified a mutual trafficking in knowledge between literary and scientific discourse and thus shaped what in *Novel Cultivations* Elizabeth Hope Chang calls "the interdependent conditions of the nineteenth-century's chief expansions: the growth of the British Empire, the rise

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<sup>7</sup> Pratt 2003: 5

<sup>8</sup> Pratt 2003: 7

<sup>9</sup> Pratt 2003: 4

of plant cultivation, the spread of global botanical exchange, and, of course, the reign of the novel".<sup>10</sup> In fact, if we accept David Amigoni's reading of Raymond Williams's account of the etymological roots that link the word 'culture' to 'cultivation' and 'colony', then the extent to which the nineteenth-century's obsession with evolutionary discourse became a "recurrent concern for contributors"<sup>11</sup> to both science and art is hardly surprising. Literature, in particular, offered a generous discursive space in which "a debate about the origin, making, substance and value of the bonds of sympathy, and, thereby, the forms of politics and collective belonging"<sup>12</sup> could be examined, "or perhaps challenged and dismantled".<sup>13</sup>

Along similar lines, the epistemological recovery of plants Chang traces in late-Victorian fiction fleshes out the volatile nature of human selfhood, expanding the parameters of "sentience, mobility, ethics, reproduction, representation, and figural operations in general"<sup>14</sup> to enquire into vegetal intelligence and nonhuman vitality as forms of agency that shape the ethical relays between human and nonhuman worlds into "environmentally responsive narratives".<sup>15</sup> It is in this respect that Chang's work becomes instructive for my reading of Susan Vreeland's novel *The Forest Lover*. Set against the Victorian legacy of forest management<sup>16</sup> in British Columbia at the beginning of the twentieth century and the perception of "colonial trees as sites for self-making across the spectrum of adventure and settler colonial fiction"<sup>17</sup>, Carr's pictorial vernacular is shown to cultivate a mode of looking and representation that hinges on

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<sup>10</sup> Chang 2019: 1

<sup>11</sup> Amigoni 2010: 25

<sup>12</sup> Amigoni 2010: 25

<sup>13</sup> Amigoni 2010: 25

<sup>14</sup> Chang 2019: 6

<sup>15</sup> Chang 2019: 27

<sup>16</sup> See Watkins 2016; Mabey 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Chang 2019: 19

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forest fellowship and reciprocity across the ontological divide, bringing to light the social and economic inequities of colonial practices. “To cultivate”, Chang reminds us, “is to call attention to an intervention that reorders representative relationships between part and whole, specimen and collective”, casting into doubt the strength of human agency as “a self-supporting and intuitively-managed affair”.<sup>18</sup> Read in light of Vreeland’s interest in “a poetics of organic life”<sup>19</sup>, Carr’s visual language speaks back to the imperial narrative of cultivation that yokes the ideal of human sovereignty to the technological domination of the natural world. As colonial agents – both seeds and cultivators – I suggest, the novel’s forests of British Columbia flex the arc of Carr’s creative life, bringing the social structures of colonial space into realignment with an environmental epistemology that shuttles between the ancient priorities of memory, sustainability and survival and the modern quest for consumption, “technology and emancipation”.<sup>20</sup>

My reading of Vreeland’s novel proceeds from several conceptual arguments, which are in keeping with the New Materialist view that life is “an embodied process of understanding”<sup>21</sup> that brings about “a material ‘mesh’ of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces”.<sup>22</sup> The emphasis on material-semiotic enmeshment welcomes a constellation of ideas that include Marder’s reasoning about vegetation as “a living figuration of thought”<sup>23</sup> reflective of life’s capacity for revelation, Emanuele Coccia’s view of plants as the wardens of being, and Robert Pogue Harrison’s reading

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<sup>18</sup> Chang 2019: 7

<sup>19</sup> Chang 2019: 33

<sup>20</sup> MacDuffie 2017: 4

<sup>21</sup> Iovino and Oppermann 2014: 4

<sup>22</sup> Iovino and Oppermann 2014: 1

<sup>23</sup> Marder 2013: 30

of the forest as a dimension of dwelling. At the heart of these conceptualisations is an enabling contradiction, formulated on the grounds of the plants' world-making activity as an ontological premise of life, on the one hand, and the human activity of meaning-making, on the other. For both Marder and Coccia, plants are the ultimate embodiment of vitality as *phusis*, which, "in its Greek derivation from the root *phuo-* and the verb *phuein* ('to generate', 'to grow out', or 'to bring forth')",<sup>24</sup> begets the gift of breath as "the originary essence of what the Greeks called *logos*, language, reason".<sup>25</sup> In other words, built into the plants' pneumatic agency is a metaphysical membrane that hosts beings in "mixture"<sup>26</sup> or immersion, a "reality of breath"<sup>27</sup>, where everything can "mix in the extension of every other living thing without losing its own identity".<sup>28</sup> To the extent that immersion is the world's "ontological design"<sup>29</sup>, in Coccia's thought, plants constitute "the paradigm of immersion"<sup>30</sup> and its attendant symbiogenesis through metamorphosis. This is why, in Coccia's words, "To think of plants means to think of a being in the world that is *immediately cosmogonic*".<sup>31</sup> The upshot of this thinking, I may add, is a vegetal ethics, consonant with the virtues of *composting*, which Serpil Oppermann defines as "a rescripting of life in the 'sedimented historialities' of decay and fecundity".<sup>32</sup> Primed for its recycling powers, *compost* enshrines the human in the world's infinite renewal, ratifying our ethical bond to *humus*, the soil, in which we "must compost to re-compose as an earthbound being like all others".<sup>33</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Marder 2013: 28

<sup>25</sup> Coccia 2019: 52

<sup>26</sup> Coccia 2019: 27

<sup>27</sup> Coccia 2019: 53

<sup>28</sup> Coccia 2019: 52

<sup>29</sup> Coccia 2019: 39

<sup>30</sup> Coccia 2019: 53

<sup>31</sup> Coccia 2019: 39. Italics in the original.

<sup>32</sup> Oppermann 2017: 138

<sup>33</sup> Oppermann 2017: 142

Pogue Harrison's thinking about forests too revolves around a metaphysical axis, but one where *logos* is coeval with *oikos* as a space of ontogenesis made manifest in the social institutions of religion, matrimony, and interment. As a site of transformation, the forest, in this line of thought, reveals "the affiliations that link all things together by virtue of their common genesis"<sup>34</sup>, calling our attention to the symbiotic networks of biosemiosis created through endless interactions between trees and the fungi (mycorrhiza) nourishing their roots.<sup>35</sup> Yet although seemingly consistent with the idea of immersion, Pogue Harrison's view is at odds with Marder's and Coccia's prioritising of vegetal agency over human sovereignty. The caveat of his logocentric reading is that human existence may find analogies in vegetation, but cannot be reduced to it:

We dwell not in nature but in the relation to nature. We do not inhabit the earth but our excess of the earth. We dwell not in the forest but in an exteriority with regard to its closure.<sup>36</sup>

This *aporia*, which accommodates the collisions of Marder's, Coccia's, and Pogue Harrison's ideas, seeps into Anne F. Harris' analysis of *hewing*, a second set of conceptual coordinates that guide my reading of *The Forest Lover*. Building her argument on the "onomatopoeic trace of the effort of cutting down"<sup>37</sup>, Harris theorises *hewing* as an act of transformation, which is not quite complete, for *the hewn* is marked by "its blended ontology: its ability to be both wood *and* tree, while being separate things".<sup>38</sup> A site of metamorphosis, the *hewn* also carries the onus of memory, whose oscillation between "separation and

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<sup>34</sup> Pogue Harrison 1993: 29

<sup>35</sup> See Mabey 2016; Simard 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Pogue Harrison 1993: 201

<sup>37</sup> Harris 2014: 17

<sup>38</sup> Harris 2014: 20

adherence”<sup>39</sup> performs the dendric work that highlights the shared vulnerability of humans and trees in the economy of finitude: “The hewn body becomes the principal object in the hero’s funerary rites. Hewn wood becomes the animate crucifix that speaks in the miracle.”<sup>40</sup>

In the suggested analogy, then, both *the hewn* and the human are semiotic partners in the material assemblages of what Jane Bennett judiciously calls “vibrant matter”.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, an ecology of *the hewn* attends to the intentions of nonhuman agents in order to catalyse the durability of their memory in the material-semiotic entanglements of life unlimited to human desires.

To the extent that *The Forest Lover* evokes the forest as a metaphor for dwelling and problematises the act of cutting down, it unfolds a dialectic of colonial subjectivity conceived as a cultivated scion of environmental mindfulness. By focusing on how the natural world is presented as an objective correlative of the protagonist’s artistic growth, I attempt to trace the ways in which this dialectic casts in relief the narrative dichotomies of *nature/culture* and *Christianity/Indigeneity*, as made manifest in the images of the Cross and the totem pole. Framed by the conceptual link between the human and *the hewn*, the novel’s iconography brings to the surface the historical ambivalence surrounding Carr’s relationship with both forest and Indigenous cultures, raising the stakes for the power of art to salvage and renew the substance that gives life to both forests and people.

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<sup>39</sup> Harris 2014: 28

<sup>40</sup> Harris 2014: 19

<sup>41</sup> Bennett 2010: x

## Vegetal Ethics and the “Vanishing Indian”

Grafting her fictional biography onto Carr’s own accounts in *Klee Wyck* and *Growing Pains: An Autobiography*, Vreeland is attentive to how the female artist’s life is equally framed by the urban insufficiency of colonial development and the loss of vernacular knowledge hosted by Canada’s forests and their Indigenous inhabitants. A variation on the *nature/culture* dialectic, the dichotomy of *urban vs arboreal* space here structures Carr’s relationship with cultural appropriation and creative licence, where the forest recalls its two dominant meanings – that of resource and sanctuary.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, we are reminded of the drift of imperial contempt in reckoning with the use of the pictorial medium to represent colonial realities. As Carr herself observed, “Artists from the Old World said our West was crude, unpaintable. Its bigness angered, its vastness and wild spaces terrified them.”<sup>43</sup>

In a seeming challenge to such metropolitan prejudice, the novel opens with a black and white reproduction of *Indian Village*, a painting by Carr, which correlates with the narrative setting of Part I. The novel’s remaining four parts are also presaged by visual reproductions of Carr’s works, animating an intermedial dialogue that rethinks personal and collective history, “the language of sympathetic connection”<sup>44</sup>, and the relation between sister arts. The novel’s opening scene encompasses these gestures in the figure of the forest in the village of Hitats’uu (Salmonberry), which has the bearings of a *sight* as much as *site*, galvanising ideas about the ontological links between the trees, the painter, and the Nootka community she visits: “Cedars elbowing firs and swinging their branches pushed

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<sup>42</sup> Pogue Harrison 1993: 123

<sup>43</sup> Carr 1971: 76

<sup>44</sup> Chang 2019: 26

against the village from behind. One wayward fir had fallen and lay uprooted with its foliage battered by waves and tangled in kelp.”<sup>45</sup> The language of anthropomorphism underpinning the suggestive parallel between the fallen fir and Emily cannot escape us: having upset her sisters’ Victorian sense of decorum and exchanged her “two-story bird cage of a house in Victoria” for a “looming forest alive with raventalk” on the “west coast of Vancouver Island”<sup>46</sup>, the protagonist opts for the “immense, paralyzing magnificence”<sup>47</sup> of Hitats’uu, where “forest and sea crashed against each other with the Nootka pressed between them”.<sup>48</sup> The hint at the forest’s supernatural powers here is followed by cultivating an awareness of how the Indigenous people are bound to both trees and water, thus constituting an intermediary in the material-semiotic relays of life’s movement. Contrary to the Victorian urbanites, such as Emily’s sisters and the white missionaries, who identify with the culture “of the new Provincial Parliament Building, all domes and arches plunked down on what was once forest”<sup>49</sup>, the Nootka are shown to be anchored in the woods as a source of life both material and spiritual. Bound to the cycles of growth and decay, the forest oversees the formation of selfhood which clashes with the imperial narrative of anthropocentrism. For the novel’s Indigenous people, “[e]verything is one”<sup>50</sup>, so that the taboo of “step[ping] across streams or walk[ing] in the sea” because “[s]almon get mad”<sup>51</sup>, syncs in with the practice of burying the dead in “large, square wooden box[es] wedged between the boughs and trunk of a cedar”.<sup>52</sup> The agency of the dead body here is coextensive with the laws of nature, turning the forest

<sup>45</sup> Vreeland 2004: 3

<sup>46</sup> Vreeland 2004: 3

<sup>47</sup> Vreeland 2004: 10

<sup>48</sup> Vreeland 2004: 3

<sup>49</sup> Vreeland 2004: 12

<sup>50</sup> Vreeland 2004: 14

<sup>51</sup> Vreeland 2004: 13

<sup>52</sup> Vreeland 2004: 15

into a receptacle of human bones: “Seedlings had split the boxes, nourished by what remained in them.”<sup>53</sup> The conceptual weight of this scene interrupts the distinction of life and death, suggesting instead the ontological parameters by which human life and selfhood are registered as seeds in the nature-culture continuum. Read in light of Coccia’s reasoning about immersion, the cedars, repurposed as they are for *compost*, are shown to participate in the “morphogenetic industry that knows no interruption”<sup>54</sup>, transforming the biological fact of death into “the living flesh of the world”.<sup>55</sup> For Emily, the forest, like the Indigenous people, offers an intelligence that makes her appreciate the symbiotic character of world-making, where humans, animals, and plants entangle in co-dependent strands of meaning, and boosts her desire to preserve Indigenous culture in her paintings. In response to a question about her mission, she says: “To preserve the totem poles in paintings. That art is vanishing.”<sup>56</sup>

Braiding together in an uneasy relationship pockets of Christian missions and “bighouses, ancestral dwelling lodges of many families”<sup>57</sup>, the novel’s Nootka village evokes “the salvage paradigm”<sup>58</sup>, to which, as David Cole evinces, Carr’s painting often has been linked. “Behind the salvage paradigm”, Cole explains, “was a realization that time was essential, that civilization was everywhere pushing Aboriginal peoples to the wall, destroying their material culture and even extinguishing the Aboriginal stock itself.”<sup>59</sup> Coupled with the recognition of “a drastic decline in the Aboriginal population, a large-scale replacement of their material existence by European goods, and

<sup>53</sup> Vreeland 2004: 15

<sup>54</sup> Coccia 2019: 13

<sup>55</sup> Coccia 2019: 39

<sup>56</sup> Vreeland 2004: 101

<sup>57</sup> Vreeland 2004: 4

<sup>58</sup> Cole 2000: 148

<sup>59</sup> Cole 2000 148-149

widespread conversion to Christianity”<sup>60</sup>, the salvage paradigm generated the myth of “the vanishing Indian”<sup>61</sup>, whose traces crop up in *The Forest Lover* by virtue of Emily’s interest in totem poles as signifiers of Indigenous identity.

The novel’s Emily acknowledges this by admitting that painting “make[s] me feel like I’m no better than a totem thief.”<sup>62</sup> Her association with the anthropologist Marius Barbeau, who recognises the “strangeness yet a sensitivity”<sup>63</sup> of her paintings and contributes to the making of her artistic reputation, bears a similar metonymic unease, contiguous with his historical role in the removal of the totem poles from their original places into museums. While the Nisga’a poet Jordan Abel has used Barbeau’s work to recall and reframe in *The Place of Scraps* the colonial acts of cultural appropriation, assimilation, and transplantation, Vreeland uses Barbeau as a foil for Carr’s reflection on her own creative ethos. Her wonder at the display of her paintings at the National Gallery in Ottawa next to “Haida, Kwakiutl, and Tsimshian pole sections, carved feast dishes, ceremonial blankets, baskets, masks”<sup>64</sup>, is complemented by “Barbeau beating on a drum and singing a Tsimshian song”<sup>65</sup> while the names of Indigenous artists are literally erased from the exhibition: “Apparently individuals weren’t seen as significant.”<sup>66</sup> Ironically, though sharing the gallery space with Indigenous artworks, Carr’s paintings forge her identity as an artist of the Canadian West by way of the critical appraisal she receives from The Group of Seven’s Lawren Harris, who gives his blessing in synecdochic terms: “You are one of us.”<sup>67</sup> Replanted on an urban turf,

<sup>60</sup> Cole 2000: 149-150

<sup>61</sup> Cole 2000: 148

<sup>62</sup> Vreeland 2004: 301

<sup>63</sup> Vreeland 2004: 318

<sup>64</sup> Vreeland 2004: 367

<sup>65</sup> Vreeland 2004: 366

<sup>66</sup> Vreeland 2004: 367

<sup>67</sup> Vreeland 2004: 369

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Vreeland's Emily is offered "a new self"<sup>68</sup>, one which relies on the institutions of settler colonialism for a pictorial cultivation of a forest ecology. This puts into perspective her concern for Indigenous cultural memory, the gradual loss of which speaks through the village that is "sinking into mud, more forlorn than ever, empty, waiting for a single green shot"<sup>69</sup> and calling our attention to the way urban culture's annihilation of the forest performs the work of cultural assimilation and renounces the vegetal ethics of "being *qua* being-with".<sup>70</sup>

On the figural plane, the totem poles Emily paints link up with the cedar houses and the cedar root baskets, especially the ones made by Sophie Frank, an Indigenous woman who befriends the painter and shares with her her life story. In a metonymic link to their inhabitants, the cedar houses invite an analogy to the human body, spelled out in the description of a cedar hut built in a sacred space for women during their time of the month: "More pear-shaped, upside down, outlined in black with concentric bands in red following its inner perimeter. [...] A womb?"<sup>71</sup> The invocation of the generational source of life links up with Pogue Harrison's observation about how the idea of materiality points to the maternal origin of being, sharing the same root "as the word *mater*, or mother".<sup>72</sup> This idea resurfaces in the image of Dzunukwa, a mysterious wooden figure Emily finds in a Kwakiutl forest:

Block-like wooden breasts hung downward, with  
nipples that had been carved into, what? Eagles'  
heads? With eyes and beaks? Arms fashioned

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<sup>68</sup> Vreeland 2004: 370

<sup>69</sup> Vreeland 2004: 79

<sup>70</sup> Marder 2013: 51

<sup>71</sup> Vreeland 2004: 17

<sup>72</sup> Pogue Harrison 1993: 28

from added wood extended forward at the shoulder, reaching. A terrifying sight.<sup>73</sup>

Not only is the figure made of wood, but, as Emily's Indigenous companion explains, she is the dark spirit of the forest, who "gives good things"<sup>74</sup>, but also "carries off children in her basket and smokes them to eat them".<sup>75</sup> A composite figure of natureculture, she is the face of the vegetal Other and of the *compost* principle: like the forest itself, Emily learns, Dzunukwa can die and "put herself together again"<sup>76</sup>, warranting continuity through re-composition rather than "a passing away of life".<sup>77</sup>

Clearly, the Indigenous vernacular of the forest is the language of immersion, incompatible with the colonial idea of the "vanishing Indian". Interrupting the salvage paradigm, the forest's vegetal forms yield to both Emily and us a pedagogical moment, showing how the forest "repel[s] her intent"<sup>78</sup> until she responds to "the pull of Dzunukwa's extended arms"<sup>79</sup>, by embracing the underside of vegetal ethics and releasing "her own unearthly call, yodelling and hooting, back to the wilderness."<sup>80</sup> Painting in the forest, Emily joins "a cosmogony in action"<sup>81</sup>, in which "*to act and to be acted upon* are formally indistinguishable"<sup>82</sup>, so that her own sight of shapes, colours, and "broad, sweeping lines"<sup>83</sup> reciprocates the breath created by the vegetal world. For, as Coccia reminds us, sight is breath, which opens the world,

<sup>73</sup> Vreeland 2004: 206

<sup>74</sup> Vreeland 2004: 208

<sup>75</sup> Vreeland 2004: 208

<sup>76</sup> Vreeland 2004: 209

<sup>77</sup> Vreeland 2004: 114

<sup>78</sup> Vreeland 2004: 17

<sup>79</sup> Vreeland 2004: 210

<sup>80</sup> Vreeland 2004: 212

<sup>81</sup> Coccia 2019: 10

<sup>82</sup> Coccia 2019: 37

<sup>83</sup> Vreeland 2004: 211

by “letting oneself be pierced by its beauty” and “creating a form”<sup>84</sup> that inaugurates life. For Vreeland, then, Carr’s work complicates the act of cultural appropriation by virtue of its own genesis in the material-semiotic entanglement within forest ecology. So much so that Emily’s painterly agency is shown to emerge as an ontological condition shared by the forest’s divinity: “The only one of her kind, having no mate, she could look upon raw life or death and not shrink from either one.”<sup>85</sup> No longer Klee Wyck – “Laughing One”<sup>86</sup> – she is renamed Hailat, a “[p]erson with spirit power in her hands”.<sup>87</sup> In *The Forest Lover*, then, Carr’s capacity to cultivate a new way of seeing the colonial space is measured against her own experience as a human seedling, whose growth is constituted through her material-semiotic immersion in what Dorion Sagan calls “the living canvas”.<sup>88</sup>

### **The Cross and the Colonial Subject**

The vegetal intelligence which hosts Vreeland’s protagonist in the Canadian forests is contrasted to the exigencies of imperial schooling both in art (she takes painting lessons in London and Paris) and ethics. While her sisters are suspicious of Emily’s wish to socialise with “primitives”<sup>89</sup> and “traipse through heathen villages painting their idols”<sup>90</sup>, she delights in the idea of being called “a wild beast”.<sup>91</sup> The reference to Fauvism here mobilises the idea of subversiveness in the novel’s ecological conjunction of the parameters of art and race. Correlative to Emily’s

<sup>84</sup> Coccia 2019: 55

<sup>85</sup> Vreeland 2004: 210

<sup>86</sup> Vreeland 2004: 10

<sup>87</sup> Vreeland 2004: 255

<sup>88</sup> Sagan 2013: 167

<sup>89</sup> Vreeland 2004: 31

<sup>90</sup> Vreeland 2004: 101

<sup>91</sup> Vreeland 2004: 199

sense of kinship with Indigenous forests, are the intertextual references to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which animate the metaphor of human as plant, extending the analogy between Emily and Dzunukwa into the more abstract idea of the white painter as a weed in the patch of Indigenous vegetation. If we accept Richard Mabey's contention that "Weeds are not only plants in the wrong place, but plants which have slipped into the wrong culture"<sup>92</sup> (Mabey 2012: 11), then Vreeland's Emily is not unlike an outlaw plant, whose forays into Indigenous forests, like Whitman's poetry, make us reconsider the *nature/culture* dialectic and the conceptual weight of "grass" as "not only a kind of organic tombstone, symbolizing an absent figure, [...] but a language spoken by nature to describe us".<sup>93</sup>

A "poetic corollary of composting"<sup>94</sup>, Whitman's "grass" "undo[es] the distinction between the living and the dead"<sup>95</sup> and thus links up with the novel's cedar baskets and totem poles conceived as *hewn* subjects. Taking their origin from wood that has been cut down, these material things are shown to mediate the vegetal intervention into the human concern for utility and ownership, resisting Emily's painterly gaze ("How dare you think you can paint me, he seemed to be saying."<sup>96</sup>) and barring her from the "inner essence" of the world conveyed by "the native carver".<sup>97</sup> Beyond these personal encounters, however, the *hewn* also makes manifest the social ligatures that bind the people into a forest-based genealogy. While the baskets the women weave from cedar roots speak of the poverty and precarity in which Indigenous people struggle to raise their families, the totem poles bring to life the multiple affiliations that sustain

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<sup>92</sup> Mabey 2012: 11

<sup>93</sup> Outka, 2005: 47

<sup>94</sup> Oppermann 2017: 143

<sup>95</sup> Outka, 2005: 48

<sup>96</sup> Vreeland 2004: 111

<sup>97</sup> Vreeland 2004: 269

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both human and nonhuman communal being. This is how Emily sees the raising of a totem pole:

Raw energy pushed up the column inch by inch until pairs of smaller supporting poles crossing like scissors could be propped under it. Children who'd never seen this before and old people who'd seen it many times all stood still and silent, as though they all were holding their breath. The men rested four times, while the chief's speaker recounted events in the lives of the dead chief and his ancestors. Raven, Bear, Killerwhale, Wolf, and the top figure, Eagle, rose higher and higher against the sky. The line of men pulled rope over the scaffolding, and in ten minutes, start to finish, it was up.<sup>98</sup>

Here, the totem pole embodies the transformation of the *arboreal* into the *ancestral* lineage, delivered through hewing as a sharing of the forest's gift. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the totem poles in the novel are shown to be key to the celebration of potlatches (and the economy of the gift), which the colonial administration deems to be antithetical to modernity's sense of progress. Vreeland draws our attention to how the life of the totem poles is continuous with the life of both the forests that nourished them and the people who hewed them. Expansive deforestation here goes in step with the racism that casts the Indigenous people as "primitives", whose "heathenish ways" obstruct advancement. A missionary tells Emily: "Wherever the potlatch exists there has been no progress [...]."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Vreeland 2004: 218-219

<sup>99</sup> Vreeland 2004: 113

In the novel's dialectic of *Christianity/Indigeneity*, the Cross emerges as a substitute for the totem poles, delivering the promise of a new ligature that binds the Indigenous people to the colonial body politic. Our attention is drawn to a scene in a forest graveyard, where "the Ancestor figure and the large cross faced each other across the fence"<sup>100</sup>, while Sophie showed Emily the tombs of her children. Agents of the ecology of *the hewn*, both the Ancestor totem and the Cross borrow from the pliability and reciprocity of the wood, so that, as Harris explains, the tree "remains vibrant and formative in the wood"<sup>101</sup> of these carvings. A figure of genealogical continuity, the Ancestor totem sustains Sophie's community in alignment with the living and the dead, which is what she tells Emily: "Even after they die, ancestors keep to helping Squamish."<sup>102</sup> Yet Vreeland registers a decline in the old ways as made evident by the impact that Sophie's attempts to adopt the English language, the imperial rule, and the Christian faith have on her life as a *hewn* colonial subject.

In Harris' explication, *the hewn* becomes yoked to a devotional logic, which reorganises human subjectivity along the lines of the suffering activated through the malleability of the wood. This is especially true of the Cross, the wooden substance of which, as Marder concurs by paraphrasing St Augustine, like the human body, is also "resurrected by and on the cross [...]."<sup>103</sup> In *The Forest Lover*, however, the role of the Cross in constructing colonial subjectivity seems to be at odds with Harris' trust in the regenerational powers of *the hewn*. This becomes most evident in Sophie's interiorisation of the missionaries' teachings to the extent where it becomes destructive to her own wellbeing. As a basket maker, she is an artist in her own right and in

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<sup>100</sup> Vreeland 2004: 43

<sup>101</sup> Harris 2014: 31

<sup>102</sup> Vreeland 2004: 43

<sup>103</sup> Marder 2004: 74

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that respect may be seen as Emily's *alter ego*, especially in her observations that Emily does not understand forests: "Forests are dark. More dark."<sup>104</sup> Her knowledge of the forest and the old ways jars with the Church's dogma and its attempts to erase Indigenous identity by means of religious teachings as well as iconography. While on the visual plane the Cross replaces "the old Ancestor", which "brooded over the graves outside the fence"<sup>105</sup>, the church buildings figure as metaphors for the new, colonial consciousness. With few people to tell old Indigenous stories and still fewer to listen to them, Sophie finds herself drawn to the missionaries' tales: "No bighouses, so not a lot of people around one fire. Now the church priest tells stories."<sup>106</sup> The impact of the priests' skewed interpretation of Christianity is such that Sophie becomes divided against herself and lives like a *hewn* subject unable to regenerate into a new being, as made manifest in the deaths of her children, the crosses on their tombs, and her own surrender to despair and prostitution. Her eventual death is shown to be part of the legacy of the emotional sadism practiced by the missionaries: when Emily asks Father John why he buried only six of Sophie's children when she had more, he answers that they died too young to have the "sanctity of the Holy Spirit".<sup>107</sup>

The priest's lack of empathy is counteracted by Emily's own emotional engagement with the Indigenous world and the forests that sustain it. Her mature paintings, Vreeland suggests, convey the vitality of the nonhuman world as a receptacle of human imaginings: "Arches of feathery lichen hanging from hemlocks like shredded veils teased her with phantasmagoric shapes."<sup>108</sup> Not only does she recognise the forest's agency, but also accepts

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<sup>104</sup> Vreeland 2004: 28

<sup>105</sup> Vreeland 2004: 43

<sup>106</sup> Vreeland 2004: 103

<sup>107</sup> Vreeland 2004: 384

<sup>108</sup> Vreeland 2004: 393

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it as a partner in the shared act of creation. Notice the visceral charge of the passage describing the appeal of vegetation:

Voluptuous curves of foliage coaxed her to enter deeper passages. She felt the pull of a viridian seduction. Lips of leafy drapery seemed shaped in folds and waves leading to purple openings to secret places, a womb in the forest where a fallen hemlock hosted a swarm of insects in its bark.<sup>109</sup>

In troping the forest as a womb, Vreeland magnifies the regenerative power of vegetation in Emily's art, where the artist herself operates as both a metaphorical lover and midwife. Unlike the priests' stories, where the forest is cleared for the graveyard, Emily's paintings open the space for growing and living. Envisioned as modes of dwelling, her canvases allow for the forest to tell stories, in which human and vegetal life share the same continuum of being, visualised through the trope of human as plant: Sophie "as burnt sienna tree", Lizzie "as a single, straight-ribbed fir", and Alice "as the soft, embracing arm of a hemlock".<sup>110</sup> The paintings take shape through "the sacramental treatment of the hewn"<sup>111</sup>, testifying to the pliance and persistence of the forest in its creative and regenerative plenitude. In the *hewn* ecology of *The Forest Lover*, this transformative power of art is shown to be coeval with the forest's capacity for self-healing and the spiritual restoration of others, not least the artist herself: "She would bow to the Wild Cedar Woman who dwells in the forest. She would hold her wooden hand [...] and put herself back together again and again."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Vreeland 2004: 294

<sup>110</sup> Vreeland 2004: 414

<sup>111</sup> Harris 2014: 35

<sup>112</sup> Vreeland 2004: 415

## Conclusion

It seems fitting to suggest that reading the ecology of *the hewn* in *The Forest Lover* ushers in improvisatory understandings of Carr's creative life, which diagnose the bonds that knit together human and vegetal worlds into what Michel Serres calls the “multiplicity”<sup>113</sup> of the forest. In Vreeland's novel, this multiplicity echoes in “the complicated multiplicities of selfhood”<sup>114</sup> which nourish the protagonist's role as both a seed and cultivator in the colonial dialectic of *nature/culture*. Highlighting the forest as “a way of making knowledge”<sup>115</sup> allows us to single out the circuits of complicity interlinking the actions of settler colonialism, deforestation, and cultural assimilation as a historical ground of Carr's work. Beyond a possibility for postcolonial redemption, however, *The Forest Lover* cultivates a sensibility that prioritises the power of the forest to yield meaning across the human contingencies of historical, ideological, and ontological divides, where the work of preservation can be refigured as a hermeneutics of *compost*, regrounding all life in the material cycles of death and resurrection.

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<sup>113</sup> Serres 1995: 56

<sup>114</sup> Chang 2019: 21

<sup>115</sup> Chang 2019: 9

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FORESTS OF THOUGHT  
FORÊTS DE PENSÉE



# **Forest as Image, Landscape and Environment on Stage: Articulating Finno-Ugric Identity through Theatre<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract** – The chapter investigates forest as a potential common platform of the Finno-Ugric peoples in their perception of self and the world and how this imagery has been represented through forest as an image, a landscape, and an environment in Estonian theatre. Estonians believe that they have a strong relationship with the forest that reaches back into the distant past. Of course, the belief is shared by a number of other peoples, predominantly the northern and Finno-Ugric peoples.

When studying the relationship between theatre and nature, we focus on two issues: 1) how forest as a mental concept is depicted on the stage, and 2) how forest as a fictional or real place is represented on the stage. The main problem is how to adapt such different phenomena like nature and art to each other and what strategies to use.

Stage interpretations of August Kitzberg's tragedy *The Werewolf* (1911), Aleksis Kivi's novel *Seven Brothers* (1870) and Anne Tünnpu's productions based on folkloric heritage, such as *Izborian Epic* (2015), and others, are analysed for this purpose.

**Keywords** – Finno-Ugric identity, Estonian theatre, forest, landscape, environment, heritage theatre

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Forest as a type of natural environment can be viewed from different perspectives and in various conceptual frameworks. Often nature has been conceptualised as an opposite of culture. But as Tim Ingold has pointed out, one should make a distinction between “really natural nature” and “culturally perceived nature”,<sup>2</sup> a mental concept to which people can relate. In addition, landscape has been described as “a holistic phenomenon that does not make unnecessary divisions into culture/nature, human/non-human, individual/collective, perceived/physical”.<sup>3</sup> Following this conceptual framework, we do not use the terms ‘culture’ and ‘nature/forest’ as opposing analytical tools but admit that only culturally modified perceptions are available for us as researchers. The discussion can be concluded by the following quote from Tim Ingold:

I have contrasted nature and environment by way of a distinction between reality *of* – ‘the physical world of neutral objects apparent only to the detached, indifferent observer’, and reality *for* – ‘the world constituted in *relation* to the organism or person whose environment it is’.<sup>4</sup>

Three terms – landscape, environment and image – are used in the chapter as conceptual tools for analysing representation and perception of the forest in theatre. Landscape is defined quite broadly as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”<sup>5</sup> If for the environmental sciences landscape is an empirical reality, a piece of the world, then for the humanities it is viewed as a material or mental representation – an image,

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<sup>2</sup> Ingold 2000: 41

<sup>3</sup> Lindström, Palang and Kull 2019: 85

<sup>4</sup> Ingold 2000: 193

<sup>5</sup> This is the definition in the European Landscape Convention (2000).

idea, conceptualisation, fantasy.<sup>6</sup> The notion of landscape has been used increasingly frequently in theatre as well as in the humanities in general since the 1980s “as a convenient metaphor for surveying and looking down from a distance on a phenomenon that involves the point of view on the textual and stage landscape”.<sup>7</sup> Physical distance between an object and a perceiver is important for the purpose of our chapter and in the context of theatre. The most common type of stage-auditorium relationship is frontal, i.e. spectators are placed in front of a stage so that they can perceive the stage in a single view. Additionally, from the 17th century to the mid-20th century theatre was predominantly an art of representation that exposed its picture-like nature best through the proscenium stage (also called the picture frame stage).

Environment, “the area surrounding a place or thing”,<sup>8</sup> is opposed to landscape in that it cannot be perceived in a single view but rather in a panoptic or panoramic view, in addition to which its systemic nature is not necessarily comprehensible by visual means. Environmental theatre is a type of stage-auditorium relationship in which the auditorium is surrounded by the stage or the stage and auditorium merge, creating in both cases an immersive effect. Environmental theatre is often used in site specific or open-air performances. The term ‘environment’ became popular in theatre through Richard Schechner’s productions and book *Environmental Theatre* (1973), but coincided also with similar developments in other arts and concerns about ecological environment in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

Definitions of the term ‘image’ vary and overlap to a considerable extent. Image is either 1) a visual object, or 2) a visual

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<sup>6</sup> Chaudhuri 2002: 12

<sup>7</sup> Pavis 2016: 117

<sup>8</sup> Oxford English Dictionary

<sup>9</sup> Schechner 1994: ix

or textual representation of a person, object or concept, either from factual or fictional reality, or 3) a mental concept held by a particular person or group of people.<sup>10</sup> In the arts, diverse images are created through different means of expression, through words, colours, gestures, sounds, etc. An artistic image is more or less figurative and carries multiple meanings; thus, an image demands interpretation but also evokes sensory experience and affective response of spectators. According to Patrice Pavis, an image remains a construction of the theatrical machinery with its own formal structure.<sup>11</sup> Images of forest on stage are created by employing different strategies, as we will show below.

The chapter investigates images of forest as a potential platform of self-perception and worldview among Estonians and how this imagery has been represented through forest as a metonymic image, a landscape or an environment in Estonian theatre to articulate Finno-Ugric identity.

### **Forest and Finno-Ugric Identity**

Self-identification through an environment is common to peoples all over the world and reflects a very old understanding of oneself as part of the environment. Different types of landscape have played an essential role in building the cultural and national identities of peoples. One can even speak of so-called national landscapes that carry specific symbolic meanings and tell the story of the group's existence.<sup>12</sup> If we ask, what are symbolically loaded landscapes in Estonia, then a forest is probably one of the prime answers. It has been argued that contemporary Estonian identity includes the motif of the “nature-loving forest people”<sup>13</sup> because Estonians have a

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<sup>10</sup> Oxford English Dictionary

<sup>11</sup> Pavis 1998: 180

<sup>12</sup> Unt 2012: 46

<sup>13</sup> Jonuks and Remmel 2020: 481

particularly strong relationship with the forest that reaches back to the distant past. Of course, Estonians share such a belief with a number of other peoples, first and foremost the northern peoples.

To elaborate on the motif (or myth) of Estonians as a forest people, we indeed need to look at the larger community of nations to which they belong, i.e. the Finno-Ugric peoples: Finns, Estonians and the peoples living in Russia such as the Mordvins, Komi, Udmurt, Mari and others. Finno-Ugric identity is based foremost on language kinship, although Finno-Ugric peoples are also thought to share way of life that encourages them to live and feel close to nature. Since Finno-Ugric languages belong to the Uralic language family, i.e. languages spoken by northern or so-called boreal peoples, there has been a tendency in Estonia to extend Finno-Ugrianism towards the northern Eurasian cultural area and to claim that Estonian identity is based on an affinity with Boreal, or ‘forest’ peoples (i.e. those who live in the forest belt) par excellence and more or less opposed to the Indo-Europeans. The idea of Estonians as a Boreal people was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by religious poet and theologian Uku Masing (1909–1985), who was influenced by the work of folklorist and religious studies scholar Oskar Loorits (1900–1961). Loorits contrasted passive, conservative, close-to-nature Estonians with European urban culture and widespread fascination with technology, which were in his opinion characteristic of Indo-Europeans.<sup>14</sup> Loorits and Masing paid lots of attention to the particularities of the languages of the northern peoples, such as a lack of future tense and of grammatical gender, and considered a harmonious relationship between man and nature essential characteristics of boreality. An indigenous natural environment and native language were supposed to shape a particular perception of

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<sup>14</sup> Loorits 1932

the world, i.e. the sense of a permanent present, non-linear and non-hierarchical patterns of perception, easy acceptance of paradoxes and contradictions, etc.<sup>15</sup>

Today, the tradition of thinking initiated by Loorits is continued primarily by the immensely popular essayist Valdur Mikita (b. 1970), who has become the leading identity writer for the younger generations. His recent work could be considered one of the main reasons for the growing popularity of Estonian self-identification as a forest people, or *homo silvaticus*.<sup>16</sup> However, Mikita does not oppose Estonian culture to European; in his opinion, Estonia exists on the border between two cultural areas because of its two main types of landscape: the sea is an ancient Germanic element that has connected Estonia with Europe, while the forest is a Balto-Finnic component that stores and enhances the Finno-Ugric mentality, i.e. animism, onomatopoetic speech, multiple perception, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the surrounding environment and forest in particular have played a crucial role in Estonian self-perception and in constructing national narratives throughout the centuries. In the 19th century, forest was mainly perceived and understood as something foreign and wild. Since Estonians were considered an indigenous peasant people who cultivate their fields, cultured nature was valued more.<sup>18</sup> Until World War II peasants literally lived in the midst of the woods and made their grain fields between forests, with the nineteenth-century German Romantic notion of an ethnicised forest lasting in Estonia only until the 1930s.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Masing 1993

<sup>16</sup> Mikita 2013: 18

<sup>17</sup> Mikita 2013: 10, 32

<sup>18</sup> Jonuks and Remmel 2020: 463

<sup>19</sup> Jonuks and Remmel 2020: 481

Forest cover increased significantly during the Soviet era; in addition, the idea of Estonians as a Finno-Ugric nation won wide popularity in the 1970s, resulting in the strengthening of the image of Estonians as a forest people. Today, ancient forests are regarded as national symbols, and intact nature and the preservation of traditional cultural heritage are widely valued.

### **Forest, Folklore and Performing Arts**

In recent decades, numerous studies have been published on the relationship between nature and performance. The performative turn in the study of the environment and society has led to increasing conceptualisation of human–nature relations.

The intertwined relationships between a person and nature are most deeply rooted in folklore. The forest is a recurrent motif in Finno-Ugric folklore and folk religion, and while the forest and nature in general are exclusively positive symbols today, then in folklore the forest is often depicted as a neutral or even negative place. One can easily get lost in the woods, and a forest also encloses dangers and mysteries. There are many folk stories about encounters with wild animals or supernatural beings who inhabit the woods, such as elves, werewolves, etc.<sup>20</sup> Folkloric beliefs, values and stories have also been incorporated into many works of fiction that depict ancient times.

It is no wonder that also many canonical literary works tackle the relationship between humans and nature. Estonian theatre researcher and ethnologist Ester Võsu has pointed out that in Estonian dramaturgy characters are usually bound to the place in which they have lived for a long time. This creates a dominant national archetype in which the human relationship with nature

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<sup>20</sup> See for example Järv 2018.

is characterised by a struggle with the forces of nature.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Downing Cless observes that throughout the history of European drama

some playwrights dramatically represent the nature/culture dualism and conflict. [...] Natural environments become dramatic forces, taking action with agency or reacting as enforced victims, not unlike characters.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to this dominant stream in European drama and theatre history where nature is anthropomorphised and opposed to human beings, August Kitzberg's tragedy *The Werewolf* (1911), a canonical work in Estonian literature, and Finnish classic novel Aleksis Kivi's *Seven Brothers* (1870) discuss the intermediate position of Finno-Ugric people between nature and civilisation in the nineteenth-century countryside where peasants earn a living as farmers but also as gatherers (hunting was reserved for the upper classes). On the one hand, the forest is seen in these works as a site of wild, savage life as opposed to more cultivated and cultured life in the villages. But on the other hand, the forest is also a nurturing and curing granary (providing wood, meat, berries, mushrooms, herbs, etc.) and refuge.

In the following, we study the relationship between theatre and nature, focusing on two issues: 1) how forest as a mental concept is depicted on the stage (using the forest either as an image, landscape or environment), and 2) how forest as a fictional or real place is represented on the stage through scenography (set design, photos and video, lighting design) and sound design. The main problem is, how to adapt such different phenomena as nature and art to each other and what strategies to use.

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<sup>21</sup> Võsu 2005: 209

<sup>22</sup> Cless 2010: 1

## Illusionistic Representations of Forest

Both *The Werewolf* and *Seven Brothers* have been frequently adapted to the stage in Estonia, thus their production history illustrates very well how the tools of representation of forest have changed in theatre and through that also the perception of forest.

*The Werewolf* was written, and produced for the first time, in 1911. It depicts a love triangle in which Christianity and pantheism as religions, ethics and life styles are opposed to each other through two different female characters: modest, hard-working and blond Mari versus passionate, bold, freedom-loving and brunet Tiina. The story line related to Tiina exposes close and intimate interaction of humans with nature in pantheism. Her mother was burned as a witch for living in the forest and curing people and Tiina herself appears to the stage followed by the howling of wolves. Act II takes place in the forest, where Tiina is teaching a viper and even has a dialogue with a squirrel who produces onomatopoetic phrases. Nevertheless, the village people are easily convinced that Tiina is a witch or werewolf. In act III – which takes place by the forest, in the liminal space between nature and civilisation on the ritualistic Midsummer Eve – the community casts Tiina out and she escapes to the forest. In Act V, she returns to the village accompanied again by the howling of wolves that underlines the threatening nature of the forest.

How to stage such a five-act play with different locations? How is it possible to represent forest or any other landscape on a theatre stage? Is a faithful depiction of forest or any other natural environment possible on a traditional stage and in a realistic setting? The strategy widely used in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century was a conventional illusionistic design employing purely artificial means, such as a painted

backdrop, cardboard trees and the like, together with forest voices (bird song, howling wolves, the murmur of trees, etc.). The production history of *The Werewolf* (44 productions) illustrates this tendency very well, since painted backdrops and cardboard trees represented the forest onstage until the end of the 1950s, even if theatre critics mention from the beginning that representations of nature, for example teaching a viper or speaking with a squirrel, are not suitable for the stage.<sup>23</sup> Of course, such a man-made artificiality has its own risks. This is how the actress Liina Reiman described her troubles in the forest scene in *The Werewolf* during the dress rehearsal (in 1915): "Trees and shrubs of the forest sway and fall. Someone stumbles on a moss rug [...] the snake prop wriggled, [...] but disturbed more than it created an illusion."<sup>24</sup> (See Figure 1) Contrary to the artificiality of the scenography, many critics have praised auditive landscapes in the productions of *The Werewolf*.<sup>25</sup>

In contemporary theatre, however, modern technological media such as video projection, film, and photos of real landscapes have created new possibilities for impressive illusionistic depiction of nature on stage. Sophisticated technological solutions and authentic materiality were combined in the production of the Estonian Drama Theatre *Metsa forte*<sup>26</sup> (2018, scenographer Kristjan Suits). The play presented a very topical debate over what to do with your private forest: whether to clear-cut or preserve it. The stage setting directed the audience's sympathy strongly towards the latter position with a most beautiful video image of trees and wood chips sprinkled on the stage to spread the smell of the forest in the auditorium. The

<sup>23</sup> G. E. L. 1911

<sup>24</sup> "Metsa puud ja põõsad kõigurad ja kukurad. Keegi komistab samblavaibale. Proovitakse just ussistseeni metsas, see butafoorlik peletis vingerdas kiill, kui seda raudtraadist veeti, kuid segas rohkem kui sünnetas illusiooni." (Järv 1979: 34) We translate.

<sup>25</sup> Järv 1979

<sup>26</sup> Mets means forest in Estonian, creating a playful reference to *mezzo forte*.

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atmosphere was perceived as authentic, airy, and magical.<sup>27</sup> Thus, an illusionistic decorative set design and intense atmosphere created an idyllic but politically charged image of the forest that called for nature protection.

Figure 1: *The Werewolf* (2015)



Nevertheless, the forest on the frontal stage is always perceived as a landscape at a distance where the spectator does not belong. The mental maps of productions of *The Werewolf* and *Metsa forte* also place the spectator in so-called civilised territory, i.e. village or city, providing a safe opportunity to observe the picturesque landscapes and events happening either in or at the frontier of the forest.

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<sup>27</sup> Jürna 2018.

## Metonymic Representations of Forest

Illusionistic scenography became obsolete in modern theatre, instead increasingly minimalist strategies gained popularity: metonymic stage design (for example, referring to the forest with the help of a couple of often conditional tree trunks or shrubs), an appropriate atmosphere created by lighting, music, sounds, or an empty stage that left the creation of the image of the forest fully to the imagination of the spectators.

The first modernist production of *The Werewolf* was presented by students at the Drama Studio theatre school in 1926; the actors played on the empty stage with only curtains as a backdrop and some necessary props creating a symbolist atmosphere.<sup>28</sup>

Stage productions of *The Werewolf* by Estonian director Mikk Mikiver (in collaboration with scenographer Aime Unt) also offer relevant examples. Mikiver staged Kitzberg's tragedy repeatedly. In 1968, the minimalist stage setting was designed to create an intense atmosphere by means of colouring and the texture of the materials: brownish backdrops did not represent anything specific but evoked mental images of archaic sites.<sup>29</sup> The production in 1974 took place in the 'found space' of the Kiek in de Kök medieval artillery tower, where thick and robust stone walls and narrow embrasures created an archaic atmosphere. The stage design was very scarce, consisting of a few pieces of furniture; the image of forest was created only by one small green birch, which sharply contrasted with the stone walls.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Järv 1979: 45-47

<sup>29</sup> Larini 2015: 247

<sup>30</sup> Valter 1974

Ideologically, many directors have tried to explore boreality through folklore, heritage and rituals, trying to go symbolically back to the past. Another work fruitfully used in theatre for exploring the relationships between boreal people and forest is Aleksis Kivi's *Seven Brothers*. The novel depicts a certain period in the lives (transmission rite) of seven brothers – young boys and men – who escape from school to the forest sometime in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Estonian production history of *Seven Brothers* starts in 1934 and continues today, with altogether 11 productions. Contrary to *The Werewolf*, the mental map of productions of *Seven Brothers* places spectators in the forest where they share the experiences of young men.

Stage director Peeter Jalakas has been working on the idea of boreality as a post/modern concept. In 1994, he adapted Kivi's novel to the stage at Rakvere Theatre (scenographers Jule Käen and Jalakas). Like several Estonian directors before him, most notably Voldemar Panso in 1971, he used an almost bare stage with a window projected on a shredded transitable screen as the main symbol. (See Figure 2) The stage represented the domestic space of the brothers, the forest and nature, and the space behind the screen transmitted via video, represented cultured spheres, school, the village and women in particular and society and civilisation in general. The cultural secretary of the Finnish Institute at the time, Eva Lille, mentioned that the most thrilling moment was when one of the brothers, a boor, stands in the spotlight, representing at the same time contemporary Finnish men who are coming out of the forest and moving towards the European Union<sup>31,32</sup> Thus the window in the production also represents the window to Europe, as Peter the Great called St Petersburg, and as we might call the Gulf of Finland, which unites Estonia and Finland. The production reminded Lille that

<sup>31</sup> Finland joined the EU in 1995, Estonia in 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Balbat 1994

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as both Estonians and Finns have come out of the forest and are now in the backwoods of Europe, they have to behave ‘properly’ (“sleeked and in silk clothes”<sup>33</sup>). The production is a good example of shared perceptions and values relating to the forest among Finns and Estonians, although it is also more than this. In 2018, Kivi’s novel was performed under the title *Seven Brothers or the Seagull of the Ural Mountains* in the Estonian National Museum in the area of the Finno-Ugric peoples exhibition.

Figure 2: *Seven Brothers* (1994)



Theatrical adaptations of *Seven Brothers* demonstrate how challenging it is to depict the forest as an environment on stage. Minimalist stage settings where location is marked visually only by tiny symbolic items or aurally by soundscape reduce the importance of specific environment to human behaviour and perception but highlight actors/characters and acting, leaving a

<sup>33</sup> Balbat 1994

lot of freedom for spectators to imagine how the fictional world might look and feel.

## Representations of Forest in the Natural Environment

The theatre stage is characteristically a neutral “empty space” (Peter Brook), ready to accommodate any fictional world. But the traditional proscenium stage and modern black box alike present specific difficulties in depicting nature: how can an image of an open natural environment be created in a closed, walled and windowless space. The dichotomy that raises the question about representability of nature on stage in general has been repeatedly addressed by theatre researchers: “In contrast to the open countryside and panoramic views that we associate with landscape, theatre summons the very image of interiority...”<sup>34</sup>

The next examples belong to theatre based on ethnic heritage (*pärimusteater* in Estonian). This term was introduced in Estonia at the beginning of the 21st century to describe theatre productions that make use of folkloric heritage (most often Finno-Ugric folklore), and interpret the material in the key of post-dramatic aesthetics. Heritage theatre aims to find new cultural resources for identity construction, reviving and intertwining forgotten cultural traditions of the Finno-Ugric and northern native peoples. The leading figure of heritage theatre in Estonia is Anne Türnpu (b. 1963), who has employed different strategies of representation of forest in her productions: from an illusionist landscape to an empty stage and to forest as a natural environment.

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<sup>34</sup> Chaudhuri and Fuchs 2002: 1

A musical composition *Meditations with Tormis*<sup>35</sup> (2015, scenographer Kairi Mändla) consisted of Tormis's choral songs (based on ancient folk songs) and utterance of ancient Estonian spells. It was performed indoors in the chamber hall of the Theatre NO99, but serious efforts were made to make this space look more like nature. A huge video montage of panoramas of Estonian landscapes by nature photographer Rein Arjukese was moving on the back wall – shots of autumn forest, bog, fields, occasionally of tree leaves in close-up, etc. The floor was covered with a grass carpet so spectators could take off their shoes, sit on the lawn and admire the beautiful montage of nature photos on the walls. Here we see an impressive use of the illusionistic strategy where the spectators' experience likened to an extent to watching a film. They were immersed in the visually represented forest.

*Lemminkäinen* (2005, scenographer Liina Tepand), based on the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, was performed by students of Estonian theatre school and directed by Anne Türnpu and Jaan Tooming. The directors included in the text of *Kalevala* Estonian, Seto and Votic folk songs, lamentation, spells, and as the most exotic component, Sami *yoiks* performed by a guest actor from the Sami theatre in Norway, that is, elements of a number of Finno-Ugric cultures were combined. The actors conveyed the story mostly by reciting or singing and they used expressive, choreographed body language. *Lemminkäinen* was initially performed in a black-box theatre, although later some performances were given in the forest landscape: at the Estonian Open Air Museum at Rocca-al-Mare and in the woods by lake Leigo. Transfer from the closed theatre space to open air was easy thanks to minimalist, virtually non-existent stage design. But what changed in the forest? First of all, the boundaries between audience and acting areas became

<sup>35</sup> Veljo Tormis (1930–2017) was an Estonian composer, whose work is largely based on traditional Estonian and Finno-Ugric folk music.

blurred: the actors moved between the trees, they imitated the sounds of nature, made hooping sounds far away, etc. There was no way of telling where the fictional environment started: acting space melted into real space. Second, the contrast between the natural environment and the stylised, theatrical manner of acting came to the fore, something that was not perceptible in the black box. This was probably to put more emphasis on the contradictory relationships between the theatrical representation of folklore and nature as the original environment for folklore. Although one critic opined that the best way to present Lemminkäinen's story was to perform it in the woods,<sup>36</sup> the play worked equally well both between walls and in a forest setting, although differently. Thus, the possibility of such transfer indicates that the forest was not of critical importance to the overall meaning and aesthetics of the production.

In 2006, Türnpu and Tooming directed a little-known Estonian expressionist drama *Obsessions* (1925) by Rudolf Reiman with the same troupe of students. The play depicts Estonian village life in the time of slavery, centuries ago, and draws material from Estonian mythology and folklore, including the werewolf motif, which is, as we know, central to Kitzberg's drama *The Werewolf*. This was an open-air performance at the established Leigo Lake Theatre (the name for the summer performances on Leigo Farm). Open-air theatre has become increasingly popular in Estonia over the last decades, yet the forest does not appear to be a very likely place for such performances as it is rather uncomfortable and difficult to access. But Türnpu met the challenge. The playground was not on the large lake's shore as usual, but in a spinney, on the shores of a small half-overgrown forest lake. A simple stage was built under the trees and the audience was seated on the other side of the forest lake under giant spruces. Thus, the traditional spatial structure of the

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<sup>36</sup> Oruaas 2005

theatre performance (i.e. the dichotomy of stage and auditorium) was preserved, but the fictional world created on the stage blended into the natural environment making its contractedness artificiality perceptible.<sup>37</sup>

A special part of the production was the audience's journey of almost half an hour to the performance site through the forest. This was led by Anne Türnpu herself, playing a shaman drum. During the journey, strange sounds came from the forest (a wolf howling, someone whooping, etc.) and the actors performed small scenes (men pulling a rope around a tree trunk, a young man beating water with a stick and shouting frantically, etc.) that remained at that moment chaotic and incoherent, as they only acquired meaning later during the performance. The journey from the farm (cultured landscape) into the wild forest was staged as a ritual transition from everyday reality to another and different one.

The last example is the open-air musical performance of Veljo Tormis's *Izborian Epic* (2015, scenographer Kairi Mändla), directed by Türnpu and Eva Koldits. They set *Izborian Epic* at the edge of a bog forest in Kodru bog, a very appropriate site, given that Izhorians are one of the indigenous Finno-Ugric forest peoples whose language and national identity have almost disappeared by today. The material used included Izhorian national heritage, Veljo Tormis's *Forgotten Peoples* cycle, three choral songs by Estonian composer Mart Saar using Izhorian melodies, and elements of Orthodox liturgy; five drama actors, chamber choir *Voces Musicales* and an accordionist participated in the performance. *Izborian Epic* took place not only in a spatial, but also a temporal, liminal area: it started at dawn (5 am), and after the performance, spectators were offered a traditional Izhorian breakfast. This production also included the spectators'

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<sup>37</sup> Oruaas 2006: 38

journey to the playground: to get there, they had to walk about one kilometre through the forest. Old photos and icons (i.e. religious items) were hung on the trees along the rather muddy trail; Türnpu's intention was to display the forest as an ancient sanctuary, a church where viewers are on a pilgrimage.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, there was no particular nostalgia nor sentimentality towards nature; stage directors and performers rather regarded it as a perfectly normal environment and used it as they needed.

The audience was seated in front of the forest trees (mainly birches and pines), meaning that the relationship between acting and viewing areas was quite traditional (i.e. frontal), which cannot be said of the 'stage' itself. An important element of open-air performances in a landscape is the horizon: "A horizon that constitutes its defining border serves as an enclosing function; it provides focus and guarantees the integrity of the inside."<sup>39</sup> In the forest the horizon was absent and thus the acting area lacked a spatial centre, a background and a clear structure. The audience was confronted with an environment with blurred boundaries. The choir who sang in the woods was invisible most of the time; the performers appeared in different locations in front, behind or between the trees. From the performers' perspective, however, such an environment was nothing but the most natural setting for a performance based on Finno-Ugric heritage and seeking to mediate the Finno-Ugric and Boreal world perception: non-linear, non-hierarchical, full of splits. The actors told stories and performed a variety of scenes, but these were just fragments that did not constitute any coherent narrative; nature and music played key roles instead of the story. While the actors mainly wore Izhorian folk costumes, the choir came out of the woods at the end of the performance in tailcoats. (See Figure 3) Thus, the performance began with nature and religion and ended with

<sup>38</sup> Pesti and Türnpu 2016: 29

<sup>39</sup> Unt 2008: 321

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a clear reference to modern secular culture: the heritage of the vanished and forgotten nation is now demonstrated in theatres and museums.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 3: *Ižhorian Epic* (2015)



The performance in the woods offered an exceptionally intense perceptual experience that heightened all of the senses. According to one critic, the journey to the playground through the forest led her to a trance-like state, although all her senses were receptive and alert.<sup>41</sup> The harmonious combination of environment and acting strategies in its turn created a powerful effect of authenticity. For example, Estonian writer Tõnu Õnnepalu described his experience poetically as follows: a total event where you are with all your heart immersed in what you see, hear and feel; acting is “impossibly natural and simple”, the actors as if totally merged with their characters.<sup>42</sup> (See Figure 4)

<sup>40</sup> Pesti and Türnpu 2016: 34

<sup>41</sup> Aibel 2015

<sup>42</sup> Õnnepalu 2015

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Figure 4: Lauri Kaldoja and Inga Salurand in *Ižhorian Epic* (2015)



Thus, forest as an environment was an integral part of this stage production and determined aesthetic choices. The forest was “experienced as an immediately present multisensory totality that the audience and actors share”<sup>43</sup> interrelated with each and with the environment. During the performance, spectators were invited to look at the performing area located in front of them, i.e. to view the forest as a landscape, even when they perceived the environment auditively and olfactorily. Nevertheless, environments are often discerned as a series of consecutive landscapes. *Ižhorian Epic* could hardly be called a site-specific production, since it did not engage with the meaning or history of this particular site. *Obsessions* and *Ižhorian Epic* both depicted forest as a live environment, reflecting Schechner’s remark that an environmental performance is one in which all the elements are recognised as alive.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Unt 2008: 319

<sup>44</sup> Schechner 1994: x

## Conclusion

In general, forest for the Finno-Ugric peoples has been a living environment but also a special Other, a symbolic site of identity construction and folklore. In human perception and in artistic representations, nature is intertwined with culture: on the one hand, cultural imagery and collective memories of a given society are projected into nature, on the other hand, these cultured landscapes become objects of artistic representation and as such evoke imaginations and associations in their turn. The representations of forest in folklore and arts belong to a secondary modelling system, since representations remodel and materialise the mental concept of forest. In drama and theatre, nature is always depicted in relation to a human being – it is a background to human actions or an environment humans are related to or dependent on. Also in Finno-Ugric folklore and fiction, the border and the being at the border of forest/nature and village/city/civilisation is a constant source of inspiration and identity creation.

In the chapter, we demonstrated how forest can be presented and perceived as an abstract image, a landscape or an environment. Landscape assumes certain physical and emotional distance from the object – it is an object or a mental conception on display, on stage or at the backdrop. Forest that is represented in theatre as a landscape tends to lead to objectified decorative static images. Metonymic images of forest rely more on individual imagination of spectators but in case of limited or weak artistic input, the image of forest might not be visualised or conceptualised at all in the reception process. Contrary to an image and landscape, which can be observed critically and impartially, an environment absorbs both performers and spectators, offering impressions and fragments of the whole for perception. According to our

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examples, the forest as a performance environment challenges theatrical conventions and conventional cultural perceptions of forest because of the theatrical framing. On the one hand, forest as a natural site acquires new cultural connotations, while on the other hand the forest and nature as cultured sites demonstrate their independence and liveness, which are attributed only to performers and spectators in traditional theatrical contexts.

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# **Explorer la forêt acadienne dans les romans contemporains pour la jeunesse qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens**

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**Résumé** – Dans ce chapitre, nous proposons une incursion dans la forêt acadienne à travers un ensemble de romans historiques qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens (de 1755 à 1763). Une analyse de contenu portant sur ces romans qui sont destinés au jeune lectorat nous a permis de cerner les principaux thèmes qui définissent la forêt du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle de même que certaines représentations qui la caractérisent. Nous soutenons que de tels romans pourraient avoir de l'influence sur les conceptions que les jeunes de notre époque entretiennent à l'égard de l'univers forestier.

**Mots-clés** – Représentation de la forêt, forêt acadienne, Déportation des Acadiens, roman pour la jeunesse, roman historique, stéréotypes autochtones, stéréotypes sexistes

La forêt est un lieu commun dans la plupart des œuvres de fiction pour la jeunesse qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens. À travers des récits épiques inspirés de faits historiques avérés, ces romans relatent à leur façon cette triste page de l'histoire de l'Acadie. Pour comprendre à quel point la forêt acadienne est un lieu déterminant au sein de cet événement marquant, il importe de rappeler, même brièvement, le contexte historique. Il faut remonter à l'année 1604 pour comprendre que dès son

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Anne-Marie Dionne, « Explorer la forêt acadienne dans les romans contemporains pour la jeunesse qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens », Sara Bédard-Goulet et Daniel Chartier [dir.], *The Northern Forest. La forêt nordique*, Montréal et Tartu, Imaginaire | Nord et University of Tartu Press, coll. « Isberg », 2022, p. 205-232.

établissement par les Français, l'Acadie fut au cœur de conflits incessants entre la France et l'Angleterre, qui luttaient avec acharnement pour conquérir de nouveaux territoires. En 1713, la France céda définitivement l'Acadie à la Grande-Bretagne en signant le traité d'Utrecht. Cependant, durant toutes ces années, les Acadiennes et les Acadiens, habitants francophones de confession catholique, restèrent neutres vis-à-vis des conflits qui ne manquèrent pas de perdurer entre les deux puissances européennes. Cette neutralité contribua toutefois à leur attirer des représailles militaires de la part des Anglais. En effet, les autorités britanniques, envieuses de ces paysans qui occupaient les meilleures terres agricoles et qui de surcroît refusaient de porter allégeance à la reine d'Angleterre et de prendre les armes contre les Français, parvinrent à mettre en œuvre un vil projet visant à déporter la population francophone d'Acadie, qui comptait alors quelque treize mille personnes. Pourchassés par les Anglais, les Acadiennes et les Acadiens virent leurs villages incendiés et leurs familles dispersées sans ménagement avant d'être embarqués sur des navires de fortune en partance pour des contrées inhospitalières, principalement vers les treize colonies britanniques de la côte Est des États-Unis, les Caraïbes, la France ou encore l'Angleterre. Durant les années que dura la Déportation, soit de 1755 à 1763, on estime que près de dix mille d'entre eux furent ainsi arrachés à leurs terres. Traqués par l'ennemi anglais, quelques milliers d'Acadiennes et d'Acadiens réussirent toutefois à s'enfuir dans les forêts autour des villages. Grâce à l'accueil et au soutien indéfectible des Mi'kmaq et des Malécites, deux peuples autochtones semi-nomades avec lesquels ils entretenaient de bonnes relations, plusieurs d'entre eux parvinrent à y survivre pendant ces années de tourmente<sup>1</sup>. Dans certains romans pour la jeunesse qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens, cette survie en forêt est souvent racontée comme

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<sup>1</sup> Bona Arsenault et Pascal Alain, *Histoire des Acadiens – nouvelle édition revue et augmentée*, Saint-Laurent, Fides, 2004 [1994], 502 p.

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ayant été une véritable odyssée, une lutte pour la survie et la liberté. En suivant les protagonistes au cœur de la forêt acadienne, les lectrices et les lecteurs sont ainsi mis en présence de divers aspects qui la définissent. Ils découvrent alors qu'elle peut être salvatrice, mais qu'elle peut tout aussi bien receler une hostilité oppressante qui varie au gré des saisons.

Notre intérêt pour ces romans portant sur la Déportation des Acadiens vient du fait qu'il s'agit d'un épisode ayant eu une incidence notable sur le développement de la franco-phonie d'Amérique. Considéré par certains comme une opération de nettoyage ethnique, cet événement a transformé considérablement la démographie de trois provinces canadiennes (la Nouvelle-Écosse, le Nouveau-Brunswick et l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard) et une partie de l'État du Maine, aux États-Unis<sup>2</sup>. Dès lors, on peut se demander si c'est par devoir de mémoire ou par souci de transmettre un savoir historique que des auteures et des auteurs de notre époque choisissent de raconter la Déportation des Acadiens par l'entremise de romans destinés aux jeunes lectrices et lecteurs. Bien que dans la présente étude, il ne s'agit pas d'explorer davantage cette question, il est éclairant de considérer les paroles de l'une de ces auteurs, Diane Carmel Léger, qui s'exprime ainsi :

J'écris surtout pour rendre l'histoire et la culture acadienne[s] plus accessibles à tous. C'est ma passion. Mes romans célèbrent les liens que les Acadiens ont avec les Mi'kmaq, les Canadiens, les Allemands et autres<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Diane Carmel Léger, « Auteure acadienne – Diane Carmel Léger », en ligne, <https://www.dianecarmellegger.com/>, consulté le 23 mars 2021.

Par ailleurs, ces romans ne font pas qu'instruire les lectrices et les lecteurs sur des faits historiques ayant contribué à façonner l'histoire du Canada ou encore sur les liens entre diverses cultures. Ils offrent également de façon contextualisée des représentations du style de vie des Acadiennes et des Acadiens, notamment leur relation à l'univers forestier ayant servi de refuge à plusieurs d'entre eux pendant la Déportation. En effet, en lisant ces romans, les jeunes peuvent aller à la rencontre de la forêt en même temps que les personnages qui vivent entre les pages. Or, les représentations de la forêt auxquelles les lectrices et les lecteurs sont alors exposés peuvent avoir une influence marquante sur les connaissances qu'ils acquièrent à son sujet de même que sur les représentations elles-mêmes qui marquent leur esprit. Bref, en analysant ces romans pour la jeunesse dont l'action se situe au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, nous nous intéressons aux façons dont la forêt se transpose dans l'imaginaire d'auteures et d'auteurs contemporains, car la schématisation qui en découle et qui imprègne leurs romans pourrait bien influencer les représentations que développent à leur tour les jeunes lectrices et lecteurs. Nous prenons en compte une période historique précise, soit le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, tout comme une région nordique particulière, soit celle de la forêt acadienne, qui est l'une des huit régions forestières du Canada et qui couvre la Nouvelle-Écosse, l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard et une partie importante du Nouveau-Brunswick<sup>4</sup>. Par ailleurs, comme le souligne Isabelle Paré, pour les jeunes de notre époque, l'expérience de la forêt et les représentations qui en découlent dépendent largement des médias auxquels ils sont exposés, notamment la littérature de jeunesse<sup>5</sup>. Étant donné l'importance accordée

<sup>4</sup> Conseil canadien des ministres des Forêts, « Des forêts saines – Des forêts vastes et abondantes », en ligne, <https://www.ccmf.org/des-forêts-saines/des-forets-vastes-et-abondantes-entrefilet/>, consulté le 25 mars 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Isabelle Paré, « Les représentations sociales pour cerner l'évolution des conceptions de la forêt québécoise : une analyse autour du documentaire *L'erreur boréale* », *[VertigO] La revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement*, vol. 17, n° 1, 2017, p. 1-25.

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à la forêt dans la trame narrative des romans qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens, il semble pertinent de s'interroger sur les représentations qui sont mises en relief dans ces œuvres destinées de prime abord à un jeune lectorat. Ces œuvres de fiction ont en commun qu'elles mettent en scène des personnages démunis de tout bien matériel qui dépendent de la forêt pour survivre. Armés seulement de leur courage, ils doivent s'adapter à leur nouvel environnement et apprendre à en tirer profit pour assurer leur subsistance. Compte tenu de ce contexte particulier, comment la forêt se révèle-t-elle à travers les romans pour la jeunesse qui racontent leur périple?

Le présent chapitre constitue une étude exploratoire ayant deux objectifs. Premièrement, nous souhaitons relever les principaux thèmes relatifs à la forêt qui se dégagent de ces romans pour la jeunesse dans lesquels elle peut s'avérer un lieu important où se déroule l'action. Cela devrait permettre de noter certaines informations pouvant enrichir les connaissances des lectrices et des lecteurs en ce qui concerne la forêt acadienne. Deuxièmement, nous voulons analyser les représentations de la forêt dans ces romans afin de mieux comprendre l'influence qu'elles pourraient avoir sur les jeunes lectrices et lecteurs. Ce faisant, nous tentons de débusquer les visions stéréotypées qui pourraient se retrouver dans ces livres. À notre connaissance, les romans pour la jeunesse n'ont jamais été examinés sous cet angle, du moins au Canada français. C'est donc un travail de mise en chantier que nous entreprenons. Néanmoins, certaines recherches portant sur les représentations de la forêt dans un contexte plus large nous permettent d'établir des bases pour étudier le sujet qui nous intéresse. Dans ce qui suit, nous faisons état de certains éléments théoriques concernant les représentations de la forêt dans l'imaginaire occidental. Par la suite, nous présentons les aspects méthodologiques de notre recherche. Après quoi, nous faisons état de nos résultats pour

mettre en évidence les thèmes relatifs à la forêt qui prédominent dans ces romans de même que les représentations de la forêt qui en émergent. Nous concluons avec une discussion en lien avec les objectifs évoqués précédemment.

### **La forêt dans l'imaginaire occidental**

L'évocation de la forêt en littérature de jeunesse ravive sur-le-champ de multiples images de lieux mystérieux, enchanteurs ou ténébreux. Souvent présente dans les contes traditionnels<sup>6</sup>, la forêt est le lieu où se cachent de délicates fées, mais aussi des sorcières et de grands méchants loups. Catherine Addison observe qu'en littérature, il n'est pas rare que la forêt soit présentée comme étant l'opposition manichéenne de la civilisation, avec ses forces cruelles ou mystérieuses, ses incertitudes effrayantes et ses dangers bien réels<sup>7</sup>. Toutefois, l'auteure se réjouit du fait que cette conceptualisation binaire en ce qui a trait aux représentations de la forêt n'est pas la seule à se retrouver dans les œuvres littéraires. À cet égard, Robert Pogue Harrison démontre que les représentations de la forêt, que ce soit dans les œuvres littéraires ou plus largement dans l'imaginaire occidental, sont plutôt nuancées<sup>8</sup>. Affirmant lui-même que les perspectives qu'il dégage n'excluent pas certains paradoxes, il soutient d'emblée qu'il perçoit la forêt comme un monde à part qui permet à la civilisation occidentale « de se dépayser, de s'enchanter, de se terrifier, de se mettre en question, en somme de projeter dans les ombres de la forêt ses plus secrètes, ses plus profondes angoisses<sup>9</sup> ». Dans son essai sur les représentations

<sup>6</sup> Cécile Boulaire, *Le Moyen âge dans la littérature pour enfants (1945-1999)*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2002, 344 p.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Addison, « Terror, Error or Refuge: Forests in Western Literature », *Alternation*, vol. 14, n° 2, 2007, p. 116-136.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forêts. Essai sur l'imaginaire occidental* [Forests. The Shadow of Civilization], Paris, Flammarion, 1992, 398 p.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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de la forêt dans l'imaginaire occidental, Harisson puise des exemples dans la mythologie grecque et dans Shakespeare pour distinguer diverses représentations de la forêt qui se retrouvent dans la littérature<sup>10</sup>. Une première représentation, qui n'est pas sans rappeler les propos de Addison<sup>11</sup>, se trouve dans les œuvres littéraires où la forêt est représentée comme l'antithèse de la civilisation. Dans cette perspective, la nature primitive de la forêt doit être conquise et domptée par l'être humain qui est à la recherche d'un refuge ou d'un nouvel endroit où s'établir. Une autre représentation est mise de l'avant lorsque la forêt est décrite comme un lieu démoniaque ou bien un lieu enchanteur. Une telle forêt, selon Harrison, effraie autant qu'elle attire par son étrangeté, car elle est habitée par les hors-la-loi, les ermites, les sorcières, les magiciens, les démons et les bons génies, bref par des êtres qui se retrouvent en marge de la société<sup>12</sup>. La forêt, lieu de régénérescence, constitue une autre représentation qui émerge des œuvres littéraires occidentales. La forêt est alors représentée comme un lieu qui incite les protagonistes à se dépasser et à devenir meilleurs. Ils ressortent transformés d'un passage en forêt qui se veut souvent initiatique. Enfin, une dernière représentation de la forêt fait apparaître celle-ci comme un lieu de plaisirs et d'amusements, ce qui donne à penser qu'elle n'est pas toujours un lieu hostile. En fait, selon Harrison, cette analogie de la forêt comme un lieu de loisirs et d'amusements aurait le pouvoir de raviver l'unité entre les êtres humains et la nature<sup>13</sup>.

Compte tenu de la trame de fond que partagent les romans pour la jeunesse qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens, on peut s'attendre à ce que certaines représentations de la forêt décrites par Harisson soient perceptibles dans les œuvres qui composent

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Addison, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

notre corpus. Cependant, avant même de nous intéresser aux représentations, il nous semble important de relever les thèmes relatifs à la forêt qui prédominent et sous lesquels nous regroupons les connaissances pouvant être acquises par les lectrices et les lecteurs. En fait, ces thèmes peuvent également être utiles pour concrétiser davantage les représentations de la forêt dans leur esprit. Ainsi, dans le but d'orienter notre recherche, les questions auxquelles nous souhaitons répondre s'énoncent comme suit :

- 1) Dans les romans pour la jeunesse portant sur la Déportation des Acadiens, quels sont les thèmes qui prédominent en ce qui concerne les connaissances relatives à la forêt?
- 2) À la lecture de ces romans, quelles sont les représentations pouvant se transposer dans l'esprit des jeunes lectrices et lecteurs en ce qui concerne l'univers forestier? Celles-ci donnent-elles lieu à des stéréotypes culturels qui risquent d'influencer les perceptions des lectrices et des lecteurs à l'égard de la forêt?

### **Méthodologie de la recherche**

La méthodologie qui nous mène à répondre à ces questions est une analyse de contenu portant sur un ensemble de six romans pour la jeunesse ayant comme sujet la Déportation des Acadiens. Nous présentons d'abord le corpus des romans pour la jeunesse qui ont été analysés. Par la suite, nous donnons des détails concernant la démarche que nous avons suivie pour réaliser cette analyse.

## Présentation du corpus

Un recensement de tous les romans pour la jeunesse dont le sujet est la Déportation des Acadiens nous a permis de constater qu'il s'agit d'un sujet ayant été peu développé pour ce lectorat. En effet, nous n'avons repéré que huit œuvres sur le sujet, dont deux romans ayant été publiés dans les années 1950 : *Josette, la petite Acadienne*, publié en 1955<sup>14</sup>, et *Le chef des Acadiens*, publié en 1956<sup>15</sup>. Bien que ces deux livres puissent se retrouver dans les archives de certaines bibliothèques universitaires, nous croyons qu'il pourrait s'avérer difficile pour les jeunes lectrices et lecteurs d'aujourd'hui d'y avoir accès. C'est pourquoi nous n'avons retenu que les six autres romans pour la jeunesse ayant comme sujet la Déportation des Acadiens, qui ont tous été publiés entre les années 2000 et 2019<sup>16</sup>. Ces six livres peuvent se retrouver sur les rayons des bibliothèques scolaires ou municipales tout comme dans les librairies. Le tableau 1 présente les détails de notre corpus.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Desmarins, *Josette, la petite Acadienne*, Montréal, Granger frères, 128 p.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Alphonse Deveau, *Le chef des Acadiens*, Yarmouth, Lescarbot, 154 p.

<sup>16</sup> Alain Rimbault, *Herménégilde l'Acadien*, Montréal, Hurtubise, 2000, 82 p.; Guy Dessureault, *Jaou d'Acadie*, Saint-Laurent, Pierre Tisseyre, 2003, 66 p.; Diane Carmel Léger, *La butte à Pétard*, Moncton, Bouton d'or Acadie, 2004, 122 p.; Andrée-Paule Mignot, *Nous reviendrons en Acadie!*, Montréal, Hurtubise, coll. « Atout », 2007, 122 p.; Richard Alarie, *François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755*, Lévis, Éditions de la Francophonie, 2010, 290 p.; André-Carl Vachon, *Raconte-moi la déportation des Acadiens*, Montréal, Éditions Petit Homme, 2019, 136 p.

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Tableau 1 : Informations concernant les romans retenus

Titre	Auteure ou auteur	Année de publication	Lieu de publication	Lectorat visé <sup>17</sup>
<i>Herménégilde l'Acadien</i>	Alain Raimbault	2000	Montréal, Québec	À partir de 9 ans
<i>Jacou d'Acadie</i>	Guy Dessureault	2003	Rosemère, Québec	À partir de 7 ans
<i>La butte à Pétard</i>	Diane Carmel Léger	2004	Moncton, N.-B.	De 9 à 11 ans
<i>Nous reviendrons en Acadie!</i>	Andrée-Paule Mignot	2007	Montréal, Québec	11 ans et plus
<i>François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755</i>	Richard Alarie	2010	Lévis, Québec	12 ans et plus
<i>Raconte-moi la déportation des Acadiens</i>	André-Carl Vachon	2019	Montréal, Québec	De 6 à 12 ans

Par ailleurs, nous remarquons que ces romans ont été écrits par des auteures et des auteurs de diverses origines, dont une auteure acadienne (Diane Carmel Léger), trois auteurs québécois (Guy Dessureault, Richard Alarie et André-Carl Vachon) et une auteure (Andrée-Paule Mignot) et un auteur (Alain Raimbault) d'origine française. Malgré ces origines diverses, un élément rejoint la plupart d'entre eux : ils sont aussi des enseignantes ou des enseignants, exception faite de Andrée-Paule Mignot, qui est devenue journaliste après avoir effectué des études en histoire de l'art. Ces informations sur les auteures et les auteurs doivent être considérées, puisque ce sont des éléments qui pourraient permettre de mieux comprendre leurs points de vue concernant les représentations qui caractérisent leurs œuvres ou même les informations relatives à la forêt qui sont révélées à travers leurs romans pour la jeunesse.

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<sup>17</sup> Ces informations proviennent des maisons d'édition.

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En ce qui concerne les illustrations, mis à part *Jacou d'Acadie*, qui est abondamment illustré, et *Herménégilde l'Acadien*, les romans comptent généralement très peu d'illustrations. Ainsi, on retrouve une seule gravure en noir et blanc dans *La butte à Pétard*. Dans *Raconte-moi la déportation des Acadiens*, on en compte huit, dont certaines occupent très peu d'espace au début de certains chapitres. Dans *Nous reviendrons en Acadie!* tout comme dans *François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755*, il n'y en a aucune. D'ailleurs, en tenant compte de ces quelques illustrations et de celles qui se trouvent sur la couverture de chaque livre, nous constatons qu'elles laissent très peu entrevoir l'importance de la forêt dans ces récits. Le roman *Herménégilde l'Acadien* se démarque toutefois des autres en ce qui a trait à l'importance des illustrations. En effet, on y retrouve environ une cinquantaine de gravures de tailles variées, dont environ la moitié représentent des aspects de la vie en forêt. Néanmoins, elles apportent très peu d'informations complémentaires : elles reflètent plutôt les informations qui sont également présentées textuellement. Compte tenu du fait que dans ces romans pour la jeunesse, les représentations visuelles sont relativement peu abondantes ou révélatrices en ce qui concerne la forêt, nous avons délaissé cet aspect afin de nous concentrer davantage sur l'analyse textuelle des romans.

### Analyse des romans

Un premier survol de ces œuvres littéraires nous a permis de constater que parmi les diverses perspectives développées par les auteures et les auteurs, chaque livre faisait référence à l'exil des Acadiennes et des Acadiens au sein de la forêt, même si c'était parfois de façon minimale. Nous avons également observé que les personnages de ces romans étaient des Acadiennes et des Acadiens, des Autochtones et des Britanniques.

En prenant appui sur les procédures de l'analyse de contenu précisées par Bruce Berg<sup>18</sup>, nous nous sommes immergée dans les documents en effectuant plusieurs lectures des six romans sélectionnés. La première lecture approfondie de ces romans nous a permis de nous familiariser avec la trame narrative de chacun et de faire connaissance avec les personnages de chaque histoire. Cette première lecture nous a également permis de dégager les principaux thèmes qui semblaient significatifs et porteurs de sens concernant les faits relatifs à la forêt. Lors des lectures subséquentes, nous avons pris en note des informations précises se rapportant à ces thèmes, soit : la nourriture, les abris, les plantes médicinales, les relations avec les Autochtones et les dangers de la forêt. Nous avons aussi ajouté une autre catégorie pour recueillir les informations relatives à la forêt qui ne pouvaient être associées aux thèmes établis précédemment. Lors de ces lectures, nous avons également relevé des extraits de texte reflétant les représentations de la forêt telles que décrites par Harrison<sup>19</sup>, c'est-à-dire : la forêt comme un lieu opposé à la civilisation, la forêt comme un lieu démoniaque ou enchanteur, la forêt comme un lieu de régénérescence et la forêt comme un lieu de plaisirs et d'amusements.

Par la suite, nous avons effectué une analyse quantitative suivie d'une analyse qualitative de nos observations. Nous avons opté pour une méthode mixte faite d'un devis séquentiel explicatif pour faire l'analyse des romans de notre corpus afin de comprendre des aspects généraux et des aspects spécifiques d'un phénomène complexe étudié dans un contexte spécifique<sup>20</sup>. Cette démarche permet ainsi de considérer le rapport entre les humains et la forêt (phénomène complexe) dans une perspective

<sup>18</sup> Bruce Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences – Fourth Edition*, Needham Heights, Allyn & Bacon, 2001, 321 p.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> John W. Creswell et Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, Newbury Park, SAGE, 2017, 520 p.

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historique et géographique (contexte spécifique). Le volet quantitatif de la recherche nous a permis de tenir compte de la prépondérance des thèmes relatifs à la forêt en comptabilisant les informations s'y rapportant. Ces résultats sont présentés à l'aide de deux tableaux accompagnés par des exemples se rapportant à chaque thème. Quant au volet qualitatif, il nous a permis de mettre en parallèle les romans que nous avons analysés et les diverses représentations de la forêt mises en exergue par Harrison<sup>21</sup>. Des extraits provenant des romans servent à illustrer les liens établis. Dans ce qui suit, nous présentons en premier lieu le volet quantitatif de la recherche, lequel est suivi du volet qualitatif.

### Prépondérance des thèmes relatifs à la forêt

Dans les 6 romans, il a été possible de relever 155 informations faisant explicitement référence à la forêt. Comme on peut le voir au tableau 2, la répartition de ces informations entre les six romans s'avère toutefois inégale.

Tableau 2 : Fréquence des informations relatives  
à la forêt dans chaque roman

Roman	Nombre d'extraits	Pourcentage
<i>François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755</i>	66	43,0 %
<i>La butte à Pétard</i>	55	35,5 %
<i>Raconte-moi la déportation des Acadiens</i>	12	7,7 %
<i>Jacou d'Acadie</i>	10	6,5 %
<i>Herménégilde l'Acadien</i>	9	5,8 %
<i>Nous reviendrons en Acadie!</i>	3	1,9 %
Total	155	100 %

<sup>21</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *op. cit.*

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Ces différences que nous avons observées montrent que la forêt est un lieu plus ou moins signifiant d'un roman à l'autre. À titre d'exemple, le roman *François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755* raconte les aventures d'un jeune garçon qui, pendant son séjour forcé dans la forêt, adopte le style de vie de son idole, un coureur des bois ayant joué un rôle important dans la survie de plusieurs familles acadiennes vivant dans la forêt lors de la Déportation. Quant au roman *Nous reviendrons en Acadie!*, il porte plutôt sur l'expérience d'Acadiennes et d'Acadiens déportés en France qui parviennent à revenir en Acadie. Dans ce roman, bien que la forêt soit mentionnée à trois reprises, elle n'apparaît pas comme un lieu déterminant où se passe l'action.

Dans le tableau 3, on retrouve la fréquence des informations se rapportant à chacun des thèmes que nous avons déterminés lors de la première lecture des romans, de même que ceux qui se sont ajoutés au moment de l'analyse.

Tableau 3 : Fréquence des faits se rapportant à chaque thème

Thème	Nombre d'extraits	Pourcentage
Nourriture	35	22,4 %
Relations avec les Autochtones	32	20,5 %
Dangers de la forêt	24	16,0 %
Abris	18	11,5 %
Plantes médicinales (et autres)	10	6,4 %
Autres thèmes	36	
- Style de vie (coutumes)	20	
- Endroit où se réfugier	10	
- Mythes et légendes	6	21,8 %
Total :	155	100 %

La nourriture est le thème le plus prépondérant. Les 35 informations qui y font référence montrent que pour survivre en forêt, les Acadiennes et les Acadiens ont pu subsister en mangeant les produits de la chasse et de la pêche. La flore de la

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forêt acadienne a également été mise à contribution. Néanmoins, en situation de famine, certains d'entre eux se seraient résolus à manger de la charogne, voire à faire bouillir le cuir de leurs chaussures afin de le consommer. Les relations avec les Autochtones constituent un autre thème qui se démarque. Les 32 informations que nous avons relevées sur ce thème montrent que de façon unilatérale, le peuple acadien et les peuples autochtones entretenaient des relations très positives. En outre, il est souvent mentionné que les Acadiennes et les Acadiens n'auraient pas pu survivre en forêt sans l'aide inestimable apportée par les Autochtones. Quant aux dangers de la forêt, nous avons relevé 24 informations s'y rapportant. Les romans montrent que le courage des protagonistes est mis à l'épreuve de plusieurs façons, que ce soit par la présence d'animaux tels que les ours, les moustiques ou les serpents ou encore en raison des intempéries, qu'il s'agisse du froid extrême de l'hiver ou des chaleurs suffocantes de l'été. De plus, les blessures et les maladies apparaissent aussi comme des dangers liés à la vie en forêt. D'autre part, nous avons noté 18 informations pouvant se retrouver sous le thème de la construction des abris. Elles nous apprennent que les protagonistes sont parvenus à se protéger en construisant des abris, c'est-à-dire des cabanes de branches, ensevelies sous la neige ou bien couvertes de branches d'épinettes. Enfin, nous avons pu relever certaines informations se rapportant aux plantes médicinales. Comme il était également fait mention d'autres produits de la forêt pouvant servir à se soigner, nous avons pris en compte les informations relatives aux produits dérivés des animaux, tels que la graisse de moufette pour soulager les rhumatismes ou encore la peau d'anguille pour panser les blessures. En ce qui concerne les autres thèmes faisant partie de notre analyse, nous constatons qu'une vingtaine d'informations se rapportent au style de vie. Celles-ci font parfois référence au style de vie ou aux coutumes des Autochtones, par exemple les rituels associés à

la chasse à l'orignal, de même qu'à certaines pratiques entourant l'accouchement. À quelques reprises, on relève que la forêt est un refuge pour les victimes de la Déportation. Enfin, quelques mythes et légendes de la culture mi'kmaq (peuple autochtone des Maritimes) sont également mentionnés. Comme on pourra le constater plus loin, ces autres thèmes qui se sont ajoutés lors de notre analyse sont particulièrement révélateurs lorsqu'il s'agit d'établir des liens avec les représentations de la forêt décrites par Harrison<sup>22</sup>.

### Les représentations de la forêt

Dans les romans analysés, il est possible de repérer certains extraits qui permettent d'établir des liens avec les représentations de la forêt énoncées précédemment. En premier lieu, nous notons que la forêt y est parfois décrite littéralement comme un lieu opposé à la civilisation. Par exemple, dans *Raconte-moi la déportation des Acadiens*, l'auteur écrit : « Les Mi'kmaq étaient semi-nomades et vivaient dans la nature. Pour les Européens, cette façon de vivre était considérée comme non civilisée, donc à l'état “sauvage”<sup>23</sup>. » Aussi, il arrive que les auteures et les auteurs établissent des comparaisons mettant l'accent sur cette opposition des deux milieux de vie :

Les paysans unirent leurs efforts pour construire des abris de fortune, inspirés des modèles des Indiens et des coureurs des bois. Ils n'égalaien pas la commodité des maisons, mais ils leur servirent de refuges suffisamment acceptables pour passer la nuit, avec un minimum de confort<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> André-Carl Vachon, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Alarie, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

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Ces propos pourraient induire qu'il va de soi que la commodité des habitations construites par les habitantes et les habitants des villages acadiens surpassé celle que peuvent offrir les habitations construites par les Autochtones vivant dans la forêt. Ces derniers n'auraient-ils pas atteint un degré de civilisation susceptible de les amener à créer des structures pouvant assurer le confort? C'est ce que pourraient penser les lectrices et les lecteurs. Évidemment, le contexte doit être pris en compte en ce qui concerne le degré de commodité recherché en situation d'urgence, comme c'est le cas pour ces Acadiennes et ces Acadiens exilés en forêt. Néanmoins, la comparaison qui est établie s'avère défavorable à l'endroit des habitations autochtones construites en forêt, qui semblent reléguées au rang d'abris ou de refuges, alors que seules les habitations qui sont construites par les habitantes et les habitants vivant sur des terres sont dénommées comme étant des maisons.

En deuxième lieu, nous remarquons que la représentation de la forêt comme un lieu démoniaque ou enchanteur ne se retrouve que dans un seul roman, soit *La butte à Pétard*. D'ailleurs, bien que l'auteure fasse occasionnellement allusion à des mythes ou des légendes autochtones, le seul personnage enchanteur qui joue manifestement un rôle dans le récit est une *bouhine*, décrite comme une femme possédant des pouvoirs extraordinaires et pouvant prendre la forme d'un animal à sa guise. Comme on peut le constater dans l'extrait qui suit, son rôle s'apparente à celui d'un ange gardien pour la famille de Pétard :

Du coin de l'œil, elle [Prémélia, la petite-fille de Pétard] voit du bleu! Non pas un soldat, mais un gros geai bleu qui voltige parmi le feuillage brillant. Tout à coup, l'oiseau disparaît. Elle le cherche des yeux. Elle sursaute! Debout, de l'autre bord du lac, se tient une dame étrange habillée en bleu. Ses cheveux sont décorés de plumes, et

sa cape en est également recouverte. La bouhine-oiseau! Prémélia est à la fois épeurée et émerveillée par l'apparition de cette femme mystérieuse qui la regarde. Lentement, l'esprit tourne la tête et pointe du doigt en direction d'un bouquet d'érables rouge vif, à quelques distances du lac. Même si elle ne voit pas clairement son visage, la jeune fille sent que la bouhine n'est pas maléfique et qu'il faut suivre ses directives<sup>25</sup>.

Ainsi, la forêt acadienne peut être perçue comme un lieu enchanteur, mais il semble bien qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme un endroit maléfique hanté par des esprits malveillants.

En troisième lieu, des représentations de la forêt comme un lieu de régénérescence se retrouvent dans la plupart des romans analysés, ce qui peut laisser entendre que les exigences de la vie en forêt contribuent au développement physique ou psychologique des protagonistes. C'est le cas d'Herménégilde, un jeune garçon ayant trouvé refuge au sein d'une famille mi'kmaq :

Au printemps, son visage d'enfant avait laissé la place aux premiers traits de l'homme. Il portait des vêtements de peau, et non plus de laine ou de lin. Il avait adopté le pas souple et silencieux des membres de sa nouvelle famille. En hiver, un nouvel Herménégilde était né. Le Saqamaw lui donna un nouveau nom : Geai de la Baie<sup>26</sup>.

François est un autre jeune garçon pour qui la vie en forêt constitue un passage initiatique. Les transformations qui s'opèrent en lui sont psychologiques, comme le montre cet extrait :

<sup>25</sup> Diane Carmel Léger, *La butte à Pétard*, op. cit., p. 51-52.

<sup>26</sup> Alain Raimbault, op. cit., p. 44.

Il constatait que le succès ne se livrait pas toujours facilement sur un plateau d'argent. Il apprenait que, pour y parvenir, il fallait être déterminé à consentir la vaillance nécessaire et l'assortir d'une bonne dose de persévérance<sup>27</sup>.

En dernier lieu, il semble bien que certains protagonistes des romans ne manquent pas de profiter tout bonnement de la vie en forêt. Celle-ci est alors représentée comme un lieu de plaisirs et d'amusements. Par exemple, on peut lire dans *La butte à Pétard* : « Satisfaits de leurs belles prises, ils contemplent la forêt aux couleurs éblouissantes. Vivre en cachette ne leur semble plus si difficile pendant ces jours d'automne<sup>28</sup>. » Quant à François, il est clair qu'il éprouve du plaisir à vivre en forêt lorsqu'il partage ainsi ses pensées : « Que dire également de la conquête des grands espaces sauvages, des nuits passées à la belle étoile et de ce sentiment d'indépendance si cher aux aventuriers<sup>29</sup>! » Bref, pour la famille Pétard tout comme pour François, la forêt ne représente pas seulement un lot de soucis, mais bien un endroit où il peut être bon de se retrouver.

### Discussion

Cette discussion porte d'abord sur les informations les plus saillantes qui contribuent à édifier les connaissances des lectrices et des lecteurs par rapport à la forêt. Nous discutons ensuite des représentations que nous avons relevées. Nous nous attardons aussi sur certains stéréotypes que nous avons remarqués lors de la lecture des romans et nous discutons de l'influence que ceux-ci pourraient avoir sur les conceptions que les lectrices et les lecteurs adoptent vis-à-vis de l'univers forestier.

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Alarie, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>28</sup> Diane Carmel Léger, *La butte à Pétard*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Alarie, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

En parcourant les romans de notre corpus, nous avons remarqué une présence significative de la forêt, en particulier dans *François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755* et dans *La butte à Pétard*. Dans ces deux romans, la forêt est plus qu'une simple toile de fond. Elle constitue un lieu essentiel sans lequel il n'y aurait pas d'action. Les protagonistes sont contraints à y vivre pendant plusieurs saisons et ils en ressortent munis d'un nouveau bagage de connaissances et transformés par les expériences vécues en ces lieux. Ainsi, les lectrices et les lecteurs acquièrent eux aussi des connaissances diversifiées concernant la forêt acadienne. Quant aux autres romans du corpus, même s'ils contribuent dans une moindre mesure à l'édification des connaissances relatives à l'univers forestier, ils apportent tout de même des perspectives complémentaires qui aident à comprendre que lors de la Déportation, se réfugier dans la forêt pouvait sembler un peu moins dévastateur pour les Acadiennes et les Acadiens que de se faire déporter vers des contrées étrangères.

Plusieurs thèmes ont permis de regrouper les informations que nous avons relevées dans les romans analysés, mais nous voulons nous attarder sur le thème de l'alimentation, car il s'agit de celui qui est prédominant. Dans l'analyse d'un corpus de récits d'expériences écrits par des Nord-Américains de différentes époques ayant séjourné à l'île d'Anticosti (située sur la Côte-Nord au Québec), Geneviève Brisson met également en évidence la prépondérance de ce thème<sup>30</sup>. L'auteure remarque que les normes alimentaires qui s'établissent au cœur de la forêt marquent en quelque sorte un clivage entre la civilisation et la vie sauvage. Par exemple, certains animaux habituellement considérés comme impropre à la consommation sont mangés, bien que ce soit parfois à contrecœur. Les romans que nous

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<sup>30</sup> Geneviève Brisson, « L'homme des bois d'Anticosti : la figure du guide de chasse et les conceptions sociales de la forêt québécoise », *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 60, nos 1-2, 2006, p. 163-189.

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avons analysés révèlent que des castors, des écureuils, des rats musqués et des moutefettes ont été consommés par des Acadiennes et des Acadiens lors de leur périple en forêt. Il s'agissait sans doute pour eux d'un menu inusité, car, comme l'indique Geneviève Sicotte, c'est surtout la viande d'élevage et les produits agricoles que privilégiaient les habitantes et les habitants de la Nouvelle-France et du Bas-Canada à l'époque de la colonisation<sup>31</sup>. Selon leurs antécédents culturels, les lectrices et les lecteurs pourraient pour le moins être surpris du fait que de tels animaux peuvent être consommés par l'être humain. Pourtant, Sicotte soutient que le rapport à l'alimentation « sauvage » est à l'heure actuelle un phénomène avant-gardiste qui est en plein essor. Basée sur la consommation de produits parfois inusités de la chasse, de la pêche et de la cueillette, cette activité culinaire mise sur « l'authenticité perçue des aliments et leur enracinement local dans une géographie, un écosystème, une culture et une identité<sup>32</sup> ». Cette gastronomie cynégétique, qui valorise fortement le patrimoine culturel, se développerait possiblement en réponse à une crise identitaire et à une perte de repères dans le domaine de l'alimentation. Ainsi, à partir de la lecture des romans que nous avons analysés, il pourrait être pertinent pour les lectrices et les lecteurs d'entreprendre une réflexion critique les menant à appréhender dans un esprit d'ouverture les faits alimentaires qui y sont présentés, tout en mettant en question leur propre rapport au terroir et à la culture en ce qui concerne la consommation alimentaire.

Nous constatons que sous plusieurs aspects, les romans analysés offrent des représentations de la forêt acadienne qui sont diversifiées. En outre, même si elle apparaît parfois comme étant l'opposé de la civilisation, les protagonistes parviennent à l'apprivoiser, surtout en appliquant les savoir-faire qui leur sont

<sup>31</sup> Geneviève Sicotte, « Histoire de chasse : les nouveaux récits de la sauvagerie dans la gastronomie québécoise », *Captures*, vol. 1, n° 2, 2016, p. 1-16.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

transmis par les Autochtones. Aussi, elle représente un lieu de régénérescence de même qu'un terrain de jeu pour celles et ceux qui sont sensibles à sa beauté et sa générosité. À l'occasion, elle se révèle un lieu enchanteur où des personnages mythiques se manifestent. Nos analyses des représentations donnent à penser que la forêt acadienne représente un milieu accueillant malgré les épreuves que sa nature sauvage impose. Néanmoins, il nous semble qu'à travers cette image qui lui est attribuée dans les romans analysés, certains stéréotypes peuvent aussi être décelés.

Un premier stéréotype qui nous semble évident se rapporte à la façon dont sont représentés les personnages autochtones. Dans les six romans de notre corpus, le soutien inestimable qu'ils ont apporté aux Acadiennes et aux Acadiens dispersés dans la forêt à l'époque de la Déportation est largement reconnu. Cependant, en aucun cas il n'est fait allusion à leurs points de vue concernant cet événement marquant de l'histoire du Canada qui a pourtant eu des conséquences sur leur existence. Par ailleurs, ce n'est qu'en de rares occasions que les auteures et les auteurs s'attardent à décrire leurs traits de personnalité ou encore leurs sentiments à l'égard des événements ou envers les protagonistes auxquels ils sont alliés. Serait-ce là un élément qui révèle le caractère ethnocentrique des romans de notre corpus? Comme Suzanne Vincent et Bernard Arcand, les lectrices et les lecteurs peuvent rester sous cette impression que les Autochtones « sont là lorsqu'ils servent de référence à l'histoire des Blancs, lorsqu'ils contribuent finalement à justifier l'identité spécifique des ex-Français<sup>33</sup> ». Bref, bien que l'importance de leurs actions soit signalée à maintes reprises, les auteures et les auteurs semblent occulter les éléments qui caractérisent les personnages autochtones de leur récit. D'ailleurs, il est rare qu'ils leur donnent la parole, préférant plutôt rapporter leurs actions

<sup>33</sup> Cités dans Christian Laville, « Les Amérindiens d'hier dans les manuels d'histoire d'aujourd'hui », *Traces*, vol. 29, no 2, 1991, p. 28.

et leurs pensées à la troisième personne du singulier ou du pluriel. Ces observations nous mènent à penser que la façon de représenter les personnages autochtones dans les romans pour la jeunesse reflète le peu de reconnaissance qui semble leur avoir été accordée dans la « renaissance de l'Acadie » vers la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Comme l'indique Michelle Landry, des événements marquants tels que les conventions nationales des Acadiens de 1881 et de 1884 ainsi que certains récits unificateurs (par exemple, la traduction de Pamphile LeMay du poème *Évangélina* de Longfellow et les écrits de François-Edme Rameau de Saint-Père, *La France aux colonies* et *Une colonie féodale en Amérique*) ont contribué à l'édification d'un discours identitaire chez les Acadiennes et les Acadiens<sup>34</sup>. Cependant, ces manifestations culturelles, tout comme les romans pour la jeunesse de notre époque, semblent occulter la façon dont les Autochtones auraient probablement influencé l'identité culturelle acadienne, ou en faire bien peu de cas.

Des stéréotypes sexistes sont également perceptibles dans les romans de notre corpus. En outre, les principaux personnages sont tous des garçons, sauf dans le roman *La butte à Pétard*, où un frère et une sœur partagent le premier rôle. Bien qu'elles soient présentes dans tous les romans, les femmes et les filles sont rarement mises à l'avant-scène. La répartition traditionnelle des activités est un autre élément à signaler : alors que les garçons s'investissent dans des activités traditionnellement masculines telles que la chasse, la pêche et la construction des abris, les filles préparent les repas et s'occupent des enfants plus jeunes. Les lectrices et les lecteurs pourraient inférer que ces tâches sont moins importantes pour contribuer à la survie des familles exilées dans la forêt puisque celles qui les accomplissent sont mises en arrière-plan dans les récits. Doit-on simplement y

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<sup>34</sup> Michelle Landry, « Esquisse d'une genèse de la société acadienne », *Recherches sociographiques*, vol. 54, n° 2, 2013, p. 305-323.

voir une représentation des rôles fidèle à l'époque à laquelle se déroule l'action ou plutôt une tendance à perpétuer une vision stéréotypée de la féminité et de la masculinité? On sait qu'en littérature de jeunesse, les personnages féminins sont généralement cantonnés aux activités domestiques alors que l'on donne aux personnages masculins l'occasion d'explorer le monde par l'entremise d'activités socialement valorisées<sup>35</sup>. Dans le but de faire évoluer les conceptions en ce qui a trait à l'équité entre les genres, il pourrait être intéressant d'amener les lectrices et les lecteurs à réfléchir aux effets pernicieux d'une répartition traditionnelle des rôles, particulièrement dans un contexte où il s'agit d'assurer sa survie en forêt.

Au terme de cette étude exploratoire, le constat qui s'impose est que les romans pour la jeunesse dans lesquels l'espace forestier est le lieu de l'action constituent un moyen pour les jeunes d'acquérir des connaissances diversifiées au sujet de la forêt, et ce, même s'il s'agit de celle de leurs ancêtres. Ces romans proposent aussi des représentations susceptibles d'influencer leur façon de valoriser cet écosystème. Néanmoins, il convient de les sensibiliser au fait que ces livres peuvent également véhiculer des stéréotypes qu'ils doivent apprendre à débusquer. De plus, à une époque où de plus en plus de jeunes se sentent interpellés par les questions environnementales, il nous semble que de tels romans peuvent les amener à réfléchir à la préservation de cet héritage naturel et culturel que représente la forêt. On peut penser que des romans tels que *François Vaillant : jeune héros acadien de 1755* ou *La butte à Pétard*, dans lesquels la forêt est omniprésente, pourraient mener à une prise de conscience chez les jeunes lectrices et lecteurs de la complexité de nos rapports actuels avec cet écosystème fragilisé par l'activité humaine.

<sup>35</sup> Anne-Marie Dionne, « La représentation des genres dans la littérature de jeunesse : une analyse des illustrations des livres primés par les Prix du Gouverneur général du Canada », *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, vol. 35, n° 2, 2009, p. 155-175.

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# The Estonian Forest and Poetic Scrutiny: Jaan Kaplinski's Walks through the Forest

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**Abstract** – Estonia takes pride in its image as a supposedly unique realm of pristine nature represented by forests and wetlands, an image that is projected both externally and internally. However, currently the image has been seen to be in open conflict with the more direct economic exploitation of the country's forest resources. The chapter observes two prose poems preceding the contemporary debates, “Through the Forest” and “The Forest Floor” by the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski. The poems focus on the persona's immediate appreciation of the forest space, with both being published in 1991, the time of Estonia's re-independence after half a century of Soviet occupation. The chapter observes frameworks that inform the author's poetic forest representations at a time when the capitalist forest industry – the activities of which colour so much of today's forest imaginary – had not arisen in Estonia, while the possible (self-)censorship that may have been a factor in the Soviet decades was no longer topical. The discussion draws on concepts deriving from semiotics of culture and ecosemiotics and draws parallels between the poems discussed and the genre of nature writing, seen as a model of the environmental relationships of a particular culture and era.

**Keywords** – Estonian poetry, Jaan Kaplinski, semiotics, nature writing, boundaries, walking

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## Introduction

Speaking of forest imaginaries in Estonia may at first glance appear to be an endeavour set to evoke well-established tropes bordering on stereotypes. When discussing contemporary Estonians' relationship with nature from the point of view of environmental psychology, Maaris Raudsepp has pointed out that a qualitative study on the topic as well as two quantitative surveys on similar issues, all dating from the turn of the millennium, show an emphasis on Estonians' self-image being closely related to nature: Estonians tend to view themselves as harbouring an emphatic awareness of their natural environment<sup>1</sup>. Should we enquire what specific biotopes constitute this 'nature' that plays such a significant role in national identity building, the forest emerges as a prominent trope. The prominence is certainly not surprising in view of the geographer Denis Cosgrove's observation that "the forest has been crucial in framing national identities in most countries north of the Alps"<sup>2</sup>, while similar arguments concerning Germany and Poland have been made by the historian Simon Schama in his chrestomeric *Landscape and Memory*.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the coda of Johannes Zechner's study of German forests *Der deutsche Wald: Eine ideengeschichte zwischen Poesie und Ideologie 1800-1945* points out that the so-called "sylvan ethnoscapes" have also been described by scholars as regards, for example, Russia, Sweden, Finland – as well as Estonia.<sup>4</sup> Such forest connections to national self-image are then by no means unique, as the significance of the forest at this latitude of the temperate zone cannot be denied – after all, as pointed out by Estonian biosemioticians Timo Maran and Kadri Tüür, it is the local climax ecosystem, which means that "if nature is

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<sup>1</sup> Raudsepp 2005

<sup>2</sup> Cosgrove 2003: 16

<sup>3</sup> Schama 1995

<sup>4</sup> Zechner 2016: 246-247

left to itself, sooner or later the result will be dense coniferous forest".<sup>5</sup>

Today's Estonia nevertheless takes pride in its carefully fashioned image as a supposedly exclusive realm of pristine nature represented by forests and wetlands which is projected both externally and internally. However, the tourist industry, which is intent on capitalising on the image, has been developing an open conflict of interest with the more direct economic exploitation of the country's forest resources by logging, and recent years have witnessed heated arguments between different stakeholders in the matter, as also scholarly communities, such as environmental ecologists and forestry scholars, environmentalist movements, and different types of forest owner and users are involved in the debates. The acuteness of this controversy involving different types of economic exploitation of forests as well as different starting points for forest protection, also inspires topical works of visual and verbal art. Thus, the country's best-known street artist Edward von Lõngus, renowned for his cutting-edge social commentary, has illustrated the present situation with an ironically intertextual image entitled "Metsa riigile" ("Forest for the state"; Figure 1), a work that creates visual parallels with the Soviet-time artist Viktor Karrus's Socialist Realist painting "Vilja riigile" ("Grain for the state"; Figure 2) dating from 1953. Von Lõngus zooms in on the cynical exploitation of national resources under hollow and abstract political slogans used both in the Soviet past as well as in the capitalist present. Hasso Krull's poem "Mets" ("The Woods"; Figure 3) with its paradoxical images of a soundless and treeless Estonian forest serves as another explicit example of recent art resonating with forest policies: "The woods. / It's very still here today. / No saws rumble today, no harvester whines, / there's

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<sup>5</sup> Maran and Tüür 2017: 286

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no one here. Not even / trees.”<sup>6</sup> Scathing irony marks both of these works as well as several others of the kind.

Figure 1: “Forest for the state”



Figure 2: “Grain for the state”



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<sup>6</sup> Krull 2020

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Figure 3: "The Woods"



Such evocative, politically loaded artistic images of the forest from the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, tend to broach it as a general concept, a symbolic notion of value and significance that exposes the points of conflict magnified in the current debates. The forest appears as a landscape of retreat and recreation that helps to sell the image of the country, or as a material resource to be used at maximum profit; old-growth forests are framed as an increasingly more endangered ecosystem that bears a vital role in supporting biodiversity and serves as a carbon sink, and forests are certainly employed as a mythicised symbol of tradition, ethnic and national belonging, and, for some, as links with surviving elements of the pre-Christian indigenous religion. Associations with these realms are readily available and it seems difficult to conceive of a discussion of forest imaginaries without these notions hovering in the background. At the same time, there seems to be less attention paid to localised, individualised forest representations mediated via a single consciousness and dependent on particular sensory impressions, i.e. the forest as a force field of economic, scholarly and social meanings prevails over the specifics of the here-and-now.

In this essay, however, I shall enquire into a couple of individual poetic works that specifically focus on the persona's perception and appreciation of the forest. The author of these two lengthy prose poems, entitled "Läbi metsa" ("Through the Forest", abbreviated as TF below) and "Metsaalune" ("The Forest Floor", below as FF), is Jaan Kaplinski, internationally the most widely published Estonian poet.<sup>7</sup> The texts first appeared in 1991<sup>8</sup>, at the time of Estonia's regaining of independence after half a century of Soviet occupation. I observe the frameworks informing the author's poetic forest representations at a time when the capitalist forest industry, whose activities colour so much of today's forest imaginary, had not yet arisen in Estonia, while the possible (self-)censorship of the author that may have been a factor in the Soviet decades was no longer topical. Such forest images from 30 years ago would have been available in the formative years of many people engaged in today's forest debates. In the end, the readings of the poems are mapped against the current 21st century framework introduced above with a reference to nature writing in general. The translations into English used in this discussion can be found in a selection of Kaplinski's poetry that is, most appropriately, also entitled *Through the Forest*.<sup>9</sup>

## A Web of Alien Life in the Timber Frame

In his collection of essays *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco employs the image of a walk through the woods as the central metaphor for a journey of literary discovery.<sup>10</sup> Jaan Kaplinski is an author who is certainly

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<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of Kaplinski's life and work in English, see Salumets 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Kaplinski 1991

<sup>9</sup> Kaplinski 1996

<sup>10</sup> Eco 1994

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aware of semiotic approaches to nature and culture<sup>11</sup>, an awareness that at times also explicitly surfaces in his artistic texts – yet the forest poems appear to be in stark opposition to Eco's highly metaphoric appropriation of the forest trope. In “Through the Forest”, the persona, who emerges as so close a stand-in for the author that I am calling him “the poet” below, takes a walk through an actual forest. He departs from his cottage in the countryside to the nearby woods and returns after having taken a turn in the familiar wooded landscape.

However, I shall first observe “The Forest Floor”, which appears as a smaller, more narrowly focused companion piece to the longer poem. In this tripartite work, the forest initially emerges as a biome that is going about being alive and manifestly not bothering with human attempts to make sense of it either by systematising its vegetation in the Linnean manner or by approaching it with contemporary scholarly toolkits that include concepts such as “postmodernity” or “ecological thread” (FF 35). This forest is presented as the other, the alien, the not-self in accordance with Juri Lotman's semiotics of culture; it lies outside the realm of human meaning-making, that is, the semiosphere, and thus emerges as fundamentally incomprehensible. Kaplinski issues a warning to human intruders entering this alien system of meanings “[...] you are a stranger. Here, different laws and relationships hold good”. (FF 35) Nevertheless, although the forest is untranslatable into human concepts, it is certainly not indescribable, it is just that the human descriptions do not take place on the forest's own terms, whose presence and validity should be recognised and respected.

The second part of “The Forest Floor” zooms in on the ground, on the herbaceous layer and the shrubs, listing various species that grow there: the wood horsetail, the wood sorrel, the bilberry,

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<sup>11</sup> See Kull and Velmezova 2018.

the lingonberry and the twinflower. Again, the distance between the forest's plant inhabitants and humans is emphasised: "We are intruders here, we are very far from those who are at home here". (FF 36) If the smaller plants that constitute the vegetative life have made the space of the forest floor their home, it must be the trees that serve as the walls and the ceiling of this living space; trees also allow us to define the forest as such. Kaplinski, exhibiting a full awareness of dwelling on the metalevel of description and in step with late-20<sup>th</sup> century thought, thus depicts the forest as "a multistoreyed postmodern house / whose inhabitants / do not really know one another" that has been built by a personified summer "in the timber frame" (FF 35). Trees typical of the Estonian mixed forests such as the birch, the pine and the spruce get a passing mention in the poem, but it is not their trunks or the swaying treetops that are in its focal centre, rather the forest as an enmeshed quantity of life forms in which everything is bound "to everything else" (FF 35). It is noticeable, though, that in his verbal mediation of this self-contained realm Kaplinski should evoke other chrestomastic Estonian poets, Paul-Eerik Rummo and Juhan Liiv in order to speak of the lingonberry, which he sees as "the real master, who moves to the forest when the forest is ready" (FF 36). It is human discourse via which we approach the forest, with no direct access to it from within our prison-house of language.

The poem's third part is set at the edge of the forest, close to the buildings of a farmstead, near enough to human occupancy for old heating stones from the sauna that have served their time and started to crumble to be cast away there to turn into sand on the road. This lifecycle of human utility is considerably different from that of the stones in the forest left there by the retreating glacier 11,000 years ago (FF 36). Close to the forest edge, the human way of mediating nature through science is addressed again, as the wildflowers are seen growing in scientifically

acknowledged combinations “as if they were well acquainted with the work of Lippmaa and others on plant association in Estonia” (FF 37) with a reference to the groundbreaking work of the Estonian botanist Teodor Lippmaa. And then, the final line of the poem sees the author, who in the preceding parts has provided the reader with an imaginative survey of the unknown at our doorstep, stride out towards it: “I step over the river marsh toward the forest” (FF 37). Notably, Kaplinski’s forest, despite all its alienness and unknowability, is not far away, but within easy reach for immediate appreciation and able to generate an intense sense of overwhelming beauty in the observer. This core sense of the forest appearing in “The Forest Floor” is expanded and fleshed out in “Through the Forest”.

### **Boundaries of the Knowable World**

At this point, we may enquire what kinds of boundary are being crossed in Kaplinski’s poems when one enters the forest from what is perceived as the cultivated and cultured realm. If a farmstead’s hayfields, meadows and pastures constitute home, could the forest also be home? “The Forest Floor” would answer in the negative. Estonian folklore also contains indications as to where the home might start and end: for instance, the werewolf lore studied in depth by Merili Metsvah suggests that one of the sites where a werewolf could regain human shape would have been behind the pigsty, the furthest of the outbuildings counting from the farmhouse.<sup>12</sup> It is in such liminal zones that the stability of the human home may evaporate and be replaced with the non-home associated with the foreignness of the forest which is a premise that also underlies Kaplinski’s poem, although the latter proceeds from a considerably more modern ontological framework. Even though recognition of the forest’s alienness may be a little disappointing for the conceited contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> Metsvah 2015: 28

self-image of “Estonians as a people of the woods”, it still testifies to its significance in the people’s lives as well as to the power and agency it has been seen to wield relative to people.

In his discussion of the concept of the border, Juri Lotman highlighted the significance of the boundary between the home and the forest as it occurs in folktales: it cannot be crossed by those characters who have been confined to the forest space, leaving this space as a scene for uncanny or downright terrifying events. Kaplinski uses the idea of the confinement of forest dwellers when speaking of plant species such as cow-wheat coming “out of the shelter of the forest and into the meadow – where they are like strangers from another world”. (TF 41) In a more recent non-fiction essay *Mõtsa ja tagasi* (To the Forest and Back Again) (2014)<sup>13</sup> Kaplinski paraphrases the Lotmanian view of the forest boundary in a more everyday context: “The forest is *l’autre*, something or someone other than. The edge of the forest is the edge and the border of the semiosphere, further from that nothing means anything any more.”<sup>14</sup> Kaplinski suggests that those people who might actually have been able to consider the forest their home could possibly have been witches or wise men.<sup>15</sup> Lotman calls those who live between two spaces and are able to cross the border of the semiosphere “a kind of interpreter,” claiming that such a “person who by virtue of a particular talent (magicians) or type of employment (blacksmith, miller, executioner) belongs to two worlds” would be settled “in the territorial periphery, on the boundary of cultural and mythological space”<sup>16</sup>. In a way, the role of the interpreter or

<sup>13</sup> The remarks on the Lotmanian angle on “Through the Forest” draw on an earlier discussion of Kaplinski’s poem, *Into the Forest and Back Again*, and the collection of poetry *Õhtu toob tagasi kõik* (1985; in English translation by Fiona Sampson *Evening Brings Everything Back*, 2004) – see Soovik 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Kaplinski 2014: 32

<sup>15</sup> Kaplinski 2014: 13

<sup>16</sup> Lotman 2005: 211

translator who crosses the boundary of the semiosphere is also the position the poet occupies when he ventures into the realm of the forest, letting the natural and the cultural merge in the process of his verbalisation of the forest experience.

## Departure from Circumscribed Existence

“Through the Forest” starts with the wish to escape, “[t]o go away without anyone seeing or knowing”, which is a way of existing without “bearing the burden of existence”, being “disembodied and carefree” as Kaplinski puts it (TF 38), which suggests the lack of a social framework determining the restrictions and obligations by which one is bound.

It is different in the forest. The forest does not care who you are outside; here you are, in some way, one of us or a stranger. It is good in the forest. (TF 42)

Kaplinski also admits that such a condition is unattainable in our everyday lives and thus we let fairy tale characters do this for us vicariously. So the forest in this poem first emerges as a desired alternative to quotidian reality with its established social structures, although it is not the only option as the sea or even the shed loft or the old sauna are also listed as possible alternatives to the burden of mundane everyday existence. The option taken in this poem nevertheless is to go into the woods, a ritual departure that erases a person to the degree it can be termed “suicide in a double metaphorical sense” (TF 38). Leaving for the forest ritually starts with exiting the enclosed home sphere through a gate, and it is only after that first crossing of the border that it is possible to claim “I am on the road” (TF 39), which of course resonates with the Bakhtinian chronotope of the road with the accompanying heightened attention to the markers of space and time as well as its potential for encounter.

Encounters, however, are studiously avoided this time; although the poet meets nobody, he reflects on how embarrassing and unpleasant it would be if he did (TF 41). The temporal dimension out in the natural realm exceeds the timescale of a single individual even in this poem as the roadside dandelions are recognised as something that may plausibly and biblically inherit the earth – and this may happen “[a]fter us, and before the forest” (TF 39). So the forest also appears as a possible alternative to the current order of the world that is dominated by humans, the confirmed climax ecosystem that is an out-of-this-world alternative to (semi)cultivated landscapes inhabited by people.

As the poet's journey unfolds, it transpires that the gate was probably more of a marker of the boundary between the open and closed spaces (which again remind us of Lotmanian concepts), but does not necessarily divide nature from culture. First, the open landscape between the farm buildings and the forest is ambivalent as it is not home any more and offers a vantage point from which home can be viewed by an external observer, although the significance-loaded edge of the forest has not been reached yet. The dual nature of the space between the home and the forest is signalled by the birds that simultaneously appear in it: on the one hand, a frightened black grouse who is afraid of human presence and starts into flight when the poet reaches a cluster of birches; on the other hand, barn swallows who prefer cultured landscapes and “have just begun to make a nest in the byre and pecked clay from the pond Lauris has dug in the garden”. (TF 39) The hybrid border zone between the home and the forest includes elements of both. Indeed, the mosaic of dispersed farms typical of most of mainland Estonia creates many varied small-scale boundary zones that are rich in contacts, semi-natural associations that the biosemiotician Kalevi Kull has commented on as follows:

In case of single farmsteads, also a share of other land beside the fields remains close to the house, including the forest. Thus, nature is not far away, but participates daily in human communication with the environment.<sup>17</sup>

## Immersive experience

It is this kind of natural environment within the human range of activity that the persona enters, in the end recognising the decisive step of entering the forest: “The forest receives me.” (TF 39) On the one hand, his presence in the forest is that of an alien element; on the other hand, he recognises a certain acceptance on the part of the environment, yet to what degree he is accepted remains to be seen. What becomes apparent in the immediate forest experience is that in the forest the vertical dimension of space becomes emphatically more noticeable. There is the human viewpoint layer, the mythical mid-earth that is framed by the forest floor below experienced as “the underworld” (TF 40) in this mythology, while above are the branches in which a robin is singing; and, to make the surrounding atmosphere even more tangibly teeming with life, there are mosquitoes everywhere. The three-dimensionality of the forest space is underscored by the uneven relief typical of south Estonia, in which the rising and falling slopes need not be so much visually observable, as they are hidden under vegetation, but are experienced by the whole moving body’s engagement with the landscape. The relief also makes it possible for the forest to be varied in a mosaic pattern. On the smaller scale it shifts between pines and spruces as the predominant coniferous species, while on the lower stretches of land between the slopes of the hills small marshes with sphagnum moss, bulrushes and arum lilies have developed. On a larger scale, the undulation of

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<sup>17</sup> Kull 2001: 98

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the landscape is a precondition of the existence of the forest covering due to its unsuitability for agricultural exploitation: “The hillier land remained forests, the flatter became fields” (TF 46).

The forest is a space in which senses other than vision are activated: the walker in the forest needs to be able to hear and smell to take in the surrounding environment. The poet “can smell the scent of the alder and the birch” (TF 40) as a blackbird’s song reminds him a line from T.S. Eliot’s “Marina” about a wood thrush singing through the fog – another aural experience highlighted in the conditions of limited visibility. In recording such immediate experiences, the poet does not devote much time to abstract contemplation of the characteristics of the forest as such. There is a very immediate explanation to this that has to do with the conditions necessarily affecting the bodily presence of a representative of a warm-blooded species in the forest. Tongue in cheek, the poet refers to the omnipresent innumerable mosquitoes as offering an immersive experience that serves as the reason for the contemplative observer to be “mercilessly in contact with the direct reality, which is usually called the present. No wonder then that our people did not produce speculative philosophers. We had mosquitoes.” (TF 43).

Several other species catch the eye of the rambler as well. In addition to the thrush also a wood warbler, a robin, a cuckoo, a crow and a finch can be heard in the forest, while a whinchat, a reed warbler and a skylark sing in the open country closer to home. The poet sees a young thrush and frightens a female roe into flight. The presence of most of the mammals in the forest can be discerned by the traces they have left in the surroundings an elk has torn the bark from a spruce and there are elk tracks on the ground; wild boars have been rootling the ground and a roebuck has scraped the road. An otter or a mink has marked

its territory with a pile of excrement, and the skull of an unidentified small predator, a fox or a raccoon dog, lies close to abandoned burrows that may have belonged to badgers.

## Human Workscape

However, it is not only wild animals that move in the forest, it also contains a gated enclosure in which heifers used to be pastured. The poet has heard the story of some of the cattle escaping into the woods and living there in the wild until finally hunted down by hunters as if they were wild animals. Thus, much of the forest is a familiar environment that has been experienced on earlier occasions, its basic structures and the stories pertaining to them known to the observer. He is aware of what has been there and what there is, and he knows how it became that way. Traces of human agency even emerge where it is immediately obvious. For instance, when the poet sees an ash among the more usual birches and alders, he remarks, “There are few ashes in the forest; most of them are close to the farmsteads, where the wind carries seeds from garden ash trees.” (TF 42) There are even more conspicuous immigrants from the farms – self-seeded apple trees that now grow among the forest trees in places where someone must have dropped an apple core some time ago. There is a coppice growing on a former meadow and a clearing that used to be a hayfield with the charred remnants of a barn still in place. The forest contains a network of paths and roads, ranging from animal tracks to forest paths that bear witness of human footprints in the soggy ground, and it is quite possible that the former have transformed into the latter through long periods of use, finally being suitable for heavy technical equipment:

Now, in the age of the tractor, roads are altogether  
more conspicuous – like gashes in the forest’s

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skin. They are marked by deep ruts, crushed saplings, lesions in the trunks of the roadside trees. (TF 43)

Thus the forest, although foreign to people, is by no means devoid of human activity, and there is moderate logging and other small-scale use of the forest going on. On a logging path some escaped blocks of wood are still lying around, while in other places the forest roads seem to have been cleared and alders that have fallen across the path have been cut away. Some digging has been going on in a bank, but it has happened sufficiently long ago so that young trees are already growing in the openings, making it difficult to determine whether these might be peacetime gravel pits or wartime gun emplacements. There is also some rusted barbed wire already grown into the live bark of trees, yet it does not stand witness to former military activity but surrounds an area that used to be a paddock for the heifers. And what is more, there are abandoned farmsteads; some dilapidated and vandalised buildings still remain standing, while others are gone, the sites marked only by the unexpected presence of flowering lilacs and fruit trees in the forest.

We also meet intentional conversion of the forest initiated by humans – a strip of land with spruces planted on it. A road can divide the forest so that its left-hand side is bordering on primeval forest, while the right-hand side grows only young pines and birchers as it is “A former field, which, in the collective farm period, became brushwood, and the brushwood forest”. (TF 45) In another place, the walker notices an area that “must have been a field, a strawberry slope”, adding “What a good influence the collective farm system had on the birches, the alders, the dandelions and the strawberries – the first to occupy the uncultivated land” (TF 51). Thus, the scenery bears witness to the disappearance of individual smaller farms and the related

lifestyle during the period of Soviet collectivisation, yet the neglect and possible tragedy behind these sites is disappearing as the forest is reclaiming the erstwhile sites of human habitation.

What Kaplinski's forest certainly is not, however, is a wilderness that would be actively threatening or in need of taming, even though it is alien, answers to its own rules and can, by extension, be dangerous. Neither is the forest in these works elevated into any quasi-religious temple or cathedral worthy of reverence or even requiring protection, rather it is neither looked up to nor is it patronised. It is a power that keeps spreading when unchecked, that was there in the beginning, that will persistently deal with human traces left in it, and that has the visible potential to finally assert itself as the climax ecosystem of the region. Occasionally personified, Kaplinski's forest is an agent in its own right.

### **Conclusion. Nature Writing and the Forest Debates**

While Kaplinski's texts have been framed as poems as they are included in collections of poetry, they nevertheless display some core characteristics of a genre that usually tends to be associated with the essay form, i.e. nature writing. In a narrow meaning of the term, nature writing would embrace such works of essayistic non-fiction that are based on the author's personal observations of nature and mediate environmental messages employing his or her individual style and mode of expression.<sup>18</sup> In semiotic terms, a nature writing text serves as "a representational model of the meaning relations that a writer has perceived in the environment under specific conditions, determined by the time, location, and the biological and cultural abilities of the perceiver".<sup>19</sup> The poems certainly display the particular features of the systems the poet is immersed in, heightened by

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<sup>18</sup> Tüür and Soovik, in print.

<sup>19</sup> Maran and Tüür 291

his knowledge of biology as well as artistic skill. Timo Maran has pointed out the localisability of the plant associations met in Kaplinski's texts in south-eastern Estonia.<sup>20</sup> In a way, the texts may be seen to share some features characteristic of Johannes Piiper, a founding father of Estonian nature writing whose essays depict a remarkable number of animal and plant species noted by the author and have been characterised as follows: "In the manner of a thorough naturalist, he takes a small portion of the landscape and provides a micro-description: the plant species he notices growing, their colour and stage of vegetation; the insects and invertebrates that are visible and active; the birds heard and what their songs are like."<sup>21</sup> All this can also be said to apply to Kaplinski; however, a major difference arises in the authors' signature styles as Kaplinski's spare writing manifestly lacks Piiper's sentimentality and baroque excess.

In their account on Estonian nature writing, Maran and Tüür proceed from the standpoint that "nature writing works as a model of the specific environmental relationships of the particular culture and era".<sup>22</sup> They also suggest that for several Estonian authors nature writing "thinking and writing about forests was an intellectual escape route from the oppressiveness of the surrounding Soviet reality".<sup>23</sup> In addition, in the transitional period of glasnost and perestroika, which witnessed such novelties as Italian channels on satellite TV (TF 39) and allowed acknowledgment of the existence of the Forest Brothers – the post-war anti-Soviet guerilla fighters hiding in the woods – Kaplinski still seems to seek detachment from social embeddedness in the forest. However, despite the teeming diversity of non-human species that constitute the forest, he nevertheless recognizes that a range of signs of (often traumatic)

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<sup>20</sup> Maran 2001: 183

<sup>21</sup> Maran and Tüür 2017: 294

<sup>22</sup> Maran and Tüür 2017: 298

<sup>23</sup> Maran and Tüür 2017: 295

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historical and social processes can be detected there, while the forest enclosing these processes does not serve as a symbol for them as happens in socially-minded 21<sup>st</sup>-century writing and art.

If we are to compare some conspicuous aspects of the forest as emerging in the discourse of Kaplinski's poems with the image of the forest as it appears in 21st-century debates, we can construct a rough scheme featuring economic, scholarly and spiritual dimensions that are evident in both. Possibly, Kaplinski's poems can also serve as approximations of traditional nature writing, which in Estonia tends to be bound to the aesthetics of local valued ecosystems<sup>24</sup>. This helps us to glean how the genre compares to the salient dimensions of today's prevailing forest discourse.

Kaplinski's forest is certainly exploited by humans as a small-scale site of economic activity and source of raw material, containing various traces of humans in action. Now, the economic dimension has become magnified to an industrial scale, most vividly manifested in logging, an activity which also provides the most loaded and impactful artistic image in today's forest discourse. If Kaplinski's persona turned to the forest to look for personal inspiration and solitude, the broader, more commodified take on a landscape with such a potential would advertise it a profitable site of recreation and tourism. On the poems' smaller scale, the two aspects are not mutually exclusive, although the chance of meeting people in the forest seems undesirable to the poet; on the contemporary larger scale, the two branches of economy are at loggerheads.

As concerns the scholarly dimension, the immediate meticulous observer in a piece of poetic nature writing would notice the association of particular, often common, local species and

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<sup>24</sup> Maran and Tüür 2017: 288

their interaction. Today's academic discourse, often focusing on environmental conservation, would explicitly relate the ecosystem and the biodiversity it harbours to a grander scheme of things, the (trans)national and the global environmental issues, and may highlight rare flagship species such as the Siberian flying squirrel, the black stork and the capercaillie while focusing on the threat of habitat loss. Scholarly discourse also tends to objectify the forest, not as an economic asset, but as an object of learned study.

Finally, there is a spiritual or immaterial sense of the forest. In Kaplinski's case this involved apprehending the forest as a space of otherness and incomprehensibility: while the poet may have attempted to serve as a translator across the boundary when mediating between the human and the non-human like a mythological wise man, he was simultaneously aware of the hopelessness of the endeavour. The forest meant solitude, being cut off. Today's spiritual take on the forest rather projects it as a wholesome, regenerating space related to (supposedly) traditional or (quasi)religious identity, which may evoke the idea of a binding, collective national unity. However, it is this to a degree naïve imaginary of admiration, of self-mythologisation of "the forest people" that can more than the other dimensions be linked with the non-objectifying gaze of nature writing, the poet's individual perception of a particular forest at a particular point in time.

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# Mentalité de garnison et survivance dans *Le poids de la neige* de Christian Guay-Poliquin

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**Résumé** – Le roman de Christian Guay-Poliquin *Le poids de la neige* se sert du motif de la solitude d'un homme lors d'une panne d'électricité. Le protagoniste est exposé aux situations extrêmes et à l'hostilité de la nature dès son retour dans son village natal isolé dans la profondeur des forêts du Québec. Là, une dichotomie prend forme entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur. Nous observons l'intérieur de la cabane, habitée par le narrateur et son gardien, et qui est à son tour isolée du village encerclé par la forêt impénétrable. La tension entre l'espace de protection et celui du danger et de la menace de l'inconnu est accentuée par l'hiver, le temps de la narration. Pour étudier cette dichotomie, nous utilisons ici le concept de la mentalité de garnison, pensé par Northrop Frye, et le concept de survivance de Margaret Atwood. Dans notre étude, nous analysons comment ces deux notions, survivance et mentalité de garnison, sont liées à l'abandon, à l'isolement, à l'écart, à la peur et au sentiment de menace que représente la spatialité, en l'occurrence celle de la forêt.

**Mots-clés** – Christian Guay-Poliquin, littérature québécoise, *Le poids de la neige*, imaginaire du Nord, imaginaire de la fin du monde, postapocalypse, survivance, hiver, solitude, forêt, Québec rural

Auteur vedette de la littérature québécoise contemporaine, Christian Guay-Poliquin a lancé sa carrière littéraire en 2013 avec la publication du roman *Le fil des kilomètres* chez La

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Dalibor Žíla, « Mentalité de garnison et survivance dans *Le poids de la neige* de Christian Guay-Poliquin », Sara Bédard-Goulet et Daniel Chartier [dir.], *The Northern Forest. La forêt nordique*, Montréal et Tartu, Imaginaire | Nord et University of Tartu Press, coll. « Isberg », 2022, p. 257-277.

Peuplade. C'est dans la même maison d'édition que la suite de ce premier ouvrage, *Le poids de la neige*, est parue trois ans plus tard. Couronné d'emblée par un succès phénoménal, ce roman a valu à l'auteur un bon nombre de prix littéraires, dont le Prix du Gouverneur général, et ne cesse d'être traduit dans d'autres langues, notamment en anglais, en italien et en tchèque. On en vient à se demander à quoi ce roman doit sa réussite auprès de ses lecteurs. Sont-ils séduits par les charmes de l'hiver, par la tension du huis clos ou est-ce tout simplement la panne d'électricité mystérieuse qui suscite leur intérêt? Quoi qu'il en soit, le motif commun de ces deux romans est la survie : celle d'un homme exposé aux situations extrêmes et à l'hostilité de la nature lors d'une panne nationale.

À travers ces deux livres prend forme une dichotomie entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur, et entre le monde humain et la nature. Cette dichotomie peut également être expliquée par le concept de *garisson mentality*<sup>1</sup>, terme introduit par Northrop Frye. Selon ce dernier, devant la menace, le regard des personnages est tourné vers l'extérieur et, pour cette raison, ils essaient de construire des murs pour se protéger. De plus, à son avis, l'identité canadienne se définit par rapport à la peur de la nature. S'en inspirant, Margaret Atwood a développé l'idée de Frye en y ajoutant la notion de la survivance<sup>2</sup>. Selon elle, la sensibilité canadienne se définit par rapport au statut de victime qui doit lutter contre cet état et contre les conditions hostiles de la nature.

La peur de la nature et la nécessité de se battre contre son hostilité s'appliquent non seulement au cas de la littérature anglo-canadienne, mais aussi à la littérature québécoise, qui y ajoute une autre question de la survivance : celle par rapport au reste

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<sup>1</sup> « mentalité de garnison », Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden. Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, Toronto, Anansi, 1971, p. 225. Je traduis.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Essai sur la littérature canadienne*, Montréal, Boréal, 1987, p. 32.

du continent nord-américain, majoritairement anglophone. La culture québécoise est quotidiennement exposée aux influences de la culture anglophone contre lesquelles elle doit se protéger en cherchant à exprimer sa voix singulière et son statut particulier. La littérature québécoise contemporaine travaille les thèmes qu'englobe la canadianité, toujours actuelle, dont par exemple la peur de la culture étatsunienne globalisante, le rapport entre les hommes et la nature ou le bilinguisme, en n'oubliant jamais de surligner sa québécoise, qui se manifeste surtout par la recherche de soi, comme c'est le cas également dans le roman analysé.

Dans ce chapitre, nous analyserons comment ces deux notions, la survivance et la mentalité de garnison telles qu'Atwood et Frye les ont définies, liées à l'abandon, à l'isolement, à la peur, au sentiment de menace ou au rapport entre la nature et l'humain, sont présentes et agissent dans *Le poids de la neige*.

## Garnison du village

« *C'est l'histoire d'un homme qui veut revoir son père<sup>3</sup>* » est la phrase qui ouvre et à la fois résume la trame narrative du roman *Le fil des kilomètres*. Lors d'une panne d'électricité mystérieuse qui touche tout le pays, un coup de téléphone de la part de son père, qui vit à l'autre bout du continent dans un ancien village minier, devient le moment déclencheur qui mobilise le héros, englouti jusque-là dans un vide existentiel.

Tel père, tel fils. Celui qui raconte l'histoire d'une voix anonyme incarne tous les clichés du perdant : une vie fade sans relations ni amis, des problèmes d'alcool, une simple caravane pour maison, qu'il partage avec le chat de son ex-copine. Mécanicien comme son père, le narrateur a fini sa quête du bonheur dans une raffinerie de

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Le fil des kilomètres*, Paris, Phébus, 2015 [2013], p. 9.

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l'Ouest du pays où il est asservi à une corvée monotone. Tandis que le monde dépourvu d'électricité semble s'être arrêté de tourner, la panne le force à venir au secours de son père à l'autre bout du pays, ce qui met fin à leur solitude respective.

*Comme tous les récits qui prennent pour thème le retour à la maison après une longue absence, celui-ci évoque aussi leur modèle éternel : L'Odyssée d'Homère<sup>4</sup>. Comme Ulysse, le personnage a hâte de revoir son « Ithaque » natale. Cette comparaison entre le village québécois caché dans la profondeur de la forêt et l'île grecque nous incite une fois de plus à citer Northrop Frye, pour qui l'isolement, une des premières connotations du mot *île*, serait l'un des éléments du sentiment canadien :*

*To feel “Canadian” was to feel part of a no-man’s-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands that very few Canadians had ever seen. “From sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” – if Canada is not an island, the phrasing is still in the etymological sense isolating<sup>5</sup>.*

Ainsi, le protagoniste de Guay-Poliquin avait quitté son village natal, une communauté traditionnelle qui le protégeait d'un monde menaçant, et s'il décide d'y retourner, c'est en raison de l'appel de son père et à cause de la panne. Comme le note Atwood, au Québec,

le groupe social constitue une force plus cohésive,  
les murs de la garnison sont encore plus hauts,

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<sup>4</sup> Homère, *L'Odyssée*, Paris, Garnier Frères, 1961, 406 p.

<sup>5</sup> « Se sentir “canadien” signifie ressentir que l'on fait partie d'un *no man's land* avec des fleuves immenses, des lacs et des îles. “D'un océan à l'autre et de la rivière jusqu'aux confins de la Terre” – si le Canada n'est pas une île, la formulation reste toujours isolante dans un sens étymologique » (Northrop Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 220. Je traduis.).

plus solides que partout au Canada; avec en corollaire, bien entendu, l'intensification du sentiment de la peur du monde extérieur<sup>6</sup>.

Cette terreur se traduit dans *Le poids de la neige* par le sentiment omniprésent de menace qui règne à l'extérieur de la cabane, dont le huis clos se transforme en un espace de sécurité, une spatialité doublement enserrée par la forteresse que forme la forêt et par le village. À cela s'ajoutent la clôture de la nature et de l'espace par la neige et tout l'imaginaire de l'hivernité qui y est associé, donc une « nordicité saisonnière<sup>7</sup> », typique des territoires du Sud du Québec. Cette esthétique du Nord se caractérise, comme nous le verrons aussi pour le roman analysé, par « un univers de froid, de pureté, de glace, de mort, d'éternité, d'alternance de lumière, et de noirceur et de blancheur<sup>8</sup> ». C'est également un univers viril, où les femmes sont sous-représentées.

La coupure du courant électrique représente pour le village une invitation au retour à un mode de vie de garnison, car poursuivre la vie urbaine n'est plus possible, comme le démontre la description du décor post-apocalyptique : voitures abandonnées, pillages, édifices fumants, attroupements et agitations. Au contraire, le village natal du narrateur semble offrir une chance de survie, protégé qu'il est par son éloignement et situé à l'abri au milieu de la forêt, qui forme un mur de protection et une frontière entre « deux mondes ». S'instaure ainsi une tension entre un monde sécurisé et un autre monde menaçant se trouvant au-delà, mais aussi entre un monde peuplé, le village, et un monde désert, la forêt. Le village du *Poids de la neige* évoque

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Chartier, « Au Nord et au large. Représentation du Nord et formes narratives », Joë Bouchard, Daniel Chartier et Amélie Nadeau [dir.], *Problématiques de l'imaginaire du Nord en littérature, cinéma et arts visuels*, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal, coll. « Figura », 2004, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

une nostalgie d'un monde d'antan et incarne un endroit hors du danger, habité par des paysans archaïques aux noms bibliques, et où l'on peut échapper à la civilisation. Guay-Poliquin y reprend l'imaginaire récurrent dans la littérature canadienne des « *small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological “frontier”* ».

La colonisation et la survivance auraient donné naissance à un fort « sentiment de l'aliénation qui s'empare de l'homme obligé à s'installer dans un espace inconnu et hostile<sup>10</sup> » et qui transcende alors la nécessité de communautarisme et d'autosuffisance qui sont liés à la mentalité de garnison. Cette dernière ainsi qu'un sentiment de menace sont présents dans l'histoire du Québec dès ses débuts, notamment avec ce qu'on a appelé les « guerres franco-iroquoises, jusqu'à nos jours, où le Québec est « assiégié » par le reste du Canada anglophone et les États-Unis et leur culture globalisante, qui menacent l'existence de ses spécificités culturelles et linguistiques. Pour protéger celles-ci, il a été nécessaire de faire entrer en vigueur des lois, donc de « fortifier » et de sécuriser leur existence.

D'ailleurs, le mot *fort* est présent dans de nombreux toponymes québécois, plusieurs villes et villages ayant été construits autour de tels établissements, ce qui se reflète surtout dans des noms de rues (p. ex. : rue du Fort-Lorette à Montréal, rue du Fort-Chambly à Sherbrooke, rue Sous-le-Fort à Québec<sup>11</sup>), de municipalités (Fort-Coulonge, Portage-du-Fort<sup>12</sup>), d'étendues d'eau (p. ex. : lac Fort, lac du Fort, lac du Vieux Fort, baie

<sup>9</sup> « communautés petites et isolées entourées par une “frontière” physique ou psychologique », Northrop Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 225. Je traduis.

<sup>10</sup> Margareta Gyurcsik, *La neige, la même, et autre : essai sur le roman québécois contemporain*, Timișoara, Editura Universității de Vest, 2004, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Gouvernement du Québec, « Recherche de noms de lieux », 2012, en ligne, <https://toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/ct/ToposWeb/recherche.aspx?s=fort>, consulté le 11 octobre 2021.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

du Vieux Fort<sup>13</sup>), de cours d'eau (p. ex. : cours d'eau du Fort Tuyau, ruisseau L'Old Fort Brook, rivière du Vieux Fort<sup>14</sup>) ou d'îles et archipels (Archipel-du-Vieux-Fort, île du Fort, île de Fort George, île du Vieux Fort<sup>15</sup>). D'autres éléments de la colonisation de certaines régions québécoises se caractérisent par des « forêts vierges à conquérir par l'abattage, [...] et l'établissement systémique de paroisses<sup>16</sup> ». À cela s'ajoute l'église, un des premiers bâtiments forts et puissant symbole de la colonisation présent dans le village du protagoniste.

Selon Frye, dans la mentalité de garnison, les communautés se définissent ainsi :

*[They] provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking menacing and formidable physical setting – such communities are bound to develop into what we may provisionally call the garrison mentality. In the earliest maps of the country the only inhabited centres are forts<sup>17</sup>.*

Dans le cas du village du narrateur, la nature donne le sentiment d'un emprisonnement désespérant, accentué par le mur de la forêt qui façonne et affecte la mentalité et la psychologie des hommes marqués par les sentiments d'écart, d'éloignement et

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Chartier, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> « [Elles] fournissent tout ce que leurs membres ont en fait de valeurs humaines distinctives; ceux-ci sont contraints de ressentir un grand respect devant la loi et l'ordre qui les tiennent ensemble, tandis qu'ils sont face à un environnement physiquement immense, franchement menaçant et formidable – ces communautés sont contraintes de développer ce que nous pouvons provisoirement appeler la mentalité de garnison. Sur les premières cartes du pays, les seuls centres habités sont des forts » (Northrop Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 225. Je traduis.).

d'indépendance. Cela est aussi souligné par l'immensité de ce territoire insaisissable, inconnu à jamais et rempli de mystères, sur lequel Rachel Bouvet a écrit :

L'immensité est propice à l'abstraction, car l'aspect démesuré de ces espaces dépasse l'imagination; il est impossible de se les représenter concrètement, l'immensité demeure insaisissable par la raison<sup>18</sup>.

L'action du *Poids de la neige* place d'emblée le lecteur dans le huis clos d'une cabane. Arrivé au village qu'il voulait atteindre dans *Le fil des kilomètres*, le narrateur a un accident de la route dont il sort grièvement blessé. En échange de vivres et d'une place dans un convoi qui partira pour la ville au printemps, Matthias, un vieil homme piégé dans le village, a pour mission de le soigner, car le narrateur est désormais le seul mécanicien dont le village dispose. Étouffés par l'immobilité hivernale, également symbolisée par la perte de mobilité du héros en raison de sa blessure, Matthias et le narrateur doivent survivre ensemble à la cruauté de l'hiver et attendre l'arrivée du printemps, qui symbolise un espoir de renouveau. Le temps cesse d'exister pour ces deux héros qui vivent dans une sorte de clepsydre où la neige a remplacé l'eau. Ils attendent le changement, le dégel et la fonte de la neige, qui marque le sommet de la crise et la fin de leur emprisonnement. Comme cela est commun dans les romans du Nord, « les épreuves du temps et du climat finissent par déranger la trame narrative à la faveur d'une épreuve tant physique qu'intérieure<sup>19</sup> ».

Le narrateur est livré à la bonté de Matthias, qui s'occupe de lui après l'accident. Leur relation est surtout marquée par

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<sup>18</sup> Rachel Bouvet, « Du désert ocre au désert blanc », Daniel Chartier (dir.), *Le(s) Nord(s) imaginaire(s)*, Montréal, Imaginaire | Nord, 2008, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Chartier, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

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la nécessité. Matthias le manifeste ainsi : « Je ne suis pas ton médecin, je ne suis pas ton ami, je ne suis pas ton père, tu m'entends? On passe l'hiver ensemble, on le traverse, puis c'est fini<sup>20</sup>. » Ce dernier est arrivé au village au début de l'été, avant la panne, alors qu'il avait des ennuis avec sa voiture et cherchait un garagiste, mais la panne s'est produite et il a dû rester sur place. Ce naufragé a peur de rester coincé dans le village. Il a besoin d'un mécanicien pour pouvoir retourner à la ville et y rejoindre sa femme. Dans le roman, il incarne l'archétype du vieux sage et il parle souvent de ses lectures. Un jour, il raconte l'histoire du tremblement de terre d'une ville pieuse. Sans qu'il la nomme, le lecteur devine qu'il s'agit de Lisbonne. C'est peu après que sous la pesanteur de la neige, une partie du plafond de la cabane s'effondre et emprisonne Matthias. Le narrateur, déjà suffisamment rétabli, commence alors à s'occuper de lui. Après cet événement, une sorte d'amitié se développe entre eux et dure jusqu'au départ de la cabane et à leur séparation à la fin du livre, alors que le héros anonyme devient une sorte de coureur des bois, partant en mission dans la forêt pour retrouver le reste de sa famille.

Ici, Guay-Poliquin fait renaître le mythe du coureur des bois et actualise un schéma traditionnel de la littérature québécoise, soit celui d'un personnage contraire à un sédentaire membre d'une collectivité confinée depuis toujours à son terroir. Lise Gauvin, théoricienne littéraire, commente cette dichotomie ainsi :

Deux grandes traditions se partagent l'imaginaire collectif québécois. Celle des découvreurs, des aventuriers, des nomades, dont la figure archétypale est le coureur des bois. Celle des sédentaires et des fondateurs de territoire, représentée par le

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<sup>20</sup> Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Le poids de la neige*, Paris, Les Éditions de l'Observatoire, 2018 [2016], p. 77.

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paysan et son travail sur une terre qu'il doit faire fructifier au rythme des saisons<sup>21</sup>.

En ce qui concerne l'hiver, c'est un topo de la littérature canadienne-française qui est associé au froid, aux cas mortels d'hypothermie et à l'omniprésence du danger que représente la nature matérialisée, ici, par la forêt impénétrable. Cette image stéréotypée du Canada rural et hivernal remonte au roman *Maria Chapdelaine*<sup>22</sup>. Survivre à la cruauté de l'hiver était une question existentielle pour les premiers colons; dans le roman de Guay-Poliquin, c'est la panne qui met les villageois devant la même épreuve que leurs ancêtres. Ces « post-colons » vivant dans un monde de « post-garnison » et livrés à eux-mêmes doivent réapprendre la survivance, qui est pour Margaret Atwood l'un des symboles et des thèmes du Canada<sup>23</sup>.

À la différence des villes où règne le chaos, le village illustre la capacité d'établir une organisation et un ordre sécurisé. Néanmoins, dans *Le poids de la neige*, Guay-Poliquin ne construit pas foncièrement un roman d'aventures lié à l'imaginaire de ce genre. Pour lui, il s'agit plutôt de démontrer le drame psychologique de la solitude qui se joue entre deux hommes dans le huis clos d'une cabane écartée du village, qui doivent survivre à la cruauté de l'hiver. Atwood parle ainsi de la survie :

Cette préoccupation de survie est nécessairement reliée aux obstacles à cette survie. Chez les premiers écrivains, ils sont extérieurs : la terre, le climat, ainsi de suite. Mais chez les écrivains plus contemporains, ils tendent à devenir plus difficiles

<sup>21</sup> Lise Gauvin, *Aventuriers et sédentaires : parcours du roman québécois*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2012, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine*, Montréal, BQ, 1990 [1913], 221 p.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

à cerner parce que de nature plus interne. Ce ne sont plus des obstacles à une survie physique, mais à une autre, que l'on pourrait qualifier de spirituelle<sup>24</sup>.

La nature prend aussi un contour psychologique, surtout en la forme de la bête qui a hanté le héros dans l'œuvre précédente du romancier, *Le fil des kilomètres*. Malgré son affirmation selon laquelle « [a]ucun monstre, aucune bête affamée ne hante ces dédales<sup>25</sup> », ce spectre n'est plus ici celui de son passé (dont il semble s'être déjà libéré), mais prend cette fois une apparence physique : celle de l'hiver et de la neige. Personnifiée, cette dernière « crève les yeux<sup>26</sup> », « montre les dents<sup>27</sup> », ses « flocons sont carnivores<sup>28</sup> » et elle a « une bouche qui se referme<sup>29</sup> ». Comme l'écrit Margareta Gyurcsik à ce propos : « Le personnage de la neige est présent dans tous ses états. Il naît, vie et meurt, il a une vie et une histoire, un présent et un passé, des moments de grandeur et de misère<sup>30</sup>. »

Selon Atwood, dans les œuvres littéraires canadiennes, la nature est typiquement représentée comme « morte, muette, carrément hostile à l'homme<sup>31</sup> ». Cette dichotomie se retrouve également dans *Le poids de la neige*. Dans sa personification de la nature comme une entité, voire de l'hiver comme un monstre, Guay-Poliquin reprend un schéma que l'essayiste Northrop Frye décrit ainsi : « *Nature is seen by the poet, first as unconsciousness, then as a kind*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Le poids de la neige*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Margareta Gyurcsik, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

*of existence which is cruel and meaningless, then as the source of the cruelty and subconscious stampings within the human mind<sup>32</sup>. »*

Dans *Le poids de la neige*, la neige devient une force invincible qui dépasse l'homme et qui menace de l'enterrer vivant. Cela rappelle ce qu'écrivit Atwood, selon qui, dans la littérature canadienne, la neige est utilisée comme la métaphore « d'un vide inhume et de la mort<sup>33</sup> ». Dans ce roman, la neige prend des contours spatiotemporels, elle limite le temps de la narration par sa présence et aussi son espace en faisant le siège du village : « Elle n'est pas ici un rideau, un décor, mais un espace, un temps où les vides et les pleins s'articulent et se renouvellent constamment<sup>34</sup>. » Le lecteur se retrouve donc dans un royaume où « [l]a neige règne sans partage<sup>35</sup> ». Guay-Poliquin réemploie des stéréotypes tant du Québec que du Canada comme pays de neige pour démontrer l'omniprésence et l'omnipotence de la neige, qui font de ses héros les prisonniers de l'hiver et accentuent ainsi leur solitude effrayante au milieu de la nature sauvage d'un pays vaste, vide et peu peuplé.

En ce qui concerne le rôle de la nature, Atwood écrit :

Cette image d'une Nature morte ou vivante mais indifférente, ou encore vivante et activement hostile à l'homme, est une image courante dans la littérature canadienne. Il en résulte un portrait d'homme isolé ou « aliéné ». Quant à la nature

<sup>32</sup> « Tout d'abord, le poète observe la nature en tant qu'inconscience, puis comme une sorte d'existence qui est cruelle et insensée, plus tard comme une source de la cruauté et des mouvements subconscients de l'esprit humain en débandade » (Northrop Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 141-142. Je traduis.).

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> Laurent Mailhot, « Préface », Margareta Gyurcsik, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Le poids de la neige*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

activement hostile, elle produit généralement un homme mort, ou très certainement menacé<sup>36</sup>.

### Attente du dégel

Le roman thématise à la fois la convivialité entre les hommes isolés qui vivent une sorte de mythe de l'Amérique, celui d'une cabane isolée à la manière de celle de *Walden* de Henry David Thoreau<sup>37</sup>, ainsi que la lutte pour la survie. Quand la nature est calme, les personnages s'adonnent à la cuisine ou au jeu d'échecs, car sinon, ils souffrent du mal d'enfermement. Le traumatisme de réclusion – ou *cabin fever*, comme il est appelé en anglais, expression dans laquelle s'entend le mot *cabane* – se définit ainsi : « Tension nerveuse résultant d'une longue et rigoureuse réclusion<sup>38</sup>. » Il s'agit d'un autre obstacle qu'ils ont à surmonter. L'attente du dégel ne représente pas une simple hibernation, mais une lutte psychologique entre deux hommes à travers le silence, la méfiance et la dissimulation et qui aboutit au conflit physique. Les deux personnages ne sont pas seulement prisonniers de l'hiver, mais aussi, comme le dit le narrateur, « prisonniers l'un de l'autre<sup>39</sup> ».

Quant au village hanté par sa survie, il représente ce que l'on pourrait appeler un univers « post-garnison » québécois : une ancienne bourgade minière qui se dépeuple. Néanmoins, motivé par le désir de survie et le protectionnisme, ce milieu se réadapte très vite au mode de vie de garnison et forme une sorte d'organisation autosuffisante, car la survivance est enracinée tant dans le paysage que dans la mentalité des individus. Le village

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> Northrop Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>38</sup> Office québécois de la langue française, « Traumatisme de réclusion », 2012, en ligne, [www.granddictionnaire.com/ficheOqlf.aspx?Id\\_Fiche=17053325](http://www.granddictionnaire.com/ficheOqlf.aspx?Id_Fiche=17053325), consulté le 15 juin 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Le poids de la neige*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

est une idéalisation de la vie communautaire liée aux souvenirs d'enfance du narrateur.

Le mythe mis en scène ici est celui de la stabilité de la garnison, qui concerne l'autosuffisance du village par rapport à la civilisation. En dépit des apparences, les villageois ne parviennent plus à soutenir une garnison viable et leur communauté commence à s'effondrer : les maisons sont pétrifiées par la glace, la nourriture devient de plus en plus rare, les habitants sont malades et maigres, et certains quittent le village.

Selon Atwood, c'est la terreur rigide de la neige qui crée dans l'imaginaire canadien une dichotomie, que l'on peut également retrouver dans ce roman, entre l'hiver et les autres saisons. Atwood écrit : « Dans la littérature canadienne, on a l'impression que l'hiver est la seule véritable saison, les autres n'étant que des préludes ou des mirages servant à la masquer<sup>40</sup>. » Néanmoins, le roman *Le poids de la neige* représente aussi un espoir et un renouveau. Malgré le pessimisme à propos du futur qui est présent dans ce livre, alors que l'on croit que même si l'électricité est rétablie, rien ne sera jamais pareil<sup>41</sup>, la promesse du printemps, du soleil et de la chaleur représente ici une délivrance de l'hiver et de la solitude à travers l'espoir de la résurrection et de la réunion.

Pour le narrateur, le dégel et la renaissance de la nature représentent la fin de sa solitude et l'espoir de retrouver ses oncles et tantes qui passent l'hiver dans un camp de chasse au milieu de la forêt. Ce lieu de protection assurant la possibilité de la survie reflète aussi une certaine ambivalence, car les ressources de bois et de gibier sont liées au danger et à la menace de l'inconnu, et il aboutit à l'image d'un espace de tension accentuée

<sup>40</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Le poids de la neige*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

par l'hiver qui clôt l'accès à la forêt, alors que le printemps en ouvre les possibilités. Abandonner le village, sa garnison, ne signifie pas seulement une exposition au danger, mais aussi une exclusion de la communauté et l'exil volontaire. Pour le héros, ce fait empêche sa réintégration parmi les villageois, car devenu explorateur, il a cessé d'être un colon. Involontairement, il essaie d'être colon pour un court temps lors de son séjour dans la cabane, mais il y échoue. Selon Frye : « D'habitude, les explorateurs entrent dans le chaos pour en ressortir ensuite; ils n'essaient pas d'y mettre de l'ordre. C'est une activité réservée aux colons<sup>42</sup>. » En se rendant compte que cette Ithaque n'est plus la sienne, une fois libéré de la prison de l'hiver, le protagoniste franchit les frontières de la garnison du village formées par la forêt et part pour le camp de chasse rejoindre ses proches.

Constatons, pour conclure, que Christian Guay-Poliquin fait usage de stéréotypes de la nature hostile pour démontrer l'omnipotence de cette dernière, dont ses héros sont les victimes, ce qui ressemble à la conception de la survivance d'Atwood, pour qui la sensibilité canadienne se définirait par rapport au statut de victime qui doit lutter contre cet état. Présent dans les deux premiers romans de Guay-Poliquin, le thème tragique de la solitude et de la terreur de la nature après une panne d'électricité qui menace la survie des personnages puise largement dans le fond thématique qui explique le traitement canadien, ici québécois, de l'imaginaire de la fin qui y est décrit. Avec ses clichés tenaces de la littérature québécoise et ses images privilégiées – la neige, voire l'hiver, la forêt et la nature sauvage –, le topo littéraire de l'hivernité, donc de la nordicité comme telle, accentue la solitude effrayante des personnages au milieu de la nature sauvage d'un pays si vaste.

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<sup>42</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 126-127.

*Le poids de la neige* présente ainsi une réappropriation et une quête du Moi par le narrateur. À travers de nombreuses péripéties, ce dernier cesse d'être une victime, et même s'il est de nouveau seul, il parvient à vaincre cet état et son statut d'échoué. Quant à l'esprit de garnison, le village représente un endroit où l'on peut survivre malgré, ou grâce à, l'isolement au milieu d'un paysage hostile qui le protège contre le chaos qui règne dans les villes. Néanmoins, ce mythe de la stabilité de la garnison et de sa capacité de survie à l'écart, dans la solitude, aboutit ici à un échec à cause du changement de la mentalité des villageois. Ces derniers ne parviennent plus à soutenir une garnison efficace et leur communauté commence à s'effondrer. Une rupture radicale s'opère avec le milieu rural d'avant, traditionnel et lié au terroir. La rupture est signalée par la dissolution des liens sociaux et de la collectivité, et culmine par un exode des villageois. La communauté n'est plus indépendante comme l'étaient les forts. La nature, cruelle et activement hostile, l'emporte.

Rentré au village natal, mais demeurant un déraciné, le narrateur découvre qu'il ne peut pas reprendre l'existence de ses aïeux, les colons; il redevient alors explorateur, comme un coureur des bois. Après la solitude de la route et les grands espaces, la solitude de la cabane et les étendues sans bornes de son âme, pour achever son parcours identitaire, il va explorer la solitude de la nature inhabitée, vierge et immense représentée par la forêt, envisagée dorénavant comme une ressource et une menace à la fois, bref un lieu opposé à l'espace humain et provoquant la peur de l'inconnu qui s'y cache. La forêt apparaît ainsi comme un lieu que la psychanalyse associe à l'inconscient et qui stimule l'imaginaire. Le narrateur s'y fixe une nouvelle raison d'être pour rompre avec son existence solitaire. Franchissant la barrière de l'inconnu et s'exposant au danger, il entre dans le bois, l'espace de l'inconnu.

Nous ne pouvons que spéculer sur le fil d'Ariane que l'histoire de Guay-Péloquin suivra dans le volet suivant des deux premiers romans, s'il paraît un jour, pour compléter ce qui semble être une trilogie<sup>43</sup>. Suivant cette stratégie textuelle, le héros pourrait se perdre dans la forêt pour en émerger plus tard. En fin de compte, le lecteur connaît assez peu ce héros, qui reste tout au long du récit une grande énigme. Pour le moment, il est avant tout un survivant qui, comme l'écrit Atwood, « n'éprouve dès lors aucun sentiment de triomphe, de victoire, seulement celui de sa reconnaissance d'être en vie»<sup>44</sup>.

La neige représente dans cette œuvre une spatialité autre. En cachant les traces de la présence humaine, elle permet de faire ressortir les traits de caractère des hommes ainsi que leur psychologie. L'arrivée de la neige signale la venue d'une nouvelle période, d'une nouvelle temporalité qui change également l'espace. Elle permet le rétablissement de la nature pour la renaissance marquée par l'arrivée du printemps. La prise d'otage par l'hiver permet d'établir un huis clos dans la cabane et de traverser cette saison en rétablissant non seulement le corps du héros, mais aussi son côté spirituel, alors que le narrateur est touché par le traumatisme suivant la mort tragique de son père et la crise existentielle de sa vie d'avant. En couvrant la nature, la neige fait découvrir l'intérieur des hommes – leur substance. Comme l'écrit Daniel Chartier : « Ainsi, l'hiver ouvre sur des territoires humains la possibilité du sacré et de l'initiatique : l'homme croit affronter la nature, mais il se rend vite compte que le seul véritable affrontement est intérieur»<sup>45</sup>. » Les personnages deviennent peu à peu habités par l'hiver. Les frontières entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur se brisent et le dehors envahit le dedans,

<sup>43</sup> Cette suite romanesque est effectivement parue en 2021 sous le titre *Les ombres filantes* : Christian Guay-Poliquin, *Les ombres filantes*, Chicoutimi, La Peuplade, 2021, 323 p.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Chartier, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

comme le montre l'exemple de la scène de la rupture du toit de la cabane.

Le roman est constitué autour de l'imaginaire de l'hivernité qui s'étoile au fur et à mesure que l'amitié entre les deux hommes se développe et que l'hiver cède son règne au printemps. Le Nord et la forêt sont ici vus en tant qu'un lieu de fuite et de refuge, permettant aux hommes de se cacher lors d'une période défavorable et de l'effondrement de la civilisation. C'est l'image de deux territoires insolites, attendant d'être découverts par les aventuriers, comme le faisait l'emblématique coureur des bois dont on retrouve les traits dans le héros du roman. Une quête collective est accomplie, survivre à l'hiver, mais aussi échouée, vu la difficulté à établir les ponts au-delà des exigences de l'intérêt commun. C'est donc déjà un village de l'époque postcoloniale, globalisé, où l'indépendance face aux ressources de l'extérieur n'existe plus. Le héros entreprend une quête individuelle : retrouver ses proches. De nouveau, il fait face à une nature inhume – bois vierges et épais –, qu'il faut vaincre pour atteindre son but. Du collectif à l'individuel, le Nord apparaît ainsi comme le lieu d'une grande douleur qui conduit à une épreuve intérieure à surmonter.

Ce roman est aussi constitué avant tout autour du froid, l'une des premières associations de l'imaginaire du Nord, et contribue à ce domaine de la littérature québécoise par la richesse de l'expression de l'univers hivernal. Il rétablit un schéma traditionnel, un conflit entre les aventuriers et les sédentaires, en l'encadrant dans un milieu rural contemporain. Il est un exemple de l'imaginaire du Nord commun dans le Sud du Québec : de petits villages perdus au milieu de forêts sur des routes ne menant nulle part où on lutte contre les conditions climatiques défavorables pendant les mois d'hiver. La forêt y prend le rôle d'un mur de protection et d'un lieu mystérieux

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où l'on n'ose entrer en hiver que pour y bûcher du bois. Cet imaginaire forestier d'une manière subtile forme les confins de l'univers du roman et le cadre spatial de la narration. Il est nécessaire pour établir la véridicité de l'univers créé, comme un lieu privilégié dans la littérature québécoise et l'imaginaire collectif des Québécois.

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FORESTS OF REPRESENTATIONS  
*FORÊTS DE REPRÉSENTATIONS*



# The Estonian Forest from the Painter's Viewpoint

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**Abstract** – Landscape, viewing, and painting have been closely intertwined throughout history. While landscape painting has generally not been mainstream, it has always represented the spirit of the era and the attitude towards both nature and image. The forest is a multisensory environment with a limited field of vision, where other ways of perception gain equal importance. This chapter analyses how Estonian painters relate to the forest, and how they have seen the forest and come by their sense of being in the forest. The analysis is based on forest paintings in the collections of Estonian art museums. It appears that Estonian artists have painted the forest mainly from a distance, often accompanied by farms, fields, and pastures. These forest vistas give a pleasant view of the homeland of these painters. There are fewer views from inside the forest. These – whether looking around, or out of, the forest, viewing an obstructing forest, or looking at the forest floor – create a stronger sense of being in the forest and better convey the multisensory experience of the forest. There are also more recognisable species in such images.

**Keywords** – Forest, Estonian landscape painting, Estonian forest painting, landscape as a view and as a multisensory environment

Art representing nature has played an important role in creating and changing attitudes towards nature. Landscape painting has influenced the choices for preferred landscapes and thus, in turn, changes in the landscape. The technique and limitations

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of painting have had a great effect on our perception of nature.<sup>1</sup> The focus of the chapter is on forest paintings; I also use the terms ‘landscape’, ‘nature’ and ‘natural environment’, considering the forest paintings as part of the landscape painting tradition. I chose to analyse forest paintings because it relates to my own practice as a painter.

The term ‘landscape’ has always been intertwined with painting, referring “simultaneously to a view or delimited area of ground, and its painted representation”<sup>2</sup>, and as in English and German, the Estonian word *maastik* is used to denote both a natural image or a painting as well as a real part of nature.<sup>3</sup> Thus it may be said that on the one hand landscape has primarily been connected to viewing – “intuitively, the landscape seems to be what we *see* around us,”<sup>4</sup> “a landscape is a way of seeing the world”<sup>5</sup>, and visual representation – “a landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring and symbolising surroundings”.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, living in the landscape and experiencing it with multiple senses is emphasised – “through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it”;<sup>7</sup> “the aesthetic environment is not merely a pleasing scene /.../ [it] is not constituted primarily of visual objects. /.../”<sup>8</sup>

In the case of forest painting, both approaches can be applied – landscape as a visual image as well as landscape as a multisensory environment. Painting is naturally related to viewing, but since the forest is an environment with a limited field of vision,

<sup>1</sup> Ely 2009: 11

<sup>2</sup> Di Palma 2016: 51

<sup>3</sup> Lehari 2000: 67

<sup>4</sup> Ingold 2000: 199

<sup>5</sup> Cosgrove 1998: 13

<sup>6</sup> Daniels and Cosgrove 1988: 1

<sup>7</sup> Ingold 2000: 191

<sup>8</sup> Berleant 1992: 27

perceptions of other feelings and detail is pivotal. The artist's knowledge, skills and attitudes influence what he or she chooses to represent in art, and how. By painting the forest from afar, the artist gives an overview of the landscape, inviting spectators to enjoy the view. By focusing on the forest floor, the painter's attention is on the detail of the forest's ecosystem, on the trees, floor, flora, and fauna. Allen Carlson compares the aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment and art, pointing out that both require prior knowledge and experience to distinguish between different systems and elements and means to focus on nature as foreground: “/.../ knowledge gives us the appropriate foci of aesthetic significance and the appropriate boundaries of the setting so that our experience becomes aesthetic appreciation”.<sup>9</sup> The painter's viewpoint and artwork depend therefore on knowledge and aesthetic appreciation as well as other values, which are amplified by the perceived experience of nature.

Based on my interest in how the forest has been represented in Estonian art, I set a research topic described by the question ‘what has been the viewpoint of Estonian painters when depicting the forest?’ In the case of the artist's viewpoint, the literal and the metaphorical meanings merge – where the artist lays his or her eyes and focus is influenced by his or her artistic vision, and vice versa. The sub-questions of my research topic cover the artist's viewpoint both literally and figuratively. For example, what forest motifs have been painted? What has been the position of the painter in depicting the forest? How do artists create a sense of being inside the forest? What forests and what species have artists preferred? What connections emerge with different viewpoints? The aim of the study was to map out how the forest has been depicted in the paintings and describe what kinds of connection and effect the different

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<sup>9</sup> Carlson 2004: 72

viewpoints have. I examined forest paintings in the collections of leading Estonian art museums using image analysis and a phenomenological approach, relying on research questions and personal viewer experience. The paintings were divided into four categories: 1) forest vistas, 2) experiences of being in the forest, 3) the forest as taskscape, 4) trees. Since I was particularly interested in how the artists have conveyed the feeling of being inside the forest, I took a closer look at the experiences of being in the forest category and divided it into subcategories, using the aforementioned method.

I will give a brief overview of the representation of nature and the forest in Estonian art, discuss the connections between viewing, representation, and painting and explain the results of the analysis of the paintings.

## Representations of Nature in Art

Throughout history, representing nature in art has reflected the values, beliefs and spirit of the era, and has been related to ideological tendencies. Wilderness has had a significant role and meaning in culture, whether as ‘the other’ – something different to conquer and cultivate – or as a dwelling place of the romantic sublime. Alienation from nature also tends to be accompanied by its idealisation, for painters among others.<sup>10</sup> Nature has been a background to human activity in painting. It has been depicted as a source of amenities that are missing in the city: pastoral views have been appreciated in paintings, natural landscapes have been idealised and wilderness has been represented as sublime, in addition to which more humble picturesque nature has been found worthy of representation. Realism glorified the ordinary beauty of domestic nature, while Impressionism

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<sup>10</sup> Andrews 1999: 31

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captured moments, colours and shadows.<sup>11</sup> Nature painting has reflected national identity, with images of nature expressing the artists' feelings and emotions, as well as forming the basis for abstraction. More recently environmental images have actively influenced environmental policy and helped create a public culture of environmental protection.<sup>12</sup>

Nature has played an important role in Estonian art. Art historians and theorists have called the depiction of nature the most original aspect of Estonian art<sup>13</sup> and have noted that "it can be interpreted as a deviation, or a subconscious wish to treat something less important and not so high, but also as something characteristic and typical to Estonia".<sup>14</sup> There are several reasons for this. For centuries, rural culture was prevalent among Estonians. Estonian artists had their roots in the countryside and so landscape painting and countryside themes were familiar to them.<sup>15</sup> The 'natural' way of living was not idealised, Estonian artists admired nature but not as the antithesis of the evil city.<sup>16</sup>

The context in which Estonian art began to develop influenced the popularity of nature painting:

The beginning of Estonian art and its foreign contacts were mostly related with Impressionism and Postimpressionism – the period most favourable to landscape in the European art tradition.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Andrews 1995; Cronor 1995; Ely 2009

<sup>12</sup> Dunaway 2008

<sup>13</sup> Kõiv & Tatar 2013: 5

<sup>14</sup> Sarapik 2002: 185

<sup>15</sup> Sarapik 2002: 186

<sup>16</sup> Sahl 2005: 44

<sup>17</sup> Sarapik 2002: 186

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The landscape was also a widely cultivated theme in Russian and German art at the turn of the 20th century and a popular genre among art lovers.<sup>18</sup>

Several Estonian artists began their careers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by painting landscapes. Landscape painting was considered less challenging than, for example, figurative composition, and as it did not place such high demands on the artist's skill, it was considered suitable for various experiments in the learning process. Landscape view thus became the least demanding composition for inexperienced and novice painters.<sup>19</sup>

After World War II, the depiction of nature continued. This can be considered the continuation of the earlier trends,<sup>20</sup> while for example Stalinist Impressionism offered the opportunity to adapt to some extent to the demands of art.<sup>21</sup> Post-war art also had a counter-ideological or escapist attitude,<sup>22</sup> natural motifs providing ideologically safe motifs as well as many possibilities to treat the landscape as metaphor for life.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, exploring, valuing, and rethinking place – as a geographical, historical, cultural location – and the spirit of place was a pervasive feature of art.<sup>24</sup> This also had an effect on the material, techniques and depictions of nature and the landscape.

Although nature is not a prevalent theme in contemporary Estonian art, the ongoing global ecological crises and

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<sup>18</sup> Lamp 2010: 160; Sakh, 2005: 28

<sup>19</sup> Lamp 2010: 160; Sakh 2005: 28; Sarapik 2002: 186

<sup>20</sup> Sarapik 2002: 186

<sup>21</sup> Konfliktid ja kohandumised 2016: 31

<sup>22</sup> Sarapik 2002: 186

<sup>23</sup> Konfliktid ja kohandumised 2016: 51

<sup>24</sup> Konfliktid ja kohandumised 2016: 101

debates about forest and nature conservation on national and international levels are reflected in Estonian art. There are also several artists who have nature at the centre of their artistic practice, be it installation, photography, drawing or painting.

### The Painter's Viewpoint

#### From Distant to Close, from Visual to Multisensory

The painter's metaphorical viewpoint on nature affects the literal viewpoint, i.e. what the painter focuses on in nature, what is included, excluded or added to the image, shows his or her attitude towards nature, what he or she sees and what he or she wishes to cherish. In the case of an open landscape, the primary perception is viewing, while experiencing a dense forest is multisensory, which makes representing the view through painting even more intriguing.

As mentioned before, landscape, viewing and painting have been historically interlinked: landscape has been referred to as “land organised and reduced to the point where the human eye can comprehend its breadth and depth within one frame /.../”.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the meaning of being a view and a representation of that view, landscape has often been invested with aesthetic qualities, such as ‘picturesque view’, or ‘pleasant view’, or because an artist sees only stylised forms and combinations of colour.<sup>26</sup> The landscape is framed by what the spectator views: by turning one's head or moving one's gaze, for example from detail to vista, one chooses new images. Painting, in turn, forms the view. Today, Claude glass is replaced by the camera viewfinder or phone display.

The appreciation and enjoyment of landscape views was one of the signs of prosperity; it has also been argued that views are

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<sup>25</sup> Andrews 1999: 4

<sup>26</sup> Ely 2009: 176; Saito 2004: 142

enjoyed by tourists rather than locals, the ‘tourist view’ being seen as one in which the visual experience dominates over other senses.<sup>27</sup> The landscape around owned land was a valuable asset. John Berger associates viewing a painting with the desire to own what is depicted. Among other functions, landscape painting was used to mark property.<sup>28</sup>

One needs a field of view in order to see. Looking from a distance and from above offers an overview, an invitation to explore what is there as well as knowledge and thus a kind of mental control of the landscape. However, distance also alienates the viewer and thus can create a hierarchical difference between the two spaces, where “the here-and-now reality of the observer suggests that the space of the view is fictional”.<sup>29</sup> Using the term ‘view’ in the title of a painting has historically indicated the purpose of depicting nature as an object far from the viewer, while rejection of the term ‘view’ may represent a major shift in the meaning and purpose of landscape painting,<sup>30</sup> this rejection bringing the artist closer to the object. Images with a clear distinction between the viewer and the object recreate the concept of man’s separateness from nature. Denis Cosgrove has pointed out how satellite images used in environmentalism in the second half of the 20th century illustrate how the distance between the human subject and the natural world has increased and how these alienating images reduce the possibility of identifying oneself with nature.<sup>31</sup>

Distance allows a view to be framed. The conventional ‘beautiful view’ disregards nature, which is considered unfitting. Various landscapes have been considered beautiful, be it the Arcadian,

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<sup>27</sup> Kull et al. 2018: 439

<sup>28</sup> Berger 2008: 105, 106

<sup>29</sup> Unt 2012: 33

<sup>30</sup> Ely 2009: 178

<sup>31</sup> Cosgrove 2008: 1878

*locus amoens*, or the picturesque, which combined both classical beauty and the awe-inspiring sublime with the earthy.<sup>32</sup> The reasons why certain landscapes are preferred and considered beautiful can be seen in both the universal and the specific. Coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery can contribute to visual preferences, as can social and cultural background.<sup>33</sup> Both homeliness, although home is characterised by multisensory structure and intimacy, as well as the frighteningly strange, which is the basis for the sublime, can influence appreciation of the beauty of the landscape.<sup>34</sup>

However, viewing nature only to enjoy its visual beauty limits the experience of nature. Focusing on the beautiful view, we appreciate “only those parts that are visually coherent, exciting, amusing, enjoyable, or pleasing”<sup>35</sup> and might overlook the parts which are visually less attractive but may be of great ecological importance. Secondly “the pictorial appreciation neglects the diverse non-visual means by which nature speaks to us”.<sup>36</sup>

Forest is a space with a limited field of vision, and sounds, smells and the perception of distance and proximity affect this experience. In the forest, and especially in old-growth forest, the connection between species, the food chain, birth and decay, and the whole ecosystem is consequential. Even though the processes of the forest’s ecosystem – “the marvelous things [that] are going on in dead wood, or underground, or in the dark, or microscopically, or slowly, over time” – are not scenic, they can be appreciated aesthetically.<sup>37</sup> It is quite challenging to depict the limited view or the multitude of views of the forest

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<sup>32</sup> Ely 2009: 27, 12

<sup>33</sup> Kull et al. 2018: 441. The theories of Stephen and Rachel Kaplan (1982) and Jay Appleton (1977) are referred to when talking about universal qualities.

<sup>34</sup> Tuan 1993: 113-114

<sup>35</sup> Saito 2004: 143

<sup>36</sup> Saito 2004: 143

<sup>37</sup> Rolston III 2004: 187

through painting, not to mention the smell of moss, the song of the chaffinch, the cold of the ground, the anxiety caused by a cracking sound or the consistency of the ecosystem. Arnold Berleant has written about the importance of engagement in appreciating the natural environment and art, noting that

both can be experienced perceptually; both can be appreciated aesthetically; and /.../ both can function reciprocally with the appreciator, enticing the participant to join in a unified perceptual situation.<sup>38</sup>

Ideally, a forest painting would convey the feeling of such an experience. In this case, however, it might be better to use phrases such as ‘represent’, ‘recall’, ‘create associations’, ‘reconstruct’ or ‘conceptualise’ instead of ‘depict’.

## Methodology

To explore the Estonian painters’ viewpoint on the forest I examined forest paintings in the collections of leading Estonian art museums. I adopted a phenomenological approach, describing how artists have represented the forest in paintings, based on my experience as a viewer while looking at the artwork.

I examined forest paintings in the collections of the Estonian Art Museum, Tartu Art Museum, the Estonian National Museum, and the University of Tartu Art Museum. I used the Museum Public Portal (Muis) as a research engine. When choosing the paintings, I made the initial decision by looking at the thumbnail and the title of the artwork. First I determined whether the painting seems to depict a forest. I did not include images which clearly did not depicted Estonian forest, deciding

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<sup>38</sup> Berleant 1992: 172

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either by the title, the distinct look or deriving the supposed place of painting from the artist's biography. If there was hesitation about the place, I included the painting, so there may be some paintings in the selection with foreign forest. Some paintings were left out, where the forest didn't form an important part of the landscape. Among the selected paintings were several that seemed to depict parks rather than forests or some with houses centrally in the view, but since the titles referred to forest, the paintings remained in the selection.

Six hundred and thirty-five paintings were selected. Looking at the paintings, four categories emerged: 1) forest vistas (74%), 2) experiences of being in the forest (12%), 3) the forest as taskscape (9%), and 4) trees (5%). The trees category consisted of paintings that focus on single trees. The forest as taskscape category consisted of paintings in which people were active in the forest, traces of human activity were visible, or the title referred to action. Forest vistas consisted of paintings which were views from a further or higher position, while the inside of the forest category created a sense of being in the forest. The forest vistas and experiences of being in the forest categories were often difficult to decide upon, as artists have often used an open space inside the forest, such as a road or river, to paint the forest. These provide space, yet allow the artist to create a feeling of the forest interior. When deciding which category to use, I followed my own sense of being inside the forest.

Since I was most interested in how the painter achieves the feeling of being in the forest, I focused mainly on this category, dividing it into subcategories based on what I could see in the painting and how it was arranged: on the forest path, view from the forest, forest obstructs the view, surrounded by forest, forest floor. From these subcategories I chose 2-4 more characteristic or unique paintings, on which I did a short image analysis. I

began with the questions what do I notice? What is viewed and where? What species are identified, how are they painted? How has the artist created the feeling of being in the forest? Below are some examples from all categories, general conclusions and a brief conclusion to the analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### General Observations

It is noticeable in the examined forest paintings that most of the paintings are distant views of the forest painted in a naturalistic way, with both realistic images and abstractions of forms. There were fewer views from inside the forest, either looking out of the forest or at details of flora. It has been found that in general Estonian artists have depicted local nature in a rather naturalistic manner, often in a restricted and realistic way<sup>39</sup> and that the emotionality offered by images of nature was important to Estonian artists at the turn of the last century, although sentimentalism was avoided.<sup>40</sup> The forest is painted in all seasons and in different weather conditions. Forest painting focuses generally on nature, direct social, political or other messages are rare, although romantic patriotism can be sensed in many paintings.

### Forest Vistas

Most of the examined forest paintings fell into the category of forest vistas. Artists have depicted the forest from afar and often from above. It was noticeable that the forest's edge, which borders either a body of water, a meadow, a pasture, a field or even a dwelling, is often depicted. In many cases, there is a

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<sup>39</sup> Kõiv and Tatar 2013: 5

<sup>40</sup> Sahlk 2005: 35

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farmhouse in the centre view with a forest in the background. Such a landscape with diverse elements has been characteristic of Estonia for centuries. The survival of mosaic landscapes was supported by sparse settlements, in which fields, pastures and forests were close to the farm.<sup>41</sup> The examined paintings also reflect living close to the forest, not only in the countryside but also in the cities and outskirts.

A kind of pride of one's homeland can be felt in these forest vistas. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, national romanticism was widespread in Estonian art. "It has also been found that the mosaic landscapes of southern Estonia may have influenced Estonian national identity in the second half of 19th century – Estonian national identity was primarily constituted by learned men from the university city of Tartu, where the landscape is characterised by hills, lakes and forests."<sup>42</sup> Some distance and an objective position has given artists the opportunity to see, enjoy and imagine the homeland and its beauty. Land had both economic and social value, with the agrarian landscape regarded as an idyllic image expressed the essence of Estonianness.<sup>43</sup> **Lepo Mikko's *Autumnal Forests*** is one of many paintings that represent a view of hilly southern Estonia. Mikko's panoramic landscapes are characterised as clear and linear.<sup>44</sup> **Imat Suumann's *Estonian Winter*** cherishes the ordinary Estonian landscape.

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<sup>41</sup> Kull 2001: 99

<sup>42</sup> Sooväli et al 2003: 116-117

<sup>43</sup> Sooväli et al 2003: 116-117

<sup>44</sup> Helme 2013: 258

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Figure 1: Lepo Mikko, *Autumnal Forests*



Figure 2: Imat Suumann's *Estonian Winter*



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In the vistas of Estonian landscapes, the forest is often stylised into patches of colour and form. This allows that painter to make a distinction between coniferous forest and deciduous forest. Across the paintings that I studied birch, pine, spruce, oak, willow, aspen, hawthorn, rowan, silver alder, juniper and crabapple were recognisable. The forest floor is generally painted using patches of colour, although in some cases species of flora can be discerned (heather, moss, rosebay willowherb, reed, water lilies and yellow water lilies, cat tails). There are also a few depictions of wild animals or birds (swans, black grouse, ducks).

### The Forest as Taskscape

There are no people in most of the selected forest paintings, although the influence of human activity is often seen. The paintings of this category show people in action, or livestock, or the results of human activity in the forest. According to Tim Ingold taskscape is interactive and is perceived through living and working in the landscape.<sup>45</sup> I formed this category wishing to observe how artists convey the feeling of being in the forest.

As for the activities, walking in the forest prevailed. One example is ***Autumn in Valgemetsa*** by Elmar Kits. Humans are generally depicted as small compared to the forest, often further along a road that disappears into the forest. Sometimes houses can be seen, where the walker is probably going to or coming from. This depiction suggests that the forest is a natural habitat close to home: one goes for a walk in the forest, and one has to go through the forest to leave or return home.

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<sup>45</sup> Ingold 2000: 197, 199

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Figure 3: Elmar Kits, *Autumn in Valgemetsa*



Another important activity is forestry. Some of the paintings show trees being cut with an axe and sawn with two-man saws, some paintings also show horses as working animals. These paintings were mainly painted between 1937 and 1949. Although today it may seem romantic to cut trees by hand and remove the timber using horses, the artists were depicting the hard work of their time. A lot of grazing was depicted in the

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examined paintings, be it cows or horses on the forest pasture or accompanied by a small shepherd. Activities that took place in the forest or at the edge of the forest depicted less were as follows: resting, eating, haymaking, living in the middle of the forest, hunting, playing, horse riding, sheltering, fishing, religious services, burning wood, cutting rye, skiing, making art and music.

As for the trees, spruce, pine, birch, oak, juniper, island, aspen, willow and maple can be identified in the paintings, the species of the forest floor are generally not distinguishably painted, only ferns, reeds and yarrow could be identified.

Although the artists have painted activity in the forest, the feeling of being a spectator remains. Painting people in a picture even suggests a certain voyeurism in which the viewer sees the actors as if from a hidden position without becoming part of their world. This is often due to the position of people in the painting, and also depends on the angle and distance from the viewer. An exception is offered by the paintings in which the forest path starts on the foreground and passes through the picture, with a walker taking the viewer into the picture.

### Trees

Several paintings focus on the portrayal of trees, some of which are brought into focus and personified. It seems that old trees with a peculiar appearance are depicted most. When trees are depicted, the species of the tree is usually named in the title and thus the tree has been personified. The species painted most is birch, followed by oak. The birch is a very common tree in Estonia. It is clearly distinguishable, with an interesting bark and coloured leaves in autumn, which may be the attraction for painters. The oak is considered a dignified, strong tree, often symbolising human characteristics. Spruces, pines and willows

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are also depicted, probably because they are common and easily recognisable. Junipers, lindens, alder, aspen and lilacs are depicted less often. In some of the pictures the whole tree has been depicted, although generally only part of the tree is painted, with a focus on an area more visible to the human eye, for example the trunk, some branches, the leaves and thorns.

### Experiences of Being in the Forest

Another approach, less frequent, is a close-up view of the forest or painted details inside the forest. I found that, in general, artists approach the creation of a sense of being in the forest in five different ways. These are 1) surrounded by the forest, 2) on a forest path, 3) the view from the forest, 4) the forest obstructs the view, and 5) the forest floor.

Scenes painted deep in the forest are uncommon in art history. The restriction of the forest focuses the observer's attention on objects that are close, and thus the forest view is much more difficult to organise into a unified whole.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, a close-up allows us to distinguish, study and depict the forest's ecosystem and species living in the forest. Aesthetic appreciation of nature is linked to the ability to understand ecology: "with basic knowledge of ecology and ecological awareness and with an aesthetic perspective towards the world and a certain kind of concentration, we can experience anything both ecologically and aesthetically."<sup>47</sup> It is more difficult to paint when inside the forest, but the depiction allows the viewer to contemplate on the artist's experience and presence.

### Surrounded by the forest

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<sup>46</sup> Ely 2013: 186-187

<sup>47</sup> Xiangzhan 2010: 786

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In order to create the impression of being inside the forest, artists have painted trees both at the front edge of the image and beyond. “A closed space and a feeling of being surrounded by trees allows the viewer to enter the picture.”<sup>48</sup> The feeling of being in the forest is emphasised by painting details. The forest is painted fairly evenly, paying equal attention to a variety of trees. One of the earliest examples in this category is *Forest* by (Estonian) Baltic German artist **Julie Hagen-Schwarz**, while **Eduard Kutsar’s** *Elva Forest* represents a spruce forest in the town of Elva.

Figure 4: Julie Hagen-Schwarz, *Forest*



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<sup>48</sup> Kõiv and Tatar 2013: 13

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Figure 5: Eduard Kutsar, *Eha Forest*



### On a Forest Path

Through the use of the forest path as a central element, the artist invites the viewer to step onto the path and stroll along. The trees next to the path give an impression that both the artist and the viewer are in the forest. At the same time, the view from the path offers a perspective that allows the spectator to observe and contemplate what is depicted. It also reminds us of the presence of humans and thus can be connected to the taskscape.

### The View from the Forest

A composition with trees framing the edge of the picture directs the viewer to gaze out of the forest. The feeling of being in the forest is created by positioning the viewers behind the trees. In some of these paintings the forest is not dense, but the point

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of view is in any case more forested than the field of view between the trees. This is the case with **Villem Ormisson's** *Summer*, which uses *repoussoir* composition. The difference is often stressed by varying light. In some other pictures, the view is not open to us, making the viewer peep through the trees. The combination of surrounding trees and a vast open field of vision merges a sense of being in the forest with a broader perspective, as if one were on a forest path. The view from the forest can also offer other interpretations from an analysis of the effects of decorative form to a dissection of the existentialist borderlines of landscape paintings.<sup>49</sup>

Figure 6: Villem Ormisson, *Summer*



### The Forest Obstructs the View

In paintings where the forest or bushes obstruct the view, the impression of space does not prevail. The obstruction in these paintings causes some malaise. Although the viewer is not surrounded by forest, the woods that hinder movement give the impression of being in the forest.

<sup>49</sup> Sahlk 2002: 287

## The Forest Floor

When painting the forest floor, the artist descends close to the ground. This emphasises intimacy with the forest. **Ferns by Valdur Ohakas** is an example where the artist creates an introspective feeling by the tones and composition, showing the forest to the viewer from the perspective of a small creature. *Sous-bois* paintings were popular among the Barbizon painters in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this type of painting, the artist has usually paid attention to notable species, demonstrating a knowledge of nature. Interestingly, in these paintings it is noticeable that the artists have painted trees of different ages, including storm-broken trunks and old stumps with mushrooms.

Figure 7: Valdur Ohaka, *Ferns*



More species can be identified in paintings of the forest interior than from forest vistas. In particular, many species of undergrowth can be identified in close-up views focusing on the forest floor. As for the trees, pine, maple, rowan, birch, willow, bird cherry, spruce, juniper, rosehip, and apple can be distinguished; in the undergrowth lingonberry, fly agaric, clouds, eelgrass, moss, clover, ferns, and heather form the flora and red admiral and elk form the fauna. When determining the species, the assessor's knowledge may be a limiting factor.

### Conclusion

Nature and the forest have been important and familiar motifs for the Estonian artists, making it interesting to explore how the artists have conveyed the multisensory essence and experience of the forest. The central concept of the research was the artist's viewpoint: I assumed that the artist's point of view in the forest and of the forest also speaks of the artist's relationship with the forest. As a painter, I was interested in how other painters have conveyed their sense of being in the forest and what kinds of painting technique they used. Four categories of viewpoints were distinguished in this chapter, one being divided into subcategories. Estonian artists have generally painted forest vistas, which give a good overview of the landscape and their homeland. The forest is often complemented with farm houses, fields, or pastures. This represents the way of living of the time as well as a nostalgic view. The forest views generalise the depicted, meaning that in most cases the species are not recognisable. The forest has also been depicted with human activity, as a taskscape. This allows the spectator to observe other people's activities. The most prevalent activity is walking into or in the forest, which reinforces the notion that people lived near the forest. When trees are portrayed, a variety of species is shown, and most tree types are painted. A few painters have

chosen the ground of a dense forest as a viewpoint. Even though painting the forest from this viewpoint is challenging, the multisensory forest experience can be expressed more vividly in this manner. A good way of conveying the sense of being in the forest is to lead the viewer's eye on a forest path, to let the viewer peep through the trees, or surround the viewer with trees. One way of emphasising the feeling of being in the forest – seen from different perspectives – was to draw attention to spatiality with trees in the foreground or beyond. The feeling of being in the forest is superbly conveyed by a detailed view of the ground. This makes it possible to distinguish and depict species and the relationships between them, which in turn gives the impression of presence. The low angle creates an impression that the viewer could be a smaller forest dweller instead of a painter.

The analysed paintings confirm that the forest has been very important to many painters. Despite the limited means of painting in conveying what is present and perceived by the senses, painters have, by carefully choosing their viewpoint and skilfully using their tools, created diverse impressions of the forest, thus contributing to the creation of an image of the northern forests.

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# **Representation and Dwelling: Finnish Forests in Four Video Installations**

**by Eija-Liisa Ahtila<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract** – By creating a different kind of space for spectators, video installations can suggest another way of dwelling, which can lead, among other things, to a shift in the human relationship to the non-human. This chapter aims to analyse four video installations by Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila (*The House* (2002), *The Annunciation* (2010), *Horizontal* (2011) and *Studies on the Ecology of Drama* (2014)) that question anthropocentric representation and offer a renewed perspective on trees and forests (by primarily showing *Picea abies* spruces, which are commonly found in Finland). Paying attention to the video editing and how it is extended by the spectators, as well as to the deconstruction and mixing of genres, the chapter shows how these installations connect the forest with the world and the human, how they suggest multispecies perception and cohabitation, and how they present the shared materiality of humans and non-humans such as trees.

**Keywords** – Forest, landscape, video installation, representation, dwelling, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, non-human

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## Introduction

The current ecological crisis has led to an increased production of artworks addressing the human relationship to nature, which is in turn examined by scholars eager to define an environmental aesthetics<sup>2</sup> and connect these artworks with issues tackled by criticism, such as the Anthropocene.<sup>3</sup> Although most of these artworks attempt to raise awareness of the natural environment and resituate it *vis-à-vis* humans, it can be claimed that artistic representations are partly responsible for human indifference, the lack of sensibility toward the non-human in general<sup>4</sup> and, I add, the forest in particular. In fact, the linear perspective used in landscape painting has not only framed the perception of nature, it has also structured the human relationship to it.<sup>5</sup> By “objectivising the subjective”<sup>6</sup>, it has conferred an exterior position to humans toward represented space, which they then have taken with them in the world. According to Allen Carlson<sup>7</sup>, this “landscape model” applied to the perception of the world is formed together with the Modern naturalist<sup>8</sup> epistemological frame, where knowledge is based on nomological objectification. Artistic landscapes, as a way of *not seeing* cohabitants<sup>9</sup>, thus embody a vision of the world in which humans are the only ones who dwell and to whom the non-humans form a habitat, a décor, an environment.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Afeissa and Lafolie 2015

<sup>3</sup> Ardenne 2018

<sup>4</sup> Zhong Mengual and Morizot 2018

<sup>5</sup> Zhong Mengual 2017

<sup>6</sup> Panofksy 1975

<sup>7</sup> Carlson 2015

<sup>8</sup> Descola 2005

<sup>9</sup> Morizot 2017

<sup>10</sup> Zhong Mengual 2017

That said, I argue that video installations, considered as devices or forms to think images<sup>11</sup> and the social world<sup>12</sup>, can reinvent the human relationship with the non-human through their questioning of representation and landscape, with the help of their specific resources, namely spatial installation, multichannel projections and sound. To show that, this chapter will chronologically focus on four video installations by Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila: *The House* (2002), *The Annunciation* (2010), *Horizontal* (2011) and *Studies on the Ecology of Drama* (2014), and analyse how they represent nonhumans and more specifically Finnish trees and forests. It will examine what kind of space these installations create for the representation of trees and forests, and what kind of dwelling they convene, for the spectators in the displays and henceforth in connection with the forests that they depict. Referring to Dziga Vertov's theory of editing, Téresa Faucon explains how multichannel video spectators "simultaneously discover and produce editing".<sup>13</sup> These videos provide a space for the spectator to establish a relationship between two or more images to produce meaning, physically experiencing the in-between space of the screens and performing the gestures of the film editor. The movement between images is "released from a certain spatial-temporal logic for the benefit of the dynamic, the momentum, the energy that circulates from one image to another, from one screen to another"<sup>14</sup>, thus engaging the bodies of the spectators. As they circulate in the installations and are mobilised by their images, the spectators-editors contribute to activate, actualise, polarise the images' energy<sup>15</sup>, reproducing in a way what Michel

<sup>11</sup> Dubois 2011

<sup>12</sup> Bal 2011

<sup>13</sup> Faucon 2012: 102. "Le découvre et le produit *simultanément*." I translate.

<sup>14</sup> Faucon 2012: 102. "Affranchi d'une certaine logique spatio-temporelle au profit de la dynamique, de l'élan, de l'énergie qui circule d'une image, d'un écran à l'autre." I translate.

<sup>15</sup> Faucon 2011

de Certeau has defined as dwelling, i.e. transforming a place into a space: “Space is the effect produced by operations that orient, circumstancise, temporalise it and bring it to function as a polyvalent unit of conflictual programs or of contractual proximities.”<sup>16</sup> The “successive neighbouring”<sup>17</sup> of spectatorship creates an inhabitable space in the video installations and suggests a way of inhabiting that can be then taken into the world.

Although Ahtila’s work presents divergent topics, it “can be thought of in terms of a career-spanning meditation on how the different systems of dramatic representation and patterns of relations between beings operate”<sup>18</sup>. While the artist’s earlier pieces deal more with difference and multiplicity of the self, her more recent work investigates the anthropocentrism of the world’s observation and representation. This complimentary vein of questioning is connected to her discovery of Jakob von Uexküll’s concept of *Umwelten*, whose *Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934) is quoted as the epigraph to *The Annunciation*.

### ***The House: The Forest as ‘the World’***

*The House*, an earlier work from 2002, explores the “human drama”<sup>19</sup> through uncertain subjectivity, while the presence of a forest prepares a future investigation of “interrelations between various nonhuman entities”<sup>20</sup>. It is a 14-minute-long 3-channel projected installation presenting a woman named Elisa

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<sup>16</sup> De Certeau 1990: 173. “Est espace l’effet produit par les opérations qui l’orientent, le circonstancient, le temporelisent et l’amènent à fonctionner en unité polyvalente de programmes conflictuels ou de proximités contractuelles.” I translate.

<sup>17</sup> De Certeau 1990: 173. “Voisinages successifs”. I translate.

<sup>18</sup> Chaffee 2015: 8

<sup>19</sup> Philbrick 2003

<sup>20</sup> Johansson 2017

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describing, sometimes through voiceover, how she has started to hear voices that interfere with her perception of the world. She eventually covers the windows of her house with black drapes to shut out images and stay with the sounds only (see figure 1). This is done without showing signs of emotion, which, as pointed out by Mieke Bal<sup>21</sup>, opens the installation to affective encounter for the viewers. Although we are invited into Elisa's house, garden and surrounding forest, the offscreen sounds often seem to come from elsewhere. This work, like *The Wind* (2002), is based on interviews with women who experienced psychosis.

Figure 1: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2002). *The House*. 3-channel video still



Figure 2: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2002). *The House*. Installation view.



<sup>21</sup> Bal 2013: 89

*The House* endeavours to deconstruct traditional storytelling, notably through mixing genres, and to create an in-between space for the viewers. The three-screen setup (see figure 2) encourages viewers to stand at the edge between the inside and the outside, listening to the video's voices. The enclosure of the house disintegrates in this triptych, echoing the outside world entering Elisa's being, so that the viewers are standing in place of the fourth wall, in place of the sound. Moreover, the outside world enters the house through embedded media. For example, a cow walks into the living room after it has appeared in a news report on Elisa's television. The permeability of the house connects domestic and public spheres while psychosis as a model<sup>22</sup> criticises the artificial unity of the subject and suggests an engagement with the world. Indeed, the Finnish forest where we see Elisa flying at one point is actually connected to a political issue through sound. The character tells us about a boat she hears over a friend's voice, while we hear paddling in the water and a ship horn together with conversations that seem to take place in a restaurant:

No place is just one anymore. Yesterday I was sitting with a friend at a restaurant table eating, and I started hearing the sounds of a paddle boat. I was simultaneously in the restaurant and beside the boat in some harbour, even though I've never seen the boat. The sound was so loud that it wasn't part of the background hum of the place, but formed another space in my head, where I was simultaneously.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bal 2013: 91

<sup>23</sup> Ahtila 2002: 163

## REPRESENTATION AND DWELLING

Figure 3: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2002).

*The House.* 3-channel video still.



During this, the central screen shows a harbour with sailing boats, the left one an outside view of Elisa's white wood main entrance terrace and the third one an indoor view of her top floor terrace with a lake view (see figure 3), giving the impression that Elisa's house is looking out to the sea as well as at the forest and closely connecting the boat that she hears with her house by placing the harbour image between the two thresholds. Where the autonomous offscreen sound, which will increase until the end of the video and replace the conversation sounds with train station sounds, seems to bear no relationship to the forest surrounding the house, referring to an elsewhere, it actually contributes to conceive the forest as 'the world' and to make an ethical subject of Elisa. The permeability of the house, highlighted by the two thresholds that skip its indoors, connects the private and public spheres, and even the political one through the question of migrants. Indeed, as underlined by Mieke Bal, "in the contemporary Western imagination, boats have come to signify the phenomenon of the refugee"<sup>24</sup> in a similar way that

<sup>24</sup> Bal 2013: 102

trains in films create a “Holocaust effect”<sup>25</sup>, as a structural and historical allusion. As her house’s walls dissolve, Elisa’s self is opening up to be inhabited by the world and harbour its refugees, against social and political indifference<sup>26</sup>. In this way, the video installation builds on the gendered association of woman and house, simultaneously representing confinement and domestic power, but also on the association of the Western individual and private propriety, whose borders, when they dissolve, would signify the subject’s collapse. Yet, it is the concept of subject that opens up when the visionary character, beyond time and space, is affected by the others settling themselves in her, in a form of hospitality and care that opposes easy identification, as Kaja Silverman reminds us:

it is only by embracing other people and things  
that we can free them to be themselves—only by  
enfolding them within our psychic enclosure that  
we can create the space where they can emerge  
from concealment.<sup>27</sup>

In this installation, inhabiting the enclosed space of the house goes together with being inhabited by the world outside it, as if, just as in the display, the world, whose sounds Elisa hears, was projected onto the screens that form the house’s walls, a metonymy of the character herself. The subject can thus be thought of in terms of cosmopolitanism, as “a way of envisioning contemporary modes of consciousness that might be commensurate with intensified global connectedness”<sup>28</sup>, but also in terms of ecocosmopolitanism<sup>29</sup>, which includes non-humans in global communities. Correspondingly, the spruce

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<sup>25</sup> Van Alphen 1997

<sup>26</sup> Bal 2013: 112

<sup>27</sup> Silverman 2000: 55

<sup>28</sup> Heise 2008: 57

<sup>29</sup> Heise 2008

forest is not only the extension of the house and the space where Elisa flies, holding on to the branches, but it fuses with the world and its inhabitants to inhabit the character, subtly reversing its usual background position.

### *The Annunciation*

#### Multispecies Perception of the Forest Landscape

With *The Annunciation*, I focus on the introduction of multiple perspectives through animal actors and specific representation devices<sup>30</sup>, and on the images of a snowy forest. Produced in 2010, this work is a 28-minute-long 3-channel projected installation building on the central motif of Christian iconography based on the narrative in the Gospel of Luke (1:26-38) and on paintings from the Renaissance, shown in the video. The videos occupy most of three walls in a dark room, immersing the spectators in them, preventing them from seeing the images all at once and forcing them to shift their gaze from one image to another (see figure 4). The events are set in the present and the work consists of material produced during the preparations for shooting and an actual reconstruction of the Annunciation. The footage was shot mainly in the Aulanko nature reserve in Finland and on a set depicting an artist's studio and the scene of the Annunciation. The human actors are a group of women from the Helsinki Deaconess Institute for Women's Support Services and two professional actors playing Mary and the director; the animal actors are a raven, two donkeys and a group of carrier pigeons, but the video also contains footage with other animals (albatrosses, horses, stuffed birds). As mentioned, the video opens with the following quotation from biologist Jakob von Uexküll on the central and right screens (in Finnish and English), with the drawing of a fir tree on the left one, before transitioning to a snowy forest landscape and then

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<sup>30</sup> Ortel 2008

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to a raven perched on a branch (see figure 5):

We are easily deluded into assuming that the relationship between a foreign subject and the objects in his world exists on the same spatial and temporal plane as our own relations with the objects in our human world.

This fallacy is fed by a belief in the existence of a single world, into which all living creatures are pigeonholed. This gives rise to the widespread conviction that there is only one space and one time for all living things.

Only recently have physicists begun to doubt the existence of a universe with a space that is valid for all beings.<sup>31</sup>

Figure 4: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2010).  
*The Annunciation*. Installation view.



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<sup>31</sup> Ahtila 2011: 107

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Figure 5: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2010).  
*The Annunciation*. 3-channel video still.



This quote can easily be connected with the presence of several animals in the video. First, the raven sitting on a branch filmed from close up, suggesting “a point-of-view shot, with the bird as a focalisor, the primary spectator of the view and source of the image we see with it”<sup>32</sup>, opens the spectators to the bird’s worldview. This impression is reinforced by the successive change in scale (from larger to smaller) of the snowy landscape and the quick camera movements in the right screen, suggestive of the bird’s gaze without an exact correspondence to the movements of its head (visible on the central screen). But this constructed worldview is troubled by the human view, especially when Santa Claus walks unexpectedly into the landscape, accompanied by Baroque harpsichord, which raises doubt about what the raven actually sees in this image. The three screens then transition to three Annunciations, from Fra Angelico (1437-1446), Leonardo da Vinci (1472-1475) and Simone Martini (1333), and corresponding close-ups of Mary’s face, and then to women introducing themselves in a studio, starting with the one who will play Mary, and pigeons that we

<sup>32</sup> Bal 2011: 72

can hear and see attending the scene. Here, the pigeons echo the usual dove pictured in Annunciations (representing the holy spirit) and the swallow (representing a patron) included in one of the reproductions that the women are looking at while discussing the casting of their Annunciation. But more importantly, the pigeons and their cooing echo the staging of the spectator as a witness of the miracle of the incarnation in representations of the Annunciation<sup>33</sup>, doubled by the women observing photocopies of the Annunciation paintings.

Thus, the video combines witnessing an invisible miracle in a visible painting as an alternative mode of viewing and animal perspectives, recalled, for example, by a voice-over comment on birds' perception of ultraviolet hues, to access new visibilities and alternative worlds. A similar effect is produced at the very end of the video, when Mary walks with a donkey, shown on the central screen while she is on the right screen. Both are viewed in a medium shot, replaced by point-of-view shots from Mary and the donkey's perspective, looking at the same road, with camera movements following their respective gaits and horses who seem to be observing them on the left screen. By connecting the presence of animals with an interrogation on representation itself, Ahtila's *Annunciation* adds to a tradition of depictions that question the possibility, together with the invention of perspective, of representing something incommensurable (the incarnation) in a commensurable representation.<sup>34</sup> The artist shifts the interrogation to the possibility of including a non-human *Umwelt* in a limited human representation, here more specifically by including animal perspectives and staging the artifice that construes, destabilises, and undermines the scene, displaying its hybrid nature against the odds of illusion and

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<sup>33</sup> Holly 1996

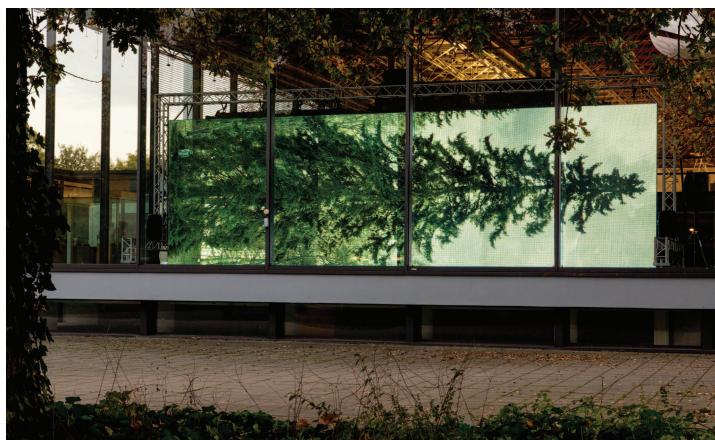
<sup>34</sup> Arasse 2003; Arasse 2006.

transparency.<sup>35</sup> The forest is consequently deconstructed as a landscape framed by human perspective and modelling and paves the way to a more-than-human dwelling.

### **Horizontal: The Tree as a Person**

I now analyse the challenges posed by portraying a spruce tree (also from the Aulanko nature reserve) in *Horizontal* and the limitations it reveals about human representation. A work from 2011, *Horizontal* is a 6-minute-long 6-channel moving image of a spruce tree, with ambient sound. It attempts to show the entire tree while keeping as much as possible its size and shape, but “because a life-size tree does not fit in a standard-sized human space, the tree is presented horizontally in the form of successive projected images”<sup>36</sup> (see figure 6.) The slight discrepancy between the six side by side frames underlines the temporal gap between the shots while the sound unifies them. There is someone standing next to the tree.

Figure 6: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2011). *Horizontal*. Installation view.



<sup>35</sup> Bal 2013: 279

<sup>36</sup> Eija-Liisa Ahtila's website

[https://crystaleye.fi/eija-liisa\\_ahtila/installations/vertical/synopsis](https://crystaleye.fi/eija-liisa_ahtila/installations/vertical/synopsis).

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This work is a meta-installation that presents the difficulty of recording a spruce tree with the methods of visual documentation invented by humans, highlighting, according to the artist, “the coexistence of separate spatial and temporal worlds of different living beings, and [...] the idea of existence next to and with something else”<sup>37</sup>. As described on Ahtila’s website, its making questioned from the start the possibility of doing a tree portrait:

The horizontal film frame cannot show the entire tree in one picture. If one uses a wide-angle lens, the tree appears distorted, and is still too large to fit in one picture. Stepping back to allow the entire tree to appear inside the frame makes the picture no longer a portrait of a tree, but a landscape in which the tree is but one element. [...] The attempt to film a spruce tree brings the portrayer face to face with the technical apparatus constructed as an extension of the human eye and perception. It also invites us to consider the preconditions of anthropocentric dramaturgy and the valuations it engenders in images and in the order of representation. [...] It soon became obvious that the more we tried to reproduce in the portrait of what we saw standing next to the tree, and combine that with our ideas of the portrait of the tree, the more the final work would be about the devices and technology of cinematography and us humans as observers.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s website

[https://crystaleye.fi/eija-liisa\\_ahtila/installations/horizontal/synopsis](https://crystaleye.fi/eija-liisa_ahtila/installations/horizontal/synopsis).

<sup>38</sup> Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s website

[https://crystaleye.fi/eija-liisa\\_ahtila/installations/horizontal/synopsis](https://crystaleye.fi/eija-liisa_ahtila/installations/horizontal/synopsis).

While technical limitations underline the anthropocentric development of image-making devices, the tree portrait also questions artistic genres. Isn't the portrait an anthropocentric genre in the first place? Does it make any sense for a tree, living in an intricate entanglement with other entities, to have its portrait taken? Conversely, does the tree portrait revisit the genre and insist on the complexity of a portrait considered as the image of a unified (and vertically presented) subject? Doesn't the portrait generally elude several aspects of the entity it presents, even in the case of a moving image with sound? Furthermore, if this is to be a spruce portrait, why include a human figure at the bottom of it?

I argue that in this work, cameras are comparable to measuring devices used in scientific experiments and play, as Karen Barad has highlighted for scientific apparatus, a similar “crucial, indeed constitutive, role in the production of phenomena”<sup>39</sup>. For Barad, “apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted”.<sup>40</sup> Properties, therefore, cannot be attributed to abstract independently existing objects through apparatuses, but only to phenomena. Apparatuses postulate the inseparability of the observer and the observed. They “enact[...] a *local* resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy”<sup>41</sup>, separating temporarily “subject” and “object” from the ongoing open process of mattering. The heavy use of image-making apparatuses in *Horizontal* underlines this local resolution of the spruce as the object of a portrait and the spectators, through the artist, as viewing subjects. Through their viewing habits, although disturbed by the horizontality, the spectators fuse the six shots to

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<sup>39</sup> Barad 2003: 816

<sup>40</sup> Barad 2003: 816

<sup>41</sup> Barad 2003: 815

make one tree of them while the slight gap between the frames, together with the sound of the wind, enhance the “vibrancy”<sup>42</sup> of the piece. Its materiality, especially when it was presented on LED screens at the Lehmbruck Museum (see figure 6), where viewers could circle around and see the number of screens from the back (see figure 7) and the multitude of lights from up close, which only focused into an image when they moved outside the museum through the glass wall, mimics the mattering of what it depicts. The presence of a human character may suggest that this phenomenon is, precisely, local and temporary, and that the cameras could equally focus on this character, although the apparatus would be unfitted for this, which insists again on the importance of shifting the gaze when portraying a tree. This work thus highlights, through materiality, the configuration of a spruce by building on the portrait genre as a still representation that usually identifies a human character, thus deconstructing the object status of trees, and renewing this genre by adding movement and sound, pointing at the multiplicity of portrayed entities, and underlining that trees are not limited to appearing in landscapes, as a background for human dwelling.

Figure 7: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2011). *Horizontal*. Installation view.



<sup>42</sup> Bennett 2010

***Studies on the Ecology of Drama***  
**The Forest and its Inhabitants' Perception**

In the fourth video installation, *Studies on the Ecology of Drama*, I examine the conditions of representation that exhibit the self-acknowledging illusion of art and its contribution to de-centre human perception of non-humans such as trees. This work from 2014 is a 25-minute-long, 4-channel projected installation with audio, which covers four walls of a room, immerse the spectators and prevents them from seeing all videos at once (although they are not always active at the same time) but multiplies the frames, often with various scales, that focus on nonhuman elements (see figure 8). It involves a human acting as a narrator who introduces herself as the actress Kati Outinen, and the location and time of the shooting, thus revealing the making of the video and its self-reflexivity. Outinen first walks into a forest park and conducts 'subtraction exercises' that aim to display how representation works and shift the gaze that it commonly builds. The first exercise to direct our attention to other 'living beings' consists of the narrator turning around so that we cannot see her face and then, when facing us again, focusing the camera on a bush behind her so that her face is blurry. In the second exercise, she stands apart from a tree, so that they both appear in the frame. In the third exercise, she asks the following questions:

What is the nature, quality and size of the performer in the picture? Is this park an 'environment', or a 'location' for filming – a background? Or do we see through the camera a number of other species and their habitats?<sup>43</sup>

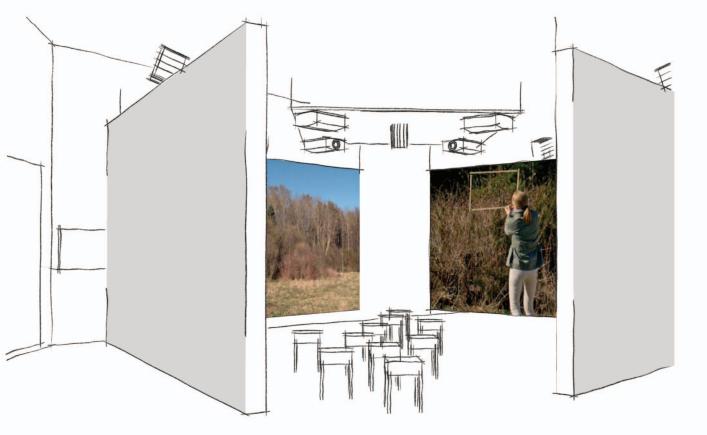
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<sup>43</sup> English subtitles from the video, accessed with the artist's permission.

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The narrator then names a few of those species. The fourth exercise refers to drawing as another art form (opposed to dramaturgy in the video), whose composition arrange elements in an active and non-hierarchical relation, so that there is no protagonist and environment *per se* or so that all elements have equal status. The installation transitions to several sections of footage connected to the narrator's comments on how time perception differs from one species to another, which reinforces the idea of parallel worlds. A third part of the installation focuses on how humans can try to understand another existence, taking the butterfly as an example of a species that changes completely during its lifetime. The narrator suggests that fiction is a communicative force used to grasp foreignness and present other worlds. The last part of the video takes place on a farm at dusk, in a *mise en abyme* that shows the shooting of a scene with 5 acrobats forming a star-shaped figure brightly lit from behind, recalling the narrator's comment on how the stars that we see sometimes no longer emit light but nevertheless affect our reality. The video starts and ends with a close up on a dog walking outdoors.

Figure 8: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2014).  
*Studies on the Ecology of Drama*. Installation diagram.



Here again, the installation questions how to represent non-humans, this time focusing on narrative (drama) and non-narrative (drawing) devices, as mentioned in the reduction exercises. Video, as a medium that features visual possibilities, such as framing and storytelling, through editing for example, combines narrative and non-narrative. Video art as a hybrid, impure form<sup>44</sup> is also at the intersection between documentary and fiction, creating an in-between space that integrates various genres, thus deconstructing a unified objective or even subjective view. In art, the term “studies” suggest a series done in preparation for a final piece, “concentrat[ing] on a single technical point”<sup>45</sup>, which is clearly not the case for *Studies on the Ecology of Drama*, a very accomplished installation. At the same time, its format, with four parts that address the problems involved in representing non-humans, form a series of attempts to understand these problems, alluding to observational studies or experiments conducted to expand knowledge on a given topic. As mentioned, this kind of research borrows from different genres. The exercises led by the narrator resemble educational videos. The second part deconstructs nature documentary by inserting a slowed-down sequence of an acrobat jumping on a trampoline to music, meant to represent a swift’s perspective (capable of perceiving faster movement than humans) although it is filmed in front of a green screen instead of outdoors (see figure 9), and another with the narrator seemingly walking in the sky while discussing the swift’s habitat, this time using the green screen to create the effect. Both sequences show how representation devices are designed for human perception but how they can be used to imagine non-human ones. The third part is similar to a filmed performance, with acrobats setting themselves up in trees with green sleeping bags to mimic caterpillars in their cocoons, reminiscent, for example, of

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<sup>44</sup> Parfait 2007

<sup>45</sup> Bal 2013: 64

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Janaina Tschäpe's photographic work on hybrid creatures set in natural environments that questions the human–non-human boundaries.<sup>46</sup> It ends with the performers prancing in a meadow with hand-held cameras, as if they were butterflies and trying to catch their perspective, while some point-of-view shots offer glances of this reconstructed perspective. The final part is a very short *tableau vivant* displaying its making. The work as a whole endeavours to make visible otherwise invisible traces of non-humans by combining genres that disrupt the usual protagonist-and-background setting and renewing, through a fiction that borrows from documentary, ways of perceiving our surroundings. Regarding the forest, mainly present in the first and fourth parts of the installation, it does not form a landscape in the traditional sense but provides a renewed sensibility towards its various inhabitants, more likely to become cohabitants for the spectators.

Figure 9: Eija-Liisa Ahtila. (2014).  
*Studies on the Ecology of Drama*. 4-channel video still.



<sup>46</sup> See artist's website <http://www.janainatschape.net>.

## Conclusion

These four works offer a renewed perspective on the landscape as a representation, an artistic genre, and thus as an environment, an “area that is spatially heterogeneous in at least one factor of interest”<sup>47</sup>. They propose “transformative and creative way[s] of being in the world”<sup>48</sup>, which involve a rethinking of human and non-human cohabitation. Most significantly, as video installations, they provide an actual and conceptual space for receptors to experiment and reflect on landscapes such as the northern forests. *The House* suggests that the Finnish forest can echo the world and inhabit the character as much as it has been inhabited. *The Annunciation* multiplies animal perspectives to give access to alternative worlds and show that the forest is not a simple landscape but that it is formed of multiple inhabitants, each of which dwells in its own way. *Horizontal* insists, through heavy image-making and showing devices, on the shared materiality of humans and trees and on the institutionalised binarity often induced by the portrait genre. *Studies on the Ecology of Drama* questions anthropocentric representation by mixing documentary and fiction to draw attention to non-humans and their respective worldviews, and by attempting to offer equal status to all represented entities. These four installations are, as Mieke Bal underlines,

opposed to the illusionism of theater and cinema, which is encouraged when the spectator sits comfortable in the dark, looks straight ahead, and forgets her own body. To such illusionism these works [...] oppose a “critical habitat” where timespace is spatialized. We sit or stand, physically

<sup>47</sup> Turner, Gardner and O’Neill 2001: 2

<sup>48</sup> Conio 2012: 148

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unable to remain abstract and distant. Whatever our critical reflections this *dispositif* intimates and makes us experience, we cannot disentangle ourselves from what we critique.<sup>49</sup>

As a result of their “critical habitat” and their interrogation of human and non-human representations, these installations allow spectators to experiment with a different kind of dwelling that opposes the landscape model and involve trees and forests in a more active relationship. The video installation apparatus creates a dwelling space akin to the ecology of the forest.

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<sup>49</sup> Bal 2013: 278

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Photo © Crystal Eye. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris, London.

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Photo © Crystal Eye. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris, London.

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Photo © Crystal Eye. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris, London.

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# Estonian and Livonian Werewolf Lore and the Forest's Place in It: Changes over Time<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – This chapter presents a short overview of the Estonian werewolf tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and a glimpse of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century werewolf beliefs, offering a comparison of the perceptions of the werewolf of the earlier and later periods. The differences between the perceptions of these two eras are examined against a background of the theoretical approaches of Tim Ingold and Philippe Descola, which help to interpret changes in worldview based on the shift from pre-modern society to modernity.

The mindset of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Estonian and Livonian peasant did not encompass the category of ‘nature’ and the borders between the human being and animal, and organism and environment, more fluidly than today. The ability to change into a wolf was perceived as beneficial because of the potentiality of acquiring new experiences and advantages. As the popular ontology changed before the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the human mind was raised to the ultimate position and the animal came to be considered inferior – the transformation of a human into an animal, when it was seriously considered at all, seemed to be strange and unnatural.

At the same time, the perception of the forest became more negative. While a respectful attitude towards the forest was still present in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the forest was regarded as a dangerous and foreign place. In the folk tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the location of werewolf activities was beside the forest, often in a meadow, while by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the werewolf mainly acted in the forest.

**Keywords** – Werewolf, folk belief, folklore, Estonia and Livonia, witch trials, neo-animism, vernacular worldview

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was translated by Ene-Reet Soovik.

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## Introduction

Werewolves and wolves, who are very popular figures in Estonian folklore and folk belief, are intrinsically connected with the forest. In werewolf legends the phrase “he/she turned into a wolf and ran into the forest” is widespread and appears in different legend types. Sometimes a person who involuntarily takes the form of a wolf is forced to run straight into the forest.

In Estonian folklore no other animal has as many folk narratives as the wolf, and no other animal has as many alternative names. It was believed that if you call a wolf by his real name (*hunt* in contemporary Estonian, *susi* in south Estonian dialects and in archaic Estonian), he will show up. Even today the proverb *Kui hundist räägid, siis hunt tulub<sup>2</sup>* is widely used. Most of the alternative names that referred to the wolf had the first constituent *mets-* ('forest') or some other word that denotes some kind of forest (for example, *võsa*, 'bush'): *metsaiilu*, *metsasaks*, *metsaisand*, *metsakutsikas*, *metsatöll*, *võsavillem*. There were other names, as well: *kriimslim*, *aia-tagune*, *(vana) põõsa-tagune*, *pajuvillem*, etc.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter<sup>4</sup> has three aims. The first aim is to provide a short introduction into Estonia's werewolf tradition. The second is to find out if distinguishing ontologies according to Philippe Descola's research can be applied to an investigation of Estonian folklore material. The third is to see if the role that the forest plays in Estonian werewolf tradition changed over time.

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<sup>2</sup> “If you speak of the wolf, he will be right here”. In the database of Estonian proverbs it appears in the version „Kus hunti kõneldakse, sääl hunt on“ (<http://www.folklore.ee/cgi-bin/script1>), which translates to “Where about wolf is spoken, there he is”.

<sup>3</sup> Kõiva 2019: 48; see also Hiiemäe 2019: 44.

<sup>4</sup> This research was supported by the Estonian Research Council (grant PRG670).

## ESTONIAN AND LIVONIAN WEREWOLF LORE

I shall introduce werewolf lore deriving from two different periods. The first period covers the 16th and the 17th centuries, and the second the 19th and the 20th centuries. The earlier period comprises information to be found in witch trial protocols, but as not much data has survived I am also including information on Estonian and Livonian<sup>5</sup> werewolves contained in travel books and other printed sources of the period. As regards the second period, I restrict my discussion to the werewolf lore stored at the Estonian Folklore Archives, including belief-related information, and werewolf folk narratives (mainly legends). The time of recording fairy tales concerning werewolves embraces approximately a century and a half, starting from the early 19th century; the werewolf legends and belief accounts have been dated from the late 19th to the late 20th centuries. As there is a considerable number of manuscript texts concerning werewolves at the Estonian Folklore Archives – approximately 1,400 – I have not added information on werewolves found in the printed sources of the period to this sizeable corpus.

The format of a short discussion does not allow me to both provide an exhaustive survey of the material belonging to either period. As I have introduced the material in some of my earlier writing<sup>6</sup>, I shall give a short and selective overview of it below that starts with an introduction to the werewolf lore of the later period. Consequently, I shall proceed to discussing werewolf lore from the earlier period. As in many fields the origin of phenomena, concepts and categories is of a key importance in understanding them, so it is worthwhile dwelling on the time from which werewolf lore originates. This will give us material to ponder how such a means of interpreting the world as the werewolf could evolve at all.

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<sup>5</sup> Part of the Livonia of the time was Estonian-speaking (today's south Estonia), the rest was Latvian-speaking (today's north Latvia).

<sup>6</sup> Metsvahi 1999; Metsvahi 2000b: 54–57; Metsvahi 2001; Metsvahi 2011; Metsvahi 2015a.

In the latter half of the chapter I shall apply P. Descola's approach. In his book *Beyond Nature and Culture* he envisages "social life from the point of view of the relations that hold it together"<sup>7</sup> and distinguishes four different modes of ontology based on these different relations. In the context of the present discussion two of Descola's postulated ontologies are relevant: animism and naturalism; the latter being the worldview that prevails in contemporary Western societies.

A common approach for scholars of folklore, as well as anthropologists, has been to explain other worldviews (ontologies) from their own naturalistic point of view. By proceeding in this way – by taking our own reality based on a naturalistic worldview for granted – it is impossible to comprehend animism and other ontologies that have no similar dualistic way of distinguishing between nature and culture, as inherent in naturalism.<sup>8</sup> I shall take another path and try to understand the belief in werewolves through the frame of popular ontology with an animistic orientation. I shall also try to answer the question of what changes occurred in the conceptualisation of the image of the werewolf as the more archaic animistic worldview was replaced by a more modern one.

Finally, I shall provide a survey of the meaning and significance of the forest in werewolf lore.

### **The Werewolf Lore of the 19th and 20th Centuries**

In 1888, Jaan Loskit from Puhja parish in Viljandimaa region sent Jakob Hurt, the initiator of Estonia's folklore collecting campaign, a story about Mats, a farmhand from Armi farm, who turned into a wolf and later became human again. In a nutshell, the story runs as follows. On a fairly cold winter day men from Korvi village

<sup>7</sup> Descola 2014: 92

<sup>8</sup> See Descola 2014: 81.

went to transport manor goods to town on their sleighs. On the way back they had been moving for about a mile through a large forest when Mats saw something unusual under a pine tree on the right-hand side of the road. He climbed down from the sleigh and saw that it was a wolf skin. Mats considered himself lucky, thinking that he would be able to sell the skin to the manor owner later. He threw it across his shoulder and ran back to the train of horses to throw it on the sled. But once there, it turned out that the skin had become attached to him. Mats turned into a wolf and the horse drawing his sleigh became wild when it noticed the beast. When the other men in the train saw that there was a wolf on Mats' sleigh they started to yell at it, but the wolf remained in place. Then the men started to beat the wolf with sticks and it fled into the forest. Some were wondering where Mats had disappeared to but when one of men suggested that the wolf may have eaten him no more questions were asked. So the men took Mats' horse to the master of Armi farm themselves. During the three months that followed a wolf would often come and pester the farm animals of the village but the dogs would chase it away. A week before St George's day when the people at Armi farm were sitting down to have their supper, the door opened and a stranger came in who told them that he was their farmhand Mats. He was very hungry and began to eat at once when asked to sit at the table. Mats's voice had become low and trembling and his face was ravaged and frightening. When asked where he had been for these three months he answered that he had been forced to turn into a wolf and do a wolf's deeds. He had become famished and would have wanted to kill a lamb, a calf or a young pig, but the dogs would not let him. He was turned back into a human as he was chasing a colt. The colt was running around a stone and as Mats fell down when running around the stone as well, the wolf skin suddenly fell away from his back and he was restored to his human shape.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Estonian Folklore Archives, H I 2, 509/11 (1) < Puhja khh., Suure-Konguta (1888).

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The story described is not a typical werewolf legend among those to be found at the Estonian Folklore Archives, but one with a unique plot; it is longer and somewhat more poetic than an ordinary werewolf legend. Nevertheless, even this idiosyncratic tale with added literary flourishes contains usual features and motifs, such as turning into a wolf by means of a wolf skin (usually, however, the skin does not get attached to a person on its own, but is deliberately pulled on or else thrown onto someone's back by an ill-wisher<sup>10</sup>) and going around a stone three times as a way for a human to turn into a wolf<sup>11</sup>.

Although most of the tales from the Estonian Folklore Archives concerning humans transforming into wolves by going three times around a stone, a tree or a bush belong to legends meant for entertainment, even the lore from as late as the 20th century to a degree contains the belief, or rather suspicion, that something terrible may happen to a person upon going three times around a stone, i.e. that he or she might turn into a wolf. In 1963, Anna Taliga from Tori parish told the folklore collector Erna Liiv that despite her not knowing the words (the charm) required to become a wolf she would never dare to run three times around the large stone close to her home for “what if something should really happen”.<sup>12</sup> The turning into a wolf in the forest and the urge of a person who has become a wolf to run off into the forest at once, as well as the difficulties of those who had become wolves against their will obtaining food, are usual in the werewolf legends recorded in Estonia in the 19th and 20th centuries.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Metsvahi 2011: 197-198, 200.

<sup>11</sup> On the frequency of the spread of this motif, see Metsvahi 1999: 119.

<sup>12</sup> Estonian Folklore Archives, RKM II 156, 324/5, 84 < Tori 1963.

## The First Written Records on Belief in Werewolves in Estonia

The earliest layer of Estonian folklore comprises folksongs known as runo songs. The fact that no runo songs contain the concept of the werewolf nor involve such characters indicates that the image cannot be very old. Medieval chronicles describing life in Estonia and Livonia never mention werewolves either.<sup>13</sup> According to Hermann von Bruiningk, who conducted a very thorough study of werewolf lore in Livonia, even material from court trials between 1546 and 1561 contain no references to werewolves whatsoever.<sup>14</sup>

Actually, there were court cases in which the accused were attributed the capacity of turning themselves into wolves in the first half of the 16th century, but their records have not survived. Thus, Sebastian Münster wrote in *Cosmographia*, the most thorough German-language world description at the time when it was re-issued in 1550, that many Livonians had confessed in front of the court that they could turn themselves into wolves.<sup>15</sup> The first edition of *Cosmographia* that was published in 1544, and which was the first description of the world by a learned German, does not mention werewolves, although in 1547-1548 a scholar from Hessen had visited Livonia and Münster's description is based on information mediated by him. Thus, the tales about humans turning into wolves originated from Livonia and not from Germany.

An account recorded in 1560 and seemingly deriving from abroad has its origin in Livonia when examined in more depth.

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<sup>13</sup> Vähi 2011: 253

<sup>14</sup> Bruiningk 1924: 183

<sup>15</sup> Metsvahi 2005b: 206

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Specifically, Philip Melanchton's son-in-law Caspar Peucer wrote about a Livonian case that proved that humans could transform themselves into wolves:

There is a true story about a certain rustic werewolf who dined with his prefect, not far from the city of Riga. Drunk, he finally fell asleep and tumbled back from his chair onto the floor, in front of other worthies. The prefect was a wise man, who immediately recognized this man to be a werewolf. He bade his servants to go, after putting him to bed. The next day, a horse was found in the field cut open down the middle. The prefect's guess that the man who collapsed the previous night and revived that morning was to blame. He was therefore led into prison, and once interrogated, he quickly confessed to the deed. He said that he was pursuing a witch in the form of a butterfly that was circling about (for werewolves boast that they are hired to ward off witches) in order to defend against danger. By chance, the witch had hidden herself there under the horse. Sneaking up with a sickle, he struck powerfully, but she narrowly escaped his intended blow, and as a result of this unexpected turn of events, he accidentally cut the horse into two. In this way, demons play among themselves for the ruin of people.<sup>16</sup>

The book from which the excerpt derives, published in Wittenberg, is entitled *Commentarius de praecipuis generibus divinationum*. Peucer was a highly educated man so there is no reason to doubt his words, all the more so because when introducing the topic of

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<sup>16</sup> Ginzburg and Lincoln 2020: 201-202. Translated from Latin.

the werewolf he wrote that he used to consider the human ability to turn into a wolf a ridiculous invention, although after hearing about the situation in Livonia he had modified his standpoint. In addition to the tale of this particular man who was able to turn into a wolf, Peucer also dispenses more general information concerning the werewolves of Livonia. He says that he has heard from a trustworthy source about what is going on in Livonia and the neighbouring regions each year for the twelve days following Christmas. At that time, several thousand werewolves come together, led by a boy with a lame foot. The werewolves attack all domestic animals with whom their paths cross and tear them apart with their teeth.<sup>17</sup> Peucer does not emphasise a connection between the forest and the wolf; it is rather the field that emerges as the scene of their activities: “In the appearance of wolves, they wander fields to attack herds of sheep and cattle.”<sup>18</sup>

The same story forwarded by Peucer is also recorded in Augustin Lercheimer’s book *Christlich bedencken und erinnerung von zauberey* (1597), which in addition speaks of another imprisoned peasant who was able to turn into a wolf, although he could also, for instance, fly across the river.<sup>19</sup> The person hiding behind the pseudonym of Lercheimer was Hermann Wilken (Witekind), a former pupil of Melanchton and the rector of the Latin school in Riga who had forwarded information on the werewolves on Livonia to Melanchton in correspondence. Thus, the “trustworthy person” who shared the information on Livonian werewolves with Caspar Peucer was not someone from Livonia but Martin Luther’s friend Melanchton.<sup>20</sup> The last sentence of Wilken’s version of the werewolf tale that was introduced above confirms that even in the middle of the 16th century werewolves were called to court:

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<sup>17</sup> Bruiningk 1924: 176; Ginzburg and Lincoln 2020: 197-198.

<sup>18</sup> Ginzburg and Lincoln 2020: 198

<sup>19</sup> Bruiningk 1924: 179

<sup>20</sup> Bruiningk 1924: 177-179

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Thus this man confessed that he had done nothing; rather, he had dreamed it... This fellow lay in the chamber all night, body and soul; therefore he could not have been out in the field in which these events took place. The devil did it and put him so powerfully in a sleep and dream that he believed and confessed it was his work. For that, he was burnt.<sup>21</sup>

In 1555, in his *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, Olaus Magnus wrote about the belief in werewolves and how it was extremely widespread in Livonia. Magnus gives a fairly thorough treatment to the topic, also providing several true stories about peasants who could turn themselves into wolves. In the information mediated by him, on several occasions the setting for werewolves' activities was the forest, although other places were involved.

A tale forwarded by Olaus Magnus that is set in the forest speaks of a nobleman taking on a long journey. Travelling through a large forest he can find no lodgings and has to spend the night in the forest with his company. As everybody is hungry, a peasant who is accompanying them suggests that he can go and fetch some meat for the company. He asks everybody to be silent in case they should see anything out of the ordinary, turns into a wolf and brings them a sheep.<sup>22</sup>

As there were very few descriptions of the lives of the northern peoples, Olaus Magnus's work became very well known. Following his example, almost no one describing the Baltics of the Early Modern age would omit mention of the ability of

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<sup>21</sup> Ginzburg and Lincoln 2020: 202

<sup>22</sup> Magnus 1845: 102-103

the inhabitants to turn into wolves.<sup>23</sup> The Austrian historian Stefan Donecker has seen this as a sociopolitical device that contributed to how the local indigenous inhabitants were to be imagined in Europe. It is known that many of these people had not accepted Christianity and followed a popular belief that combined Catholic and pre-Christian elements.<sup>24</sup> To attribute the ability to turn into wolves to such barbaric and wild people in Europe's little-known periphery pointed at their "heathen" nature, indicating that they had to be civilised<sup>25</sup> and led to Christian truths. At the same time, the capacity for animal transformation made the indigenous inhabitants dangerous and showed the external world that they could threaten official power with their supernatural abilities.<sup>26</sup>

From the viewpoint of the present chapter it is not the connecting of the image of the werewolf with the indigenous inhabitants as a sociopolitical step taken for the sake of the external world that is important, but the question of whether, and how, these local people would believe in the human ability to turn into a wolf and how this imaginary changed over the centuries.

### **Witch Trials as Creators of the Werewolf Imaginary**

Approximately 150 witch trial protocols survive from Estonia and the part of Livonia that remains in the territory of present-day Estonia. The majority of these date from the 17th century,

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<sup>23</sup> Donecker 2010

<sup>24</sup> For example Lust, Küng et al. 2017: 179-181.

<sup>25</sup> The powers used the wolf and the forest as metaphors for barbarity in the 18th century. In 1764 the ruler of the Russian Empire Catherine the Great, who was proceeding from the interests of the Russian state as a whole and was not interested in an extensive autonomy of the Baltic provinces, wrote to her new General Prosecutor: "(...) the provinces mentioned (...) have to be influenced so they become more Russian and not look towards the forest as wolves do." (Laur 2000: 208)

<sup>26</sup> See Donecker 2012: 313

with a few deriving from the 16th century<sup>27</sup>. In 18 of these trials women (18 women) and men (13 men) of peasant origin were accused of causing harm as werewolves<sup>28</sup>. In comparison with witch trial protocols from the rest of Europe this represents a relatively high proportion.<sup>29</sup>

A person's ability to turn into a wolf in order to attack humans and animals first began to be listed among the accusations at witch trials in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands and certain regions of the Holy Roman Empire starting from the 15th century.<sup>30</sup> The belief in werewolves appears to have reached the Livonian and Estonian courts in the 16th century, and according to the confessions of the local accused the offences related to attacking animals, but not humans.<sup>31</sup> Although most of the accused gave their statements under duress of torture, they could not have confessed to having done something that would have had no meaning for them. Thus, it can be claimed with certainty that belief in werewolves was based on the popular imaginary of animal transformation<sup>32</sup> that became merged with demonological teachings.

In the popular understanding of the world the nature of the relationship between humans and animals was rather different from that prevailing among the upper echelons of society, who had adopted Christian thought. If for Aristotle in Classical Antiquity humans remained a part of nature, in the Christian

<sup>27</sup> Madar 1987: 126

<sup>28</sup> Madar 1987: 138

<sup>29</sup> Metsvahi 2000a: 17

<sup>30</sup> Pluskowski 2015: 83

<sup>31</sup> Metsvahi 2015b: 219

<sup>32</sup> The motif of human-non-human transformation also appears in runo song. For example in the song Fish Maiden there is a motif of a young man opening a fish to find a wreath, beads and a brooch (Tedre 1969: 31-32). Exactly the same objects are often found in the legend in which a dead wolf is cut open to reveal a girl inside. (Metsvahi 1999: 111-112)

view of the world humans became separate from nature, rose to be outside and, simultaneously, above it. Similarly to humans, God – who created nature – stands as separate from nature and even the beauty of nature is valued not proceeding from nature itself but from God.<sup>33</sup>

The differentiation between two totally separate categories, “nature” and “humanity”, only emerged in Europe in the 17th century;<sup>34</sup> among the Estonian peasantry it was likely to have happened not earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Not even a preliminary stage of this dualist differentiation – the understanding of the separateness of the Creator and nature and the presumed position of humans outside nature – had reached the peasants in the 16th and 17th centuries.

There was no clarity regarding animal transformation among demonologists and men of education either. It appears from the chapter dedicated to animal transformation in the guidebook to belief in witchcraft *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487) that the tales known to demonologists both from peasant lore as well as from Classical Antiquity proved to be problematic.<sup>35</sup> In his book *Deonomanie des sorciers*, published in Paris in 1580, the philosopher Jean Bodin considers the tales of transformation to be true.<sup>36</sup> However, in his book *De praestigiis daemonum*, published in 1564, the physician Johann Wier attempted to reduce visions of the devil to disturbances related to tensions in the brain and in moods<sup>37</sup>. It was generally claimed that there can be no true transformation, for that would have belonged to the divine purview, and werewolves were but illusions created by the devil<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Descola 2014: 66

<sup>34</sup> Descola 2014: 69

<sup>35</sup> Sprenger and Institoris 1923: 63

<sup>36</sup> Bodin 1591: 118-129

<sup>37</sup> Schenda 1961: 46-47

<sup>38</sup> Lercheim 1586: 26-27

## **Animistic Ontology on which Belief in Werewolves Is Based**

As was pointed out above, proceeding from today's view of the world in analysing the werewolf imaginary of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17th centuries would lead us to an impasse. Thus I shall attempt here to provide a slightly more comprehensive analysis of the differences between modern and historical ways of categorising the world, starting with an explication of the basics of the premodern peasantry's way of seeing the world.

According to such a view, the characteristics of the entities to be found in the cosmos do not depend on their presumed nature, but rather on the place that they occupy in the relations between themselves.<sup>39</sup> The identity and the form of the entities is not pre-fixed, but flexible and depends on the conditions<sup>40</sup>, thus fundamentally different from our view of the world according to which identities and forms are considered to be stable. According to this approach organisms are not living things, but material embodiments of a certain way of being alive.<sup>41</sup> The world in its turn is not a representation but rather an expansion of the body<sup>42</sup>.

Because to live means to be in relations that call forth various forms, the Cree tribes in North America, for instance, do not consider consciousness to be something that should be added to organic life, but rather to the cutting edge of life. The literal translation of the Cree term for 'life' would be "continuous birth".<sup>43</sup> As humans are born, grow and die, eat, defend them-

<sup>39</sup> Descola 2014: 10

<sup>40</sup> Descola 2014: 23

<sup>41</sup> Ingold 2000: 89

<sup>42</sup> See Descola 2014: 283.

<sup>43</sup> Ingold 2000: 51

selves and procreate as other animals do, the places of humans and animals in the world do not differ in principle. Both animals and humans are possible locations in which broad fields of interrelationships become manifest.<sup>44</sup>

If we analyse how people have been making sense of and conceptualising their institutions throughout history, it becomes clear that the social sphere has very rarely been differentiated as something separate from everything else and related only with human activity.<sup>45</sup> The statement can also be reversed: what we call ‘nature’ is tightly integrated with the sphere of social life.<sup>46</sup> Even quite recently – in Estonia in the 19th century and, in places, even during the first half of the 20th century – it was not a given that humans and non-humans should be treated proceeding from totally different starting points.<sup>47</sup> For instance, in 1885 the Estonian peasant Jaan Keerus turned to the community court at Sürgavere and accused Tõnis Wiilup of injuring the leg of his pet dog. He demanded a large sum of money (a hundred roubles) in compensation and claimed that his dog “was more clever than a man”.<sup>48</sup>

Both humans and non-human animals are related to the environment<sup>49</sup> and attribute meanings to it each according to their experience. During a major part of humanity’s history, relating to the environment has occurred by being active in it.<sup>50</sup> It is only relatively recently that the position that it is human consciousness that ultimately gives meaning to the environment has become predominant. This is in paradoxical contradiction

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<sup>44</sup> Ingold 1994: 2

<sup>45</sup> Descola 2014: 247; for examples of understanding marriage and courtship, see for example Metsvahi 2018; Metsvahi 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Descola 2014: 235

<sup>47</sup> See Descola 2014: 248

<sup>48</sup> Rahvusarhiiv, EAA.3541.1.13, 166/190, 114.

<sup>49</sup> See Ingold 1994: 14.

<sup>50</sup> Ingold 2000: 42

to another contemporary scholarly truth of humans being the result of an evolutionary process, a further stage from apes.<sup>51</sup> The fact that research into animal consciousness has turned out to be a very hard nut to crack for scientists studying animals has made them abandon the study and claim that animals have no consciousness.<sup>52</sup> As representatives of different fields of research generally tend to work at a distance from one another, this assumption regarding animals has not made researchers abandon the dualist approaches regarding humans in which body and consciousness are treated separately in a Cartesian spirit, while the body is viewed as a machine and consciousness as the force making it move.<sup>53</sup>

### **Animal Transformation in the Werewolf Lore of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17th Centuries, and of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20th Centuries**

According to such a philosophy of being, animal transformation would be totally different from what we would presume it to be proceeding from our way of seeing the world. As nature was not understood as something separate, the humans of that time did not differentiate between social and natural categories.<sup>54</sup> Animistic ‘nature’, and what was superior to ‘nature’, was populated with social communities with which people could forge relationships in accordance with norms shared by everybody. Humans and animals could exchange perspectives, signs and, occasionally, even bodies. It is in this way that they were capable of understanding one another.<sup>55</sup> At a witch trial held at Idavere (Haljala parish) in 1651 an 18-year-old Estonian youth Hans confessed that he had been moving around as a werewolf and killing smaller animals for two years. In reply to the judges’

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<sup>51</sup> See Ingold 2000: 108.

<sup>52</sup> Vilkka 2002: 288

<sup>53</sup> See also Descola 2014: 62.

<sup>54</sup> See Descola 2014: 23-24.

<sup>55</sup> Descola 2014: 249

question if he had felt himself to be a human or an animal in his mind, Hans answered that he had been an animal.<sup>56</sup> There is no reason to over-emphasise that the judges posed the question about the “mind”, and Hans gave a similar answer also when asked about the “soul”:

The judges enquired if Hans’s body had participated in running around as a werewolf or if it had just been his soul. The youth confirmed that he himself had crept into the wolf skin and showed a trace of a dog bite that he had received as a werewolf on his leg as proof.<sup>57</sup>

Hans does not separate his soul, mind and body from one another in the way we would, or as the question presumes. His answer reflects the understanding of animal transformation in the pre-modern period, i.e. human intentions were exchanged for animal intentions while he was a wolf. A similar answer could be given by the Achuar or the Cree who hold an animistic view of the world: if they attribute a ‘soul’ to something, this means that the thing has a will, as people and animals do.<sup>58</sup> A worldview postulating a similar sense characteristic of animals is expressed by Alit, the accused at the Kiviloo witch trial in Harjumaa region in 1615, whose life ended at the stake. To the question if she knew to whom the animals belonged that she had killed together with two other witches, she laughingly retorted, asking if a wolf ever went to find out whose the animals are before killing them.<sup>59</sup> Intentionality and corporeality are but rarely separated from each other in such a worldview.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Madar 1987: 138

<sup>57</sup> Madar 1987: 138

<sup>58</sup> Descola 2014: 188

<sup>59</sup> Hexenprozess 1840: 342

<sup>60</sup> Descola 2014: 207

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The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17th-century images of the werewolf differ from those found in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20th-century legends of the werewolf, for they are based on a different ontology. As according to this ontology both humans and animals relate to their environment by acting in it, being an animal would unequivocally mean acting like an animal. Also, according to this ontology human and animal natures do not differ from each other; and what is more, neither has a permanent essence.

Thus, in the lore from the earlier period the transformation of humans into animals appears as a natural phenomenon that widens the possibilities of humans to relate to the environment, and not only through harming other entities as the mode of thinking enforced by demonologists would claim, but also by creating new advantages in the lives of the community, their companions or themselves. Let us recall that the earlier layer includes a Livonian peasant who has accidentally killed a horse when attempting to help the community by chasing a witch; and another peasant who, in the shape of a wolf, fetched meat for a nobleman to eat; and a woman werewolf who dared to laugh in the face of judges representing power, saying that wolves will do wolves' deeds without reasoning.

The understanding of the world that forms the background to the tale of Mats the farmhand from Armi, which represents the newer layer, is different. The wolf skin became stuck to the curious Mats and he was made to turn into a wolf against his will. His original human nature was a hindrance for him because as a wolf he could not kill enough animals to satiate his wolf hunger. When a lucky chance turned him back into a man, not all his human features were restored and his voice and looks remained as permanent reminiscences of his forced period as a wolf. Mats's transformation was unnatural from the perspective of the more modern popular ontology.

## The Forest in the Werewolf Lore of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> and 20th Centuries

In the reports from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, werewolves are not as often connected to the forest as they are in the legends of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the stories mediated from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries not all transformations into wolves take place in the forest, werewolves of the time are occasionally connected to the meadow. In 1586 the Jesuit Antonio Possevino wrote concerning Livonia that people are afraid of going onto the meadows alone for there are many of those moving around there who have been turned into wolves by witchcraft<sup>61</sup>. Also, according to the information mediated by Caspar Peucer (see “The first written records on belief in werewolves in Estonia” above) werewolves were not active in the forest, but first and foremost in the meadows.

As was claimed above, the popular ontology that formed the background to these beliefs changed over time, which is why transformations from humans to animals, and the other way round, were not considered self-evident as they were previously. This is why in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries some motifs that used to be related to werewolves during the period of witch trials became connected with human characters who were not capable of turning into wolves at will.

It is probable that quite a few of the people accused of turning into werewolves in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were considered to be witches<sup>62</sup> or magi. Researchers of witch trials have

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<sup>61</sup> Possevino 1994: 22

<sup>62</sup> It is important to note that the Estonian word “witch” does not hold as thoroughly a negative meaning in contemporary common language as it does in several other European languages. The notion of the witch also holds connotations of the wise (wo) man and the healer and the word’s semantic field has been positive etymologically.

determined that the witch trials in Estonia and Livonia brought to the court quite a few professional magi (healers, soothsayers and blessers).<sup>63</sup> Even Thiess<sup>64</sup>, the most famous werewolf active in Livonia, who claimed to have been a good werewolf working for the welfare of the community,<sup>65</sup> was a healer and a blesser of grain.<sup>66</sup>

Nineteenth- and 20th-century sources tell us that witches (who were sometimes called toothmen) had the ability to make wolves kill cattle, or the other way round, protect cattle by keeping wolves at bay; thus, they could rule and command wolves.<sup>67</sup> It is known that some herdsmen who were watching over the village cattle would use charms called wolf words. With the help of these words the forest could be “closed”, so that wolves could not get out of the forest to kill animals.<sup>68</sup>

The belief that there were people with supernatural abilities capable of taking on the shape of an animal in order to change their intentions and field of activity was no longer in accordance with the new sense of the world, although some traces of such people remain in the lore.<sup>69</sup> The background to werewolf lore had become considerably more negative not only because of a change in ontology that had been advanced by the success of the Lutheran church among the people in labelling people with all kinds of supernatural abilities<sup>70</sup>, but also the ever more negative

<sup>63</sup> Madar 1987: 135

<sup>64</sup> Thiess was a Latvian-speaking peasant, that is why I have not expanded upon Thiess' werwolfery in this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> See Ginzburg and Lincoln 2020; de Blécourt 2007.

<sup>66</sup> It is worth mentioning that at the witch trials that were held in Estonia witches were mostly accused one or two at a time and 59.2% of the accused were men. (Madar 1987: 135-136)

<sup>67</sup> Loorits 2001: 8; 170-172

<sup>68</sup> Loorits 2001: 104

<sup>69</sup> See e.g. Metsvahi 1999: 113-114; Metsvahi 2015a: 27.

<sup>70</sup> At the same time it should be admitted that the attempts at marginalising witches advanced but slowly and even in the late 17th century the Livonian healer and

stereotyping of the wolf and the forest characteristic of soil tillers and cattle breeders.

As the wolf is generally an animal with negative characteristics in the Christian world<sup>71</sup>, it is really remarkable that even in the 18th and 19th centuries Estonians were not willing to kill wolves – despite being promised monetary compensation to do so – as the animals were considered so worthy of respect.<sup>72</sup>

Several beliefs speak of this respect for the wolf. It was believed that the wolf had to have its share so that it refrained from killing too many domestic animals.<sup>73</sup> Sometimes even some young animals were left to the wolf in the forest so that it would be satisfied and not kill any more cattle.<sup>74</sup> Even as late as 1977, Rudolf Sordla from Võnnu parish said the following: “Whenever an animal, for instance a sheep, was killed the first vertebra of its neck was to be thrown into the woods for the wolf. (...) This was called the wolf’s share, people themselves would not eat it.”<sup>75</sup> The attitude towards wolves also found expression in the custom of addressing the wolf respectfully when it happened to cross paths with humans.<sup>76</sup>

The forest too was respected in a similar way to the wolf. In 1586 Antonio Possevino wrote that Livonians “worship snakes, woods and other such things”.<sup>77</sup> When wolves had killed an animal, it

werewolf Thiess could boast at court that he had a better understanding of the workings of the world than the clergyman: “He said that he understood this better than Herr Pastor, who was still young.” (Ginzburg and Lincoln 2020: 27. Literal translation from German-language court records from 1691).

<sup>71</sup> See Pluskowski 2015: 92.

<sup>72</sup> Metsvahi 2015b: 216

<sup>73</sup> See e.g. Loorits 2001: 141; Roots 2005: 433.

<sup>74</sup> Loorits 2001: 140

<sup>75</sup> RKM II 328, 244 < Võnnu khk, R. Sordla 1977, published in Roots 2005: 433-434.

<sup>76</sup> Roots 2005: 434-435

<sup>77</sup> Possevino 1995: 24

was said that “the forest had spoiled it”.<sup>78</sup> In Finland, however, where there have always been more bears than wolves, the bear occurs more often in folklore: the sayings “the forest killed a sheep”, “the forest took...” and “the forest spoiled...” would mean that the animal was killed by a bear.<sup>79</sup>

While talking about the bear was taboo in Finland and Karelia, the prohibition in Estonia was mentioning the wolf. It was believed that if the wolf was mentioned by name it would appear: “The wolf is not to be mentioned by name, for if you name it, it will certainly come and may also kill. Sooner, it may be said that the forest is coming or that the forest killed, etc.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, the forest and the wolf were used synonymously in certain contexts, so that to give offerings to the forest meant the same as giving offerings to the wolf.<sup>81</sup> It was believed that wolves would not harm cattle if people did not harm the woods and the wolves and the forest would be pure and revered if people did not damage their relationship with the forest.<sup>82</sup> The herdsmen had to be alert to notice the wolf before it saw them, for it was believed that if the wolf saw the herdsman first it would take away his voice.<sup>83</sup>

Yet despite several positive features that were related to the forest and the wolf even in the 18th and 19th centuries, the forest was increasingly losing its revered status and the wolf its respected position. The forest and the wolf were predominantly opposed to the safe sphere of the home and were connected with the strange and the frightening.

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<sup>78</sup> Loorits 2001: 13

<sup>79</sup> Nirvi 1944: 88; see also Roots 2005: 463.

<sup>80</sup> Nirvi 1944: 88

<sup>81</sup> Nirvi 1944: 88-89; see also Tarkka 1994: 59.

<sup>82</sup> Tarkka 1994: 60.

<sup>83</sup> Loorits 2001: 146; 229

## In Conclusion

As with the forest and the predatory wolf, people capable of turning into wolves have also had to abandon their positive features over the centuries. As the position held by learned men that man has a consciousness while animals do not, was increasingly popular, being an animal was becoming more inferior and reprehensible than previously. The ability to turn into a wolf no longer gave a person a new possible mode of acquiring experiences and advantages, but rather impoverished his or her human nature, which was believed to be superior to that of animals in several ways.

Attributing morality exclusively to humans, which is closely related to Cartesian dualism and Christianity, is a phenomenon of relatively late origin in human history. According to animistic ontology, which characterised the Estonian and Livonian peasants at the start of the witch trials, there were no universal laws of nature as they exist in our worldview. What was more important than the physical plurality of being was the universality of the moral subject that authorised relations between humans and non-humans.<sup>84</sup>

Attempts were made to diminish the relatively deep chasm that reigned between the worldviews of the upper and lower layers of society in the 16th and 17th centuries by spreading among the people fear of witches. Witches were to be wiped out for they collaborated with Satan, and a percentage of peasants went along with the panic this created, sometimes attempting to use witch trials to settle conflicts within the village. The words of several accused uttered as court testimony give reason to think

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<sup>84</sup> Descola 2014: 199

that there was an alternative culture<sup>85</sup> within which witches were helpers of men and werewolves were people with greater ability and a broader sense of the world than ordinary people. The concept of counterculture makes it possible to understand why the accused Alit could laugh in the judges' faces in the face of death, and the accused Thiess state that the clergyman was too young to know how things in the world actually work.

Although in the second half of the 19th century some elements of a respectful attitude towards nature still survived and the chasm between animals and humans was not as deep, and the concept of the dualism of body and soul not as rigid as they are today, one must conclude that humans and animals on the one hand, and any organisms and their living environments on the other hand, were still much more strongly differentiated than they had been in the 16th and 17th centuries. Humans were believed to have their essence and animals theirs. The popular ontology had transformed, which was clearly evidenced in the werewolf lore that would now attribute much that was alien and negative to the wolf and the forest as well as to human transformation into the wolf.

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<sup>85</sup> See also Ginzburg and Lincoln 2000: 169-170; 186; 189.

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# Résumés en français

## L'écosémiotique profonde. La forêt et la modélisation sémiotique

Timo Maran, Université de Tartu (Estonie)

**Résumé** – De nombreux concepts utilisés en sémiotique aujourd’hui proviennent de la linguistique, de la philosophie, des études littéraires et d’autres disciplines. Pour une approche véritablement écosémiotique, nous devons développer des outils de modélisation qui dépassent un imaginaire basé sur la culture et la communication humaines. Dans ce chapitre, je développe un modèle de recherche écosémiotique qui utilise la forêt comme appui premier. Pour cela, je présente d’abord la modélisation comme méthode analytique fondée sur l’école de sémiotique culturelle Tartu-Moscou. Ensuite, je décris les propriétés de la forêt comme écosystème et signification expérientielle pour les humains. À partir de ce cadre, cinq caractéristiques clés de la forêt comme modèle sémiotique sont mises en évidence : 1) les significations et les codes sont partiellement partagés dans les variations; 2) les significations tolérantes sont un type de relation sémiotique élémentaire; 3) dans la forêt, une unité de base d’analyse est un nœud ou point central; 4) les propriétés de la forêt ont de puissantes ontologie et histoire; 5) il y a un surplus de matériel sémiotique au-delà des processus sémiotiques en activité. En tant que modèle, la forêt est considérée comme localement formée et régulée, accidentelle et immense, mais en même temps bien intégrée. Le modèle forestier peut être appliqué à l’étude d’objets communs de l’écosémiotique, mais il peut aussi être reflété en retour aux objets de la sémiotique générale, culturelle ou sociale. Des suggestions pour développer ce modèle dans la recherche appliquée concluent ce chapitre.

**Mots-clés** – Arne Naess, écosémiotique, codes écologiques, écologie de la forêt, Jakob von Uexküll, systèmes de modélisation, écrire la nature estonienne, modélisation sémiotique, surplus de signes, tolérance des significations

## Les forêts affectives dans *Une histoire des loups* d'Emily Fridlund

Sven Blehner, Université de Tartu (Estonie)

**Résumé** – Ce chapitre explore les relations humain-forêt dans *Une histoire des loups* d'Emily Fridlund afin de comprendre le rôle affectif que joue la forêt dans les vies humaines. En s'appuyant sur la théorie des affects et l'écocritique et en utilisant l'analyse de texte affective, ce chapitre explore quels types de forêt suscitent des affects et comment les humains se situent vis-à-vis de ces forêts. Des passages du roman sont d'abord examinés à travers le prisme des intensités expérientialles ordinaires de réalités vécues ainsi que sous la perspective de « sentir avec » et de « connaître à travers » la forêt dans un processus de devenir, évoluer, changer avec celle-ci. L'analyse porte également sur comment et pourquoi la forêt suscite différents affects chez des initiés et des étrangers et sur comment la transformation de l'environnement et du soi cause une détresse solastalgique. Elle montre que les forêts fantasmatiques, ontiques et ontologiques s'entrecroisent et suscitent des affects différents et d'intensités variées en fonction de la proximité émotionnelle et physique de chaque personne à la forêt et de son appartenance à celle-ci. L'agentivité affective de la forêt joue aussi un rôle dans la réponse affective qu'elle évoque.

**Mots-clés** – Forêt affective, géoffect, solastalgie, Fridlund, *Une histoire des loups*

## Les enchevêtrements d'intra-actions dans *L'arbre-monde* de Richard Powers

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**Résumé** – *L'arbre-monde* (2018) de Richard Powers est un exemple remarquable de « climat-fiction » contemporaine, notamment parce que les arbres y sont représentés comme des personnages plus importants que les êtres humains. Le récit de Powers est composé de manière à ressembler à un arbre, avec des fils conducteurs qui évoluent dans un système racinaire complexe et s'adaptent à la vitesse de croissance propre à un arbre. Le roman ne nous présente pas seulement les personnages humains, mais aussi des événements historiques (conquête de l'Ouest, immigration, guerre du Viêtnam, progrès des jeux vidéo immersifs, etc.) qui déterminent la vie de ces personnages et celle des agents non humains avec lesquels, selon Deleuze et Guattari, ils forment des agencements complexes ou des enchevêtrements d'« intra-actions », pour Karen Barad. L'attention que Powers porte aux arbres offre un bon exemple de ce que Jane Bennett nomme l'« interaction des forces humaines et non humaines ». Dans ce chapitre, nous proposons, en suivant Barad, une analyse discursive-matérielle du roman pour arriver à une meilleure compréhension de ce que Donna J. Haraway appelle « le monde du devenir avec ».

**Mots-clés** – Lecture diffractive, intra-action, climat-fiction, banalité de la crise, Richard Powers

## Une écologie de la taille dans *The Forest Lover* de Susan Vreeland

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė, Université de Vilnius (Lituanie)

**Résumé** – Dans ce chapitre, j'aborde l'importance des forêts dans l'art de la peintre canadienne Emily Carr, telle qu'imaginée dans le roman *The Forest Lover* de Susan Vreeland. En suivant les sentiers conceptuels du nouveau matérialisme, je m'attarde aux ambivalences des figurations du monde végétal dans le roman, en tant que source simultanée d'inspiration, d'usage, de mémoire culturelle et de lutte idéologique. En dessinant la trajectoire de la vie créative de Carr dans la Colombie-Britannique du tournant du siècle, le roman explore comment la croissance de sa subjectivité artistique est tributaire de son association avec les peuples autochtones de la province et les forêts qu'ils habitent. Observées dans une perspective matérielle-sémioïque de l'immersion comme condition ontologique, les forêts dans le roman de Vreeland peuvent être vues comme des actrices cosmogoniques, intégrées dans une série de transformations qui lient l'expansion impériale européenne et l'art d'avant-garde au pouvoir destructeur des protocoles écologiques et raciaux de la modernité industrielle. Ces liens conceptuels sont soutenus par les notions de culture, de compost et de taille, qui dépassent la dialectique narrative de nature/culture et de christianité/autochtérie, et incitent à repenser les (dis)continuités structurelles qui joignent les êtres arboricoles et humains du Canada dans l'herméneutique coloniale de la survie.

**Mots-clés** – Mât totémique, croix, forêt, taille, compost, culture, immersion, Emily Carr

**La forêt comme image, paysage  
et environnement scénique.  
Articuler l'identité finno-ougrienne  
à travers le théâtre**

Luule Epner, Université de Tallinn (Estonie)  
Anneli Saro, Université de Tartu (Estonie)

**Résumé** – Ce chapitre porte sur la forêt comme potentielle plateforme commune aux peuples finno-ougriens dans la perception de soi et du monde. Il s'intéresse également à comment cet imaginaire a été représenté à travers la forêt comme image, paysage ou environnement dans le théâtre estonien. Les Estoniens considèrent avoir une relation étroite avec la forêt, ancrée dans un passé lointain. Bien entendu, cette conviction est partagée par d'autres peuples, principalement par les peuples nordiques et finno-ougriens.

En examinant la relation entre théâtre et nature, nous nous concentrerons sur deux éléments : 1) comment la forêt en tant que concept est représentée sur scène; 2) comment la forêt comme lieu fictionnel ou réel y est représentée. Le problème principal concerne l'ajustement de phénomènes aussi différents que la nature et l'art l'un à l'autre, et les stratégies à disposition pour y arriver. Des interprétations scéniques de la tragédie *Libahunt* (1911) d'August Kitzberg, du roman *Seitse vendaa* (1870) d'Aleksis Kivi ainsi que des productions d'Anne Türnpu basées sur le patrimoine folklorique, comme *Isuri eepos* (2015) et d'autres, sont analysées à cet effet.

**Mots-clés** – Identité finno-ougrienne, théâtre estonien, forêt, paysage, environnement, théâtre patrimonial

## **La forêt estonienne et l'observation poétique. Les marches de Jaan Kaplinski dans la forêt**

Ene-Reet Soovik, Université de Tartu (Estonie)

**Résumé** – L'Estonie s'enorgueillit de son image de prétendu royaume unique de nature vierge, représenté par des forêts et des milieux humides, une image projetée autant dans le pays qu'à l'international. Toutefois, cette image s'est récemment heurtée aux exploitations économiques plus directes des ressources forestières du pays. Ce chapitre étudie deux poèmes antérieurs à ces débats contemporains, *Läbi metsa* et *Metsaalune*, du poète estonien Jaan Kaplinski. Ces deux textes, publiés en 1991, au moment où l'Estonie regagnait son indépendance après un demi-siècle d'occupation soviétique, se concentrent sur l'appréciation personnelle immédiate de l'espace forestier. Ce chapitre examine ainsi les cadres alimentant les représentations poétiques de la forêt de l'auteur à une époque où l'industrie forestière capitaliste, dont l'activité colore tant l'imaginaire actuel de la forêt, n'avait pas encore pris place en Estonie, tandis que la possible (auto)censure de l'auteur qui entrait en jeu pendant les décennies soviétiques n'était plus d'actualité. L'analyse s'appuie sur des concepts provenant de la sémiotique culturelle et de l'écosémioïque, et établit des parallèles entre les poèmes et le genre de l'écriture de la nature, considéré comme le modèle des relations environnementales d'une culture et d'une époque données.

**Mots-clés** – Poésie estonienne, Jaan Kaplinski, sémiotique, écriture de la nature, frontières, marche

## Les forêts estoniennes vues par les peintres

Jane Remm, Eesti Kunstiakadeemia (Estonia)

**Résumé** – Le paysage, la vue et la peinture ont été étroitement liés à travers l'histoire. La peinture de paysage n'a généralement pas été prédominante en peinture, mais elle a toujours représenté l'esprit de l'époque et l'attitude envers la nature et l'image. La forêt est un environnement multisensoriel avec un champ de vision limité, où d'autres manières de percevoir gagnent en importance. Ce chapitre analyse comment les peintres estoniens se rapportent à la forêt, comment ils ont vu la forêt et gagné une impression d'être dans la forêt. L'analyse s'appuie sur des peintures de forêt faisant partie de collections de musées d'art estoniens. Il semble que les artistes estoniens aient peint la forêt principalement à distance, souvent accompagnée de fermes, champs et pâturages. Ces vues de la forêt offrent un aperçu plaisant du territoire familier. Il existe moins de vues depuis l'intérieur de la forêt. Qu'elles présentent les abords de la forêt, une vue depuis la forêt, une forêt qui fait obstacle au regard ou du sous-bois forestier, celles-ci créent une forte impression d'être dans la forêt et convoquent son expérience multisensorielle. On trouve aussi davantage d'espèces identifiables dans ces images de l'intérieur de la forêt.

**Mots-clés** – Forêt, peinture de paysages estoniens, peinture de forêts estoniennes, le paysage comme vue et environnement multisensoriel

## **Représentation et habitat. La forêt finlandaise dans quatre installations vidéos d'Eija-Liisa Ahtila**

Sara Bédard-Goulet, Université de Tartu (Estonie)

**Résumé** – En créant un espace différent pour les spectateurs, les installations vidéo peuvent suggérer une autre manière d'habiter un lieu, ce qui peut entre autres mener à un changement dans les relations humaines au non-humain. Ce chapitre propose une analyse de quatre installations vidéo de l'artiste finlandaise Eija-Liisa Ahtila (*The House* (2002), *The Annunciation* (2010), *Horizontal* (2011) et *Studies on the Ecology of Drama* (2014)) qui remettent en question la représentation anthropocentrique et offrent une perspective renouvelée sur les arbres et les forêts (en montrant principalement des épinettes présentes en Finlande : *Picea abies*). En portant attention au montage vidéo et à son prolongement par les spectateurs de même qu'à la déconstruction des genres et à leur mélange, l'analyse montre comment ces installations connectent la forêt au monde et à l'humain, comment elles suggèrent des perceptions et cohabitutions multiespèces, et comment elles présentent la matérialité partagée des humains et des non-humains tels que les arbres.

**Mots-clés** – Forêt, paysage, installation vidéo, représentation, habiter, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, non-humain

## **La place de la forêt dans la tradition estonienne et livonienne du loup-garou. Changements dans le temps**

Merili Metsvahhi, Université de Tartu (Estonie)

**Résumé** – Ce chapitre résume la tradition estonienne du loup-garou aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, présente un aperçu des croyances à son égard aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles et propose une comparaison des perceptions de cette créature à ces deux périodes. Les différences entre les perceptions de ces deux époques sont examinées à la lumière des théories de Tim Ingold et de Philippe Descola, qui participent à interpréter les changements de cosmologies entre les sociétés prémoderne et moderne.

Les conceptions des paysans estoniens et livoniens des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles ne comprenaient pas la catégorie de « nature », et les frontières entre les humains et les animaux et celles entre les organismes et leur environnement étaient plus fluides qu’aujourd’hui. La capacité à se transformer en loup-garou était perçue comme une possibilité avantageuse d’acquérir de nouvelles expériences et des bénéfices. Comme l’ontologie populaire a changé avant la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle – l’esprit humain fut élevé en position supérieure et l’animal considéré comme inférieur –, la transformation d’un humain en un animal, lorsqu’elle était prise en considération, s’est alors mise à sembler étrange et contre nature.

Dans un même temps, la perception de la forêt est devenue plus négative. Tandis que l’attitude respectueuse envers celle-ci était encore présente aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du XX<sup>e</sup>, la forêt est considérée comme un lieu dangereux et étranger. Dans la tradition populaire des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, les activités du loup-garou se situaient en dehors de la forêt, souvent dans les prés, alors que dans les coutumes des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, le loup-garou agit principalement dans la forêt.

**Mots-clés** – Loup-garou, croyance populaire, folklore, Estonie et Livonie, procès pour sorcellerie, néo-animisme, vision vernaculaire du monde



## **Introduction.**

### **Les lieux de la forêt nordique<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Définir la forêt nordique**

Les dictionnaires français<sup>2</sup> définissent la forêt comme une étendue couverte d'arbres ainsi que comme l'assemblage d'arbres qui occupent cet espace. Les références plus anciennes précisent qu'il s'agit d'arbres plantés pour l'exploitation, qui peuvent faire l'objet d'une surveillance de l'État et dont la jouissance peut être réservée au souverain. Toutefois, l'étymologie du terme renverrait davantage au dehors, c'est-à-dire « hors de là » où vivent les humains, qu'à un lieu pratiqué. Cette ambivalence correspond bien à celle de la forêt comme lieu familier et

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<sup>2</sup> Littré, *Trésor de la langue française*, Le Petit Robert, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.

fréquenté et, à l'inverse, comme endroit inconnu, hors du monde et sauvage. Elle révèle aussi la complexité dans laquelle s'inscrit notre réflexion sur les représentations et images de la forêt nordique, réflexion qu'on souhaiterait ici inclusive et qui implique des champs de savoir divers, comme on le verra dans les contributions qui composent cet ouvrage : études littéraires, théâtrales, folkloriques et artistiques, sémiologie. De la même manière, la nordicité de la forêt concerne de vastes aires géographiques, là où au Nord se terminent les aires forestières, dont on en retrouvera plusieurs dans les textes de ce livre : la Finlande, l'Estonie et la Livonie, les États-Unis, le Québec, l'Acadie, la Colombie-Britannique.

La caractéristique essentielle de la forêt serait de contenir des arbres. Or, l'inventaire du couvert forestier tel qu'il est cartographié par la géographie varie en fonction des critères adoptés pour définir les arbres (selon leur espèce, leur taille, la superficie qu'ils occupent, leur densité, etc.). Aussi, on évacue parfois de cet inventaire des forêts dont les arbres voient leur croissance restreinte par le climat, comme c'est le cas dans les régions nordiques qui nous intéressent et où se trouvent les frontières des forêts tempérées et boréales. Plutôt que de limiter son intérêt aux arbres, la botanique considère les forêts comme des communautés végétales dans lesquelles d'autres espèces de plantes vivent en association avec les arbres et dont ceux-ci ne peuvent se passer. L'écologie systématisé cette idée d'association en décrivant les forêts comme des écosystèmes, c'est-à-dire des ensembles d'êtres vivants qui interagissent dans et avec un milieu. Ces diverses appréhensions de la forêt par les sciences de la nature montrent à quel point elle est un milieu complexe, relatif et multiforme. Par extension, le système écologique de la forêt peut devenir un modèle de pensée pour d'autres domaines, notamment par son extraordinaire faculté à se régénérer, en conservant ce qui pourrit comme un réservoir de mémoire.

## INTRODUCTION

Les représentations culturelles de la forêt relaient l'ambiguïté entre la verticalité des arbres, symbole d'une hiérarchie pour certains<sup>3</sup>, et l'horizontalité « communautaire » de leurs associations renvoyant davantage à la pensée rhizomique<sup>4</sup>, *végétariaf*<sup>5</sup> à gérer et exploiter pour certains, à protéger et conserver pour d'autres, habitat familier ou lieu étranger. Si ces représentations simplifient parfois la forêt et la posent comme opposée à la civilisation – sauf dans le cas des cultures autochtones, qui la perçoivent comme un tout à la fois social, spirituel, culturel et naturel –, elles indiquent aussi avec justesse qu'elle est « un lieu où la logique de distinction s'égare<sup>6</sup> », rejoignant de cette manière la perspective écologique qui considère l'entremèlement des espèces vivantes de la forêt comme si étroit qu'il est difficile d'en extraire un représentant – sauf si on adopte la position scientifique moderne qui cherche à créer des objets de connaissance distincts et dont Bruno Latour a montré le leurre<sup>7</sup>. Mentionnons un seul exemple de cette alliance multiespèces : celle qui lie les arbres et les mycètes, dont l'évolution conjointe a fait l'objet de nombreux travaux<sup>8</sup>. Les forêts mènent ainsi à une manière de penser les assemblages, à laquelle les diverses approches contenues dans ce livre font écho, en montrant notamment à quel point les représentations de la forêt sont liées à la forêt elle-même. Cet enchevêtrement des

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Kentigern Siewers, « Trees », Jeffrey Jerome Cohen [dir.], *Inhuman Nature*, Washington, Oliphant Books, 2014, p. 101-113.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie II*, Paris, Minuit, 1980, 645 p.

<sup>5</sup> Catriona Sandilands, « Vegetate », Jeffrey Jerome Cohen et Lowell Duckert [dir.], *Veer Ecology. A Companion for Environmental Thinking*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> « a place where the logic of distinction goes astray » (Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests. The Shadow of Civilization*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. x).

<sup>7</sup> Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris, La Découverte, 1991, 210 p.

<sup>8</sup> Voir, par exemple, Suzanne Simard et Daniel M. Durrall, « Mycorrhizal Networks: A Review of Their Extent, Function and Importance », *Canadian Journal of Botany*, vol. 82, n° 8, 2004, p. 1140-1165.

processus de représentation et de ceux du vivant<sup>9</sup>, mis de l'avant par la sémiologie et l'écocritique<sup>10</sup>, est d'autant plus visible dans les régions nordiques, où les épreuves du climat ont, du moins jusqu'à récemment<sup>11</sup>, conduit à une forme d'attention privilégiée à l'environnement. Ces réflexions reposent finalement sur une définition de l'espace nordique d'une part comme imaginaire et discours<sup>12</sup>, d'autre part comme réalité sémiologique, culturelle et physique.

### Usages, historique et images de la forêt nordique

Contrairement aux forêts méditerranéennes entièrement exploitées par les Grecs puis par les Romains<sup>13</sup>, les forêts nordiques de l'Europe étaient encore largement intactes au début du Moyen Âge. Elles s'opposaient alors aux agglomérations qui survivaient au déclin de l'Antiquité et étaient associées aux personnes en marge de la société qu'elles abritaient, à distance de la loi, dites parias, fous, bandits, lépreux, maquisards, fugitifs, etc.<sup>14</sup>. L'Église chrétienne, qui domine cette époque, est hostile à la forêt, qu'elle considère comme hors de l'espace humain et dernier refuge du paganisme. Toutefois, c'est aussi dans la forêt que se réfugient les ermites et les saints qui souhaitent vivre à l'écart de la corruption de la société et au plus près de leur dieu. Les chevaliers qui servent la religion cherchent également, dans

<sup>9</sup> « connection between representational processes [...] and living ones » (Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think. Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2013, p. 7).

<sup>10</sup> Serenella Iovino et Serpil Oppermann [dir.], *Material Ecocriticism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2014, 359 p.

<sup>11</sup> « évoluant vers une dénordification différentielle » du Nord (Louis-Edmond Hamelin, *Nordicité canadienne*, Montréal, Hurtubise HMH, coll. « Géographie. Les cahiers du Québec », 1975, p. 121).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Chartier, *Qu'est-ce que l'imaginaire du Nord? Principes éthiques*, Montréal, Imaginaire | Nord, coll. « Isberg » et Harstad, Arctic Arts Summit, 2018, 157 p.

<sup>13</sup> David Attenborough, *The First Eden: The Mediterranean World and Man*, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1987, 240 p.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *op. cit.*

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les romans de chevalerie, l'aventure dans la forêt, afin d'éprouver leur courage, certes, mais aussi pour y trouver leur avenir, orienté par l'agentivité forestière<sup>15</sup>. De manière semblable, la forêt continue d'être un lieu de transformation pour les personnages des contes de fées, un espace favorable à leur évolution s'ils savent en déchiffrer correctement les signes<sup>16</sup>.

De lieu étranger, refuge des marginaux, la forêt deviendra, pendant la période suivante, un refuge de paix pour les humains souffrant de l'agitation de la civilisation<sup>17</sup>, dans une appréhension pastorale de la nature. Le côté sauvage et noir auparavant attribué à la forêt se trouve maintenant dans la société et le cœur des humains, qui devraient tendre à la quiétude des bois. Ceux-ci sont toutefois de plus en plus aménagés en Europe, alors que se développe une gestion des forêts par les États qui systématisent l'objectification utilitaire des arbres en tant que ressource ligneuse. La sylviculture va ainsi aller de pair avec une représentation domestiquée de la nature et des forêts, mises à distance par le paradigme moderne qui abstrait les observateurs (humains) de leur milieu<sup>18</sup>. De la même manière, on conserve des aires protégées par la création de parcs et on délimite des réserves pour l'exploitation forestière, ce qui contribue encore à la réduction du caractère libre de la forêt au profit de son intégration dans le cadre cartésien de la frontière, de la loi et de l'ordre. Ce cadre épistémologique et le monde « désenchanté »

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, « Introduction: Ecostitial », Jeffrey Jerome Cohen [dir.], *Inhuman Nature*, Washington, Oliphant Books, 2014, p. v.

<sup>16</sup> Jack Zipes, « The Enchanted Forest of the Brothers Grimm: New Modes of Approaching the Grimms' Fairy Tales », *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, vol. 62 n° 2, 1987, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> C'est le cas notamment du héros de Gabrielle Roy, Alexandre Chenevert : « Il imagina une forêt profonde. Il allait, se frayant un chemin dans un silence parfait. Il trouvait une cabane abandonnée. [...] Il n'y avait là ni journaux, ni radio, ni réveille-matin. Alexandre s'apaisait. Ses mains commençaient à se desserrer. Sa bouche se déplissa quelque peu. Les arbres de la forêt furent agités par le vent. » (*Alexandre Chenevert*, Montréal, Beauchemin, 1964 [1954], p. 24).

<sup>18</sup> Bruno Latour, *op. cit.*

qu'il crée<sup>19</sup> marquent durablement le rapport à la forêt. À la pastorale qui présente celle-ci comme une source d'harmonie et de sérénité s'opposent les efforts du Romantisme pour « réenchanter » les bois en s'attardant sur leur côté obscur. Dans ce contexte romantique, la forêt nordique sert de repère : « Le Nord c'est la nostalgie, les sentiments sombres, l'infini<sup>20</sup>. »

Tandis que la forêt était encore au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle considérée, à l'image de la nature, comme illimitée, elle deviendra au siècle suivant, en parallèle à une prise de conscience de l'effet de l'activité humaine sur l'environnement, finie, fragile, utile et désirable. Bien que la « nature » reste pour beaucoup une contrainte extérieure qu'il faut abolir pour obtenir une autonomie<sup>21</sup>, plusieurs réalisent que les libertés individuelles et collectives sont tributaires de la santé de ses écosystèmes comme les forêts. Or, en cela, toutes les forêts ne sont pas sur un pied d'égalité : si la destruction des forêts tropicales a attiré et attire beaucoup l'attention, celle des forêts nordiques passe plus souvent inaperçue. Ainsi, alors que les feux qui ont touché l'Amazonie, l'Australie et la Californie en 2019 et 2020 ont été largement médiatisés, des millions d'hectares de forêt sibérienne sont partis en fumée, eux, dans l'indifférence. Par ailleurs, l'imaginaire contemporain de la forêt nordique est tributaire de sa transformation : dans bien des endroits, les forêts primaires ont pour la plupart disparu pour laisser place à des plantations d'arbres, qui réduisent la diversité des espèces et, par conséquent, la capacité de survie et de régénération des forêts. En plus de soulever des inquiétudes environnementales, ces aires de natures hybrides<sup>22</sup> demandent aux humains et

<sup>19</sup> Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life. Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, 213 p.

<sup>20</sup> Stéphane Guéguan, *L'abécédaire du Romantisme français*, Paris, Flammarion, 1995, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Charbonnier, *Abondance et liberté. Une histoire environnementale des idées politiques*, Paris, La Découverte, 2020, 459 p.

<sup>22</sup> Nelly Mäckivi et Riin Magnus, « Hybrid Natures – Ecosemiotic and Zoosemiotic Perspectives », *Biosemiotics*, vol. 13, 2020, p. 1-7.

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aux nonhumains de négocier de nouvelles manières de vivre ensemble. De nombreuses fictions contemporaines participent à l'élaboration d'une écologie intime qui permettrait de développer une sensibilité inédite aux espèces qui peuplent la forêt et qui ont souffert de la « crise de notre sensibilité au monde vivant<sup>23</sup> » autant que du récit de la croissance continue.

### Les réalités sémiologiques et culturelles de la forêt nordique

La forêt nordique se représenterait aisément comme ce que Michel Foucault nomme des « hétérotopies », ces lieux hors de la société civile, spatialement délimités et où le découpage singulier du temps peut se faire sur plusieurs modes<sup>24</sup>. L'indistinction qui y règne peut constituer les forêts, à la manière des espaces de médiation, en « espaces de (re)création et d'appropriation de l'expérience en nous inscrivant dans l'échange<sup>25</sup> ». Si la forêt est souvent représentée comme un lieu d'épreuve ou de flottement identitaires, elle permet aussi l'émergence d'une expérience particulière grâce à « son caractère *virtuel, non finalisé et ouvert* », « son caractère *articulatoire*, à plusieurs niveaux » et son « caractère *autopoïétique*<sup>26</sup> ». En envisageant la forêt dans sa dimension matérielle et pragmatique, on constate qu'elle rend possibles des situations dans lesquelles l'indétermination peut être momentanément résolue et les entités en présence, identifiées<sup>27</sup>. En cela, les représentations de la forêt doivent nécessairement

<sup>23</sup> Estelle Zhong Mengual et Baptiste Morizot, « L'illisibilité du paysage. Enquête sur la crise écologique comme crise de la sensibilité », *Nouvelle revue d'esthétique*, n° 22, 2018, p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *Le corps utopique* suivi de *Les hétérotopies*, Paris, Lignes, 2009, 61 p.

<sup>25</sup> Annabelle Klein et Jean-Luc Brackelaire, « Le dispositif : une aide aux identités en crise », *Hermès*, n° 25, 1999, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72-73. En italique dans l'original.

<sup>27</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007, 61 p.

être considérées comme parties de phénomènes qui incluent observateurs et énonciateurs, rappelant qu'on ne peut obtenir qu'une connaissance située<sup>28</sup> de la forêt nordique.

Les contributions rassemblées dans cet ouvrage tracent les termes d'une poétique de la forêt nordique en abordant notamment les mots utilisés pour nommer celle-ci, mais aussi les expériences sensorielles qu'elle fait vivre et les affects qu'elle suscite. Comme on le verra dans ces études, éprouver la forêt ne se réduit pas à la vue, qui n'est d'ailleurs pas, selon les saisons, le sens le plus approprié pour saisir la diversité forestière, mais sollicite largement l'odorat, l'ouïe, le toucher et même le goût, lorsqu'on s'attarde aux sources de nourriture variées qui s'y trouvent. De la même manière, les diverses langues du Nord sont réputées pour bien exprimer la qualité des silences forestiers, celle de la lumière qui filtre ou non à travers la canopée, les échelles de taille des éléments, l'opposition entre l'infiniment petit et l'infiniment grand. On pourrait ainsi dégager une manière de décrire les caractéristiques de la forêt et d'en faire le récit, en repoussant la forêt nordique jusqu'à ses limites, géographiques – où s'arrête la forêt nordique? –, mais aussi ontologiques – « j'habite une forêt sans arbres », écrit la poète innue Joséphine Bacon; « La forêt comme des locaux de silence désertés », écrit le poète suédois Tomas Tranströmer. La forêt possède ses propres façons d'agir et de communiquer, par un ensemble de signes interconnectés qui sont à la fois constants et variables.

Les représentations de la forêt nordique incluent souvent celles des habitants humains qui les peuplent ou les traversent : randonneurs, chasseurs, Autochtones, bûcherons, etc. À travers eux, elles présentent différents discours (culturels, écologiques,

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<sup>28</sup> Donna Haraway, « Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective », *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, n° 3, 1988, p. 575-599.

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économiques, etc.), pratiques et rapports à la forêt. Espace naturel mais aussi social, la forêt est également un espace genre, qui accueille essentiellement des hommes<sup>29</sup> ou, à l'inverse, qui abrite des femmes<sup>30</sup> et participe à la symbolisation différenciée de la nature. La forêt nordique est aussi représentée avec ses habitants nonhumains, qui se posent comme des obstacles ou des appuis aux protagonistes humains, ou qui occupent parfois même le centre des récits, ce qui favorise une représentation de la forêt et de ses éléments avec leur perspective. Les représentations visuelles de la forêt nordique, tout en étant attentives aux éléments nonhumains, incarnent aussi cette difficulté de transmettre leur point de vue à un public humain et expriment à leur manière l'ambivalence générale de la forêt.

### « Droit » à la forêt<sup>31</sup> / « Droit » de la forêt

La transformation et la destruction des habitats forestiers, la diminution consécutive de la superficie et de la biodiversité forestières, l'action délétère du réchauffement climatique et les feux de plus en plus fréquents et importants qui touchent la forêt nordique alertent sur sa situation et même sur sa capacité de régénérence et de survie. Alors que les forêts du Nord semblaient, encore récemment, infinies, leur déclin en font un bien précieux, que ce soit en tant que ressource industrielle ou récréative ou pour leur valeur intrinsèque. Aussi ces forêts

<sup>29</sup> Comme c'est le cas, par exemple, dans la littérature allemande pour enfants où figure la forêt canadienne (voir Martina Seifert, « Appropriating the “Wild North”: The Image of Canada and Its Exploitation in German Children’s Literature », Emer O’Sullivan et Andrea Immel [dir.], *Imagining Sameness and Difference in Children’s Literature. From the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, Londres, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 215-234).

<sup>30</sup> C'est le cas notamment dans le roman de Marie Le Franc *Hélier, fils des bois* (Paris, Rieder, 1930, 283 p.).

<sup>31</sup> Pour reprendre ici le titre de l'essai de l'environnementaliste inuite du Nunavik Sheila Watt-Cloutier : *Le droit au froid* [*The Right to Be Cold*], Montréal, Écosociété, coll. « Parcours », 2019 [2015], 356 p.

deviennent-elles un marqueur identitaire pour certaines cultures nordiques qui, comme c'est le cas en Estonie, se perçoivent comme particulièrement attentives à la forêt et valorisent un passé lointain et mythifié qui ferait d'elles des « peuples de la forêt ». Ce symbole fait ainsi naître de nouvelles formes d'intérêt pour la forêt, qui ne se limitent plus à sa défense à des fins écologiques ou d'exploitation, mais qui sont aussi motivées par un « droit » légitime à la forêt et un « droit » de la forêt en tant que personnalité juridique. Les diverses nations autochtones des pays nordiques – que ce soit les Atikamekw, qui se considèrent comme « le sang de la forêt<sup>32</sup> », ou les Yakoutes de la République de Sakha, qui s'en proclament les gardiens – sont d'ailleurs au centre de ce débat, puisqu'elles font valoir depuis longtemps l'importance et la valeur de la forêt en dénonçant la surexploitation dont elle fait l'objet.

Historiquement perçues comme des milieux exigeant des savoir-faire spécifiques et nécessaires à la survie, les forêts nordiques font aujourd'hui partie d'un patrimoine à (re)découvrir et à préserver. Tandis que se multiplient les portraits d'arbres<sup>33</sup> et les performances artistiques<sup>34</sup> qui valorisent la singularité et l'individualité des arbres en les identifiant comme quasi-personnes, des ouvrages scientifiques<sup>35</sup> et des livres de vulgarisation<sup>36</sup> qui deviennent des succès de librairie insistent sur l'entremèlement et la collaboration des espèces dans la forêt,

<sup>32</sup> Voir par exemple la pièce de la dramaturge Véronique Basile Hébert, *Notcimik, là d'où vient notre sang* (créeée au Festival Présences autochtones en 2021).

<sup>33</sup> Pour ne nommer qu'un exemple : David Suzuki et Wayne Grady, *Tree: A Life Story*, Vancouver, Greystone Books, 2007, 190 p.

<sup>34</sup> Par exemple, les œuvres d'Annette Arlander : <https://meetingswithtrees.com/>

<sup>35</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, 331 p.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Wohlleben, *La vie secrète des arbres. Découvertes d'un monde caché [The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate. Discoveries from a Secret World]*, Montréal, MultiMondes, 2017 [2016], 259 p.

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et sur la connexion de la forêt avec le monde. Dans les deux cas, on rétablit une attention pour les arbres et le rapport à la forêt et à sa vitalité plurielle, à laquelle nous participons. Replacer ainsi l'humain comme simple élément au sein de la communauté multiespèce complexe que forme la forêt permettrait de penser le « droit » de la forêt et laisse entrevoir une réorganisation symbolique du monde, où l'humain ne se trouve plus au centre et où les relations prennent pleinement leur sens.

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Cet ouvrage s'organise selon quatre grandes orientations qui permettent de réfléchir à la forêt dans le contexte du Nord pluriel : *Penser la forêt*, *Forêts d'émotions*, *Forêts de pensée* et *Forêts de représentations*. Nous avons voulu mettre de l'avant le rapport continu et intrinsèque entre le vivant, le non-vivant et la forêt, mais aussi la possibilité de voir la forêt comme un modèle de pensée qui suscite de l'émotion et des affects, qui induit des modes de pensée et qui peut être vu tant comme une représentation que comme la source de représentations culturelles.

Nous avons demandé à Timo Maran et à Rachel Bouvet de réfléchir à comment *Penser la forêt*, ce qu'ils ont tous deux fait d'une manière complémentaire : Bouvet réfléchit, par l'analyse d'œuvres littéraires, à la figure du refuge, ce qui lui permet de tracer les contours d'un imaginaire de la forêt. À partir des œuvres romanesques de Marie Le Franc, de Sylvain Tesson et d'Audrée Wilhelmy, elle montre que le refuge – ou la cabane – représente un espace intermédiaire qui permet d'habiter la forêt, ou du moins de la côtoyer, en créant un lieu de confort et de sécurité. Maran souhaite de son côté ouvrir la sémiotique vers l'écosémiose en utilisant la forêt comme appui de réflexion, ce qui lui permet de se dégager des concepts usuels liés à la culture et à la communication. Selon lui, la forêt est un écosystème dont

on peut définir les caractéristiques sémiologiques. Il suggère que le système de la forêt, par les surplus qu'il génère au-delà de ses processus en activité, peut servir de modèle dans d'autres champs, par exemple en études culturelles ou sociales. Réfléchir à la forêt apparaît ainsi une manière de réfléchir à l'ordre du monde et de proposer des modèles qui s'appuient sur des bases autres que celles qu'on trouve dans les activités humaines.

La forêt peut aussi inspirer une émotion, l'affection, même l'amour. Sven Blehner ouvre la section sur les *Forêts d'émotions* en se penchant sur la relation affective entre les humains et la forêt. À partir de l'analyse du roman d'Emily Fridlund *History of Wolves*, il suggère que divers types de forêts peuvent susciter différents affects. Il relève que le contact avec celles-ci peut permettre aux humains d'évoluer et de changer leur comportement. Sur le mode de la recherche-création, Monique Durand explore la puissante charge symbolique conférée à la forêt par les humains, ce qui les conduit parfois à l'écriture. Selon elle, les « forêts intérieures », profondes et enfouies dans les modes de pensée, ouvrent un univers tant sacré que profane, tant enchanteur que dangereux, qui met au jour des récits et légendes. Raili Marling s'intéresse à un récit où la forêt n'est plus un décor, mais au contraire à la fois un personnage et un canevas d'écriture : le roman *The Overstory* de Richard Powers lui permet de constater qu'une œuvre littéraire peut prendre l'arbre comme modèle, avec des fils conducteurs dans un système racinaire complexe qui suivent la vitesse de croissance de la forêt. Enfin, Rūta Šlapkauskaitė examine comment le monde végétal a pu être une source simultanée d'inspiration, d'usage, de mémoire et de lutte dans l'œuvre de la peintre canadienne Emily Carr, tel qu'on peut le percevoir dans le roman de Susan Vreeland qui lui est consacré, *The Forest Lover*. Carr, influencée par la pensée autochtone, a ainsi développé une subjectivité qui lui a permis de construire une relation avec le monde végétal.

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Dans la partie sur les *Forêts de pensée*, Luule Epner et Anneli Saro se proposent d'étudier comment la forêt, qui joue un rôle déterminant dans la perception de soi et du monde chez les peuples finno-ougriens, et en particulier chez les Estoniens, a pu être représentée sur les scènes de théâtre comme image, paysage et environnement. Anne-Marie Dionne tente quant à elle de voir si les représentations de la forêt dans les récits pour la jeunesse qui racontent la Déportation des Acadiens peuvent avoir une influence sur les conceptions contemporaines de la forêt chez les jeunes. Dans les deux cas, les autrices explorent le lien entre perception de la forêt et représentations culturelles de cette dernière. Ene-Reet Soovik constate, en étudiant deux poèmes de l'Estonien Jaan Kaplinski, que le lien écosémotique peut aussi être modulé par d'autres champs extérieurs, par exemple l'exploitation économique de la forêt ou la situation politique. Les représentations littéraires de la forêt peuvent enfin révéler des modes de pensée fondateurs, tel que le montre Dalibor Žíla en retrouvant dans un roman récent de Christian Guay-Poliquin une mentalité de garnison, qui pose la forêt comme un espace de danger et la maison isolée comme un espace de protection.

Finalement, dans la partie sur les *Forêts de représentations*, Jane Remm se penche sur la peinture de paysage pour saisir l'esprit d'une époque et l'attitude envers la nature : en passant en revue les peintures estoniennes de la forêt, elle relève que cette dernière a surtout été représentée à distance, peut-être entre autres parce que de l'intérieur, elle fait obstacle à la vue d'ensemble qui préside l'idée du paysage. Dans le cas des représentations intérieures, toutefois, les tableaux examinés convoquent une expérience multisensorielle. En étudiant l'œuvre vidéographique de la Finlandaise Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Sara Bédard-Goulet note que l'artiste remet en question la représentation anthropocentrique de la forêt et qu'elle propose une autre manière de l'habiter qui permettrait de modifier la relation humaine au nonhumain.

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Merili Metsvahi suggère de son côté que cette relation a évolué dans le temps. En analysant la figure du loup-garou dans ses représentations des cinq derniers siècles, elle constate que l'état d'esprit a changé face à la nature et que la relation des humains avec le reste du monde vivant était autrefois plus harmonieuse.

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## Abstracts in English

### Forest and Cabins. Figures of Refuge

Rachel Bouvet

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**Abstract** – This chapter examines different figures of refuge linked to the forest imaginary in order to understand the dynamics that underlies them. Three narratives are analysed from a geopoetic approach using various written sources: the novel *Hélier, fils des bois* (1930) set in the Laurentian Forest by Marie Le Franc, a writer of Breton origin settled in Quebec; *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* (2011), by French travel writer Sylvain Tesson, recounting a stay beside Lake Baikal; and *Blanc Résine* (2019) by Quebec author Audrée Wilhelmy, set in an imaginary boreal forest. The cabin seems to be the only way of dwelling in the forest because of the close contact with nature, the porosity of walls, the materials used (sourced in the forest), and the feeling of security and intimacy that emerges from this ‘wild’ architecture. Initially attention focuses on the rebel figure running away from civilisation, a figure shaped in the occidental imaginary who echoes with eremitic tradition. The chapter then studies the intimate immensity provided by immersion in the immensity on site which constitutes the forest. Finally, the den, possessing the features of an animal shelter, reveals intimacy with the forest environment, with its plants and its fauna.

**Keywords** – Forest, refuge, cabin, lair, rebel, intimate immensity, Marie Le Franc; Sylvain Tesson; Audrée Wilhelmy

## Interior Forests

Monique Durand  
Cégep de Sept-Îles (Canada)

**Abstract** – Historically, forests have produced a mysterious attraction in humans, carrying a powerful symbolic charge. Québec has cleared space in the heart of the forest, although traces remain in its imagined space and in its Native and non-Native literature. My chapter focuses on investigating the deep interior of the forest that is buried in psyche and literature. It evokes a secular and sacred universe, enchanting and dangerous, the embodiment of an alternative relationship to the world, a maelstrom of stories and legends. The forest carries a horizon and the tree carries a way to write.

**Keywords** – Forest, spruce, symbolic charge, pull effect, sacred

## **Exploring the Acadian Forest in Novels for the Youth Recounting the Expulsion of the Acadians**

Anne-Marie Dionne, University of Ottawa (Canada)

**Abstract** – In this chapter, we are exploring the Acadian forest through a series of historical novels on the subject of the Deportation of the Acadians (from 1755 to 1763). A content analysis of these books intended for young readers has enabled us to identify the main themes that define the forest of the 18th century, as well as certain representations that characterise it. We argue that such books could have an effect on the views that today's young people entertain about the forest world.

**Keywords** – Representation of forest, Acadian forest, Expulsion of the Acadians, novel for the youth, historical novel, indigenous stereotypes, sexist stereotypes

## Garrison Mentality and Survival in Christian Guay-Poliquin's *The Weight of Snow*

Dalibor Žíla, Masaryk University (Czechia)

**Abstract** – In his novel, *The Weight of Snow*, Christian Guay-Poliquin narrates a story of a lonesome man in a world hit by a mysterious blackout. After his homecoming in a village, hidden somewhere deep in the forests of Quebec, this nameless hero is exposed to extreme situations and hostilities of nature. There, a spatial dichotomy between the inside and the outside takes place. We observe the interior of a hut, inhabited by the narrator and his guardian, located above the village surrounded by the forest cutting its universe from the rest of the world, giving the narration its secluded atmosphere. Space of protection, source of wood and nutrition, but also of unknown dangers and threats, the forest and its barrier allows the narrator to construct a space of tension which is accentuated by the winter, season in which the story takes place. In order to study this dichotomy, we apply the concept of garrison mentality, introduced by Northrop Frye, and Margaret Atwood's concept of survival. In our contribution, we analyse how these two notions, survival and garrison mentality, as defined by Atwood and Frye, which are linked to abandonment, isolation, separation, fear, and the feeling of threat, are present in this work in connection with its spatiality, especially that of the forest building a natural protective wall.

**Keywords** – Christian Guay-Poliquin, Quebec literature, *The Weight of Snow*, imagined North, imagined end of the world, post-apocalypse, survival, winter, loneliness, forest, rural Quebec

# Abstracts in Estonian

**Süvaökosemiootika.**

**Mets ja semiootiline modelleerimine**

Timo Maran, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Mitmed tänapäeva semiootikas kasutatavad mõisted tulenevad lingvistikast, filosoofiast, kirjandusteadusest ning teistest valdkondadest. Ehedalt ökosemiootilise lähenemise jaoks tuleb meil välja töötada modelleerimisvahendid, mis ulatuvad kaugemale inimkultuuril ja -kommunikatsioonil põhinevatest kujunditest. Peatükis pakun välja ökosemiootilise uurimismudeli, mille põhialusena kasutatakse „metsa“. Selleks tutvustan esmalt Tartu-Moskva kulturisemiootikakoolkonnale tuginedes modelleerimist kui analüüsimeetodit. Seejärel kirjeldan metsa omadusi ökosüsteemina ning selle kogemuslikku tähendust inimeste jaoks. Sellelt aluselt lähtudes tuuakse välja viis põhijoont, mis iseloomustavad metsa kui semiootilist mudelit: 1) tähendusi ning koode jagatakse osaliselt variatsioonidena; 2) tähenduste sallimine on semiootilise suhte põhitüüp; 3) analüüs põhiüksuseks metsas on sõlm või fookuspunkt; 4) metsa omadustel on tugev ontoloogia ja ajalugu; 5) lisaks parajasti aktiivsetele semiootilistele protsessidele esineb semiootilise materjali liiasus. Metsa kui mudelit peetakse kohalikult kujundatuks ning reguleeritavaks, juhuslikuks ja kõikeholmavaks, ent ühtlasi ka hästi lõimituks. Metsamudelit saab rakendada ökosemiootika tavaobjektide uurimisel, kuid seda võib tagasi peegeldada ka üldise, kultuurivõi sotsiosemiootika objektidele. Peatüki lõpetavad ettepanekud metsamudeli edasiarendamiseks praktilise uurimistöö käigus.

**Märksõnad** – Arne Naess, ökosemiootika, ökoloogilised koodid, metsa-ökoloogia, Jakob von Uexküll, modelleerimissüsteemid, Eesti looduskirjandus, semiootiline modelleerimine, märkide üleküllus, tähenduste sallivus

## Metsad ja onnid kui peidupaigad

Rachel Bouvet

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**Resümee** – Siinne peatükk vaatab erinevaid käsitlusi metsa kui varjupakkuvaa paiga kujutlustest, et mõista dünaamikat, millele need kujutlused tuginevad. Analüüsitsakse kolme jutustust: Québecis elava bretooni kirjaniku Marie Le Franc'i romaan „Hélier, fils des bois“ (1930), mille tegevus kulgeb Saint-Laurenti metsades; prantslastest kirjaniku ja reisija Sylvain Tesson'i teost „Dans les forêts de Sibérie“ (2011), mis käsitleb elamist Baikali järve ääres, ja Québeci autori Audrée Wilhelmy teost „Blanc Résine“ (2019), mille tegevus kulgeb väljamõeldud põhjamaises metsas. Ainuvõimalik koht, kus metsas elada, näib olevat hütt, kuna see on tihedas kontaktis loodusega, selle seinad on poorsed, selle ehituseks kasutatakse metsast pärit materjali ja kuna selle „metsik arhitektuur“ pakub turva- ja lähedustunnet. Esmalt pööravad autorid tähelepanu tsivilisatsiooni eest põgeneva mässaja kujundile, mis on moodustunud läänemaailma kujutuspildis ja meenutab erakluse traditsiooni. Seejärel käsitleb peatükk „siseilma avarust“, mida võimaldab sukeldumine „kohapeal avanevasse avarusse“, mida pakub mets ise. Viimaks vaadeldakse uru kujundit, mida iseloomustavad ühelt poolt loomade elukoha ormadused ja mis on samal ajal ka väga tihedas seoses metsakeskkonna ning sealse taimestiku ja loomastikuga.

**Märksõnad** – Mets, varjupaik, onn, pesa, mässaja, intiimne mõõtmatus, Marie Le Franc, Sylvain Tesson, Audrée Wilhelmy

## Afektiivsed metsad Emily Fridlundi romaanis „History of Wolves“ („Huntide lugu“)

Sven Blehner, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Peatükis käsitletakse inimese ja metsa vahelisi suhteid Emily Fridlundi romaanis „Huntide lugu“ eesmärgiga mõista metsa afektiivset rolli inimeste elus. Ühendades afektiteooriat ja ökokriitikat uuritakse peatükis afektiivsele lähilugemisele toetudes, missugused metsad kutsuvad afekte esile ning kuhu inimesed nende metsadega suhestatuna paigutuvad. Esmalt vaadeldakse katkendeid romaanist läbi elatava realsuse tavakogemusliku pingestatuse prisma ning arvestades metsaga koos tundmist ja metsa kaudu teadmist metsa seltsis millekski saamise, nihkumise, muutumise protsessis. Edasi uuritakse, kuidas ning miks kutsub mets esile erinevaid afekte kohalikes ja väljastpoolt tulnutes ning kuidas keskkonna ja mina muutumine põhjustab solastalgilist ängistust. Analüüsist nähtub, et fantasmaatiline, ontiline ja ontoloogiline mets sulanduvad ühte ning kutsuvad esile erinevaid mitmesuguse intensiivsusega afekte olenevalt inimese füüsilisest ja emotсionalsest lähedusest metsaga ning tema metsakogemusest, metsa osaks olemise kogemusest. Metsa afektiivne agentsus etendab samavõrra olulist osa esilekutsutavate afektiivsete reaktsioonide kindlaksmääramisel.

**Märksõnad** – Afektiivne mets, maa-afekt, solastalgia, Emily Fridlund, „Huntide lugu“

## Sisemised metsad

Monique Durand, Cégep de Sept-Îles (Kanada)

**Resümee** – Metsad on inimeste jaoks läbi aegade olnud saladuslikult ligitõmbavad ja kandnud eneses võimast sümboolset jõudu. Québec on enesel pinna rajanud keset metsa. Mets on endiselt alal paikkonna kujutlustes ja iseloomustab niihästi sealset allohtoonset kui ka autohtoonset kirjandusmaastikku. Siinsed read püüavad tungida psüühes ja kirjanduses peituvate siseilma-metsade sügavustesse. Autor kirjeldab maailma, mis on ilmalik ja püha, võlitud ja ohtlik, mis kehastab teistsugust mailmakäsitust, kus on üheks põimunud lood ja legendid. Mets kannab silmapiiri, puu kannab kirja.

**Märksõnad** – Mets, kuusk, sümboolne tähendus, ligitõmbavus, püha

## Intra-aktiivsed seosed

### Richard Powersi romaanis “The Overstory” (“Ilmapuu”)

Raili Marling, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Richard Powersi romaan „The Overstory“ (2018) on suurepärane näide tänapäevastest kliimamuutuskirjandusest, eelkõige kuna romaanis on inimestest olulisem roll puudel. Powersi narratiiv meenutab puud, on kohandatud puude kasvule omasele aeglusele ning selle erinevad lood on omavahel keeruka juurestiku abil seotud. Romaan pole niivõrd inimtegelastest kuivõrd ajaloolistest sündmustest (Ameerika lääneosa koloniseerimine, immigratsioon, Vietnami sõda, haaravate arvutimängude loomine jne), mis mõjutavad nii inimesi kui ka muid elusaid ja elutuid tegustejaid, kes toimivad keerukates kogumites (Deleuze & Guattari 1978) või intra-aktiivsetes seostes (Barad 2007). Powersi tähelepanu puude vastu on hea näide katsetest jäädvustada seda, mida Jane Bennett (2010: 31) nimetab „inimlike ja mitte-inimlike joudude vastastikuseks mõjuks.“ Käesolev peatükk pakub Baradi mudelit järgides selle romaanri materiaal-diskursiivse tõlgenduse, et mõista „koossaamise maailma“ (Haraway 2008: 19).

**Märksõnad** – Difraktsioon, intra-aktiivne lugemine, intra-aktsioon, kliimakirjandus, kriisi tavalisus, Richard Powers

## Tahutuse ökoloogia Susan Vreelandi teoses „Metsaarmastaja“ („The Forest Lover“)

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė, Vilnius University (Leedu)

**Resümee** – Peatükk käsitleb metsade tähtsust Kanada maalikunstniku Emily Carri loomingus, nagu seda kujutatakse Susan Vreelandi romaanis „Metsaarmastaja“. Uusmaterialismi kontseptuaalsetes jälgedes käies pööran tähelepanu taimemaaailma kujutamisele romaanis ühtaegu nii inspiratsiooni, praktiliste kasutusvõimalustele, kultuurimälu kui ka ideoloogilise heitluse allikana. Järgides Carri loomingulist elukaarti Briti Columbias 19. ja 20. sajandi vahetusel uurib romaan, kuidas tema subjektiivsuse kasv kunstnikuna tuleneb tema osadusest provintsi põliselanikega ning metsadega, milles nad elavad. Immersiooni kui ontoloogilise seisundi materiaal-semiootilisest vaatenurgast nähtuna võib Vreelandi romaan metsi tölgendada kosmogooniliste tegutsejatena, hõlmatuna teisenemiste ritta, mis ühendavad Euroopa impeeriumide laienemist ning avangardistlikku kunsti industriaalse modernsuse ökoloogia- ja rassiprotokollide hävituspõhjuga. Neid kontseptuaalseid liitekohti toetavad kultiveerimise, komposti ning tahumise ideed, mis ületavad looduse/kultuuri ning kristluse/põliselanikustatuse narratiivset dialektilat ning kutuvad üles ümber mõtestama strukturaalseid järjepidevuse(tu)si, mis toovad Kanada puid ja inimesi kokku koloniaalsesse ellujäämisfernentikasse.

**Märksõnad** – Tootemisammas, rist, mets, tahutus, kompost, kultiveerimine, immersioon

## **Mets kui kujund, maastik ja keskkond laval. Soome-ugri identiteedi väljendumine teatris**

Luule Epner, Tallinn Ülikool

Anneli Saro, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Peatükis uuritakse, kuidas mets kui soome-ugri rahvaste potentsiaalne ühine platvorm on seotud nende enesetunnetuse ja maailmatajuga ning kuidas neid kujutusi eesti teatris representeeritakse metsa kui metonüümilise kujundi, maastiku ja keskkonnana. Eestlased usuvad, et neil on metsaga tugev side, mis ulatub tagasi iidsetesse aegadesse. Samasugune uskumus on ka paljudel teistel rahvastel, peamiselt metsavööndi põhjarahvastel ja soomeugrilastel.

Teatri ja looduse suhete uurimisel keskendutakse kahele teemale: 1) kuidas metsa kui mentaalset üldistust on laval kujutatud ja 2) kuidas metsa kui fiktioonialset või reaalset kohta on teatris presenteeritud. Peamine probleem seisneb selles, kuidas kohandada üksteisega kaks nii erinevat fenomeni nagu loodus ja kunst ning milliseid strateegiaid nende ühildamisel kasutada.

Nimetatud teemade käsitlemiseks analüüsatakse August Kitzbergi tragöödia „Libahunt“ (1911) ja Aleksis Kivi romaan „Seitse venda“ (1870) lavatölgendusi ning Anne Türnpu pärimusteatri lavastusi nagu näiteks „Isuri epos“ (2015).

**Märksõnad** – Soome-ugri identiteet, eesti teater, mets, maastik, keskkond, pärimusteater

## **Avastamas Akaadia metsasid akaadialaste küüditamist kujutavates noorsooromaanides**

Anne-Marie Dionne, University of Ottawa (Kanada)

**Resümee** – Siinne peatükk esitab sissevaate Akaadia metsadesse ajalooliste romaanide kaudu, mis käitlevad akaadialaste küüditamist (1753–1763). Nende noortele suunatud romaanide sisu analüüsides püiritleb autor põhitteemad, mille kaudu määratleti metsa 18. sajandil, ja toob välja omadused, millega metsa iseloomustati. Autori hinnangul võib sellistel romaanidel olla mõju nüüdisaegsete noorte käsitustele metsakeskkonnast.

**Märksõnad** – Metsa kujutamine, Akaadia metsad, akaadialaste küüditamine, noorsooromaan, ajalooline romaan, põlisrahva stereotüübidi, seksistlikud stereotüübidi

## Eesti mets ja selle käsitlemine luules. Jaan Kaplinski roitmised metsas

Ene-Reet Soovik, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Eestis ollakse uhked riigi kuvandi üle ainulaadse rikkumata looduskeskkonnana, mida enim esindavad metsad ja sood. Tänapäeval aga on see, nii siseriiklikult kui väljapoole projitseeritav kuvand sattunud otsesesse konflikti metsaressursside laialdase majandusliku kasutamisega. Peatükis vaadeldakse kaht proosaluuletust, mis eelnesid tänapäeva metsavaidlustele: Jaan Kaplinski 1991. aastal ilmunud tekste „Läbi metsa“ ja „Metsaalune“. Need ilmusid Eesti taasiseseisvumise ajal ning esitavad luulemina vahetut metsakogemust perioodil, mil tänapäeva metsakujutusi värviv kapitalistlik metsatööstus polnud Eestis veel tärganud, kuid Nõukogude-aegsed võimalikud ideoloogilised piirangud kirjandusele polnud enam aktuaalsed. Peatükis toetatakse kultuurisemiootikast ja ökosemiootikast lähtuvatele mõistetele ning tömmatakse parallele Kaplinski luuletuste ja looduskirjanduse žanri vahel, mida käsitletakse konkreetses kultuuris ja ajas valitsevate keskkonnasuhete mudelina.

**Märksõnad** – Eesti luule, Jaan Kaplinski, semiootika, looduse kirjutamine, piirid, jalutamine

**Garnisonimentaliteet ja ellujäämiskunst  
Christian Guay-Poli奎ni romaanis  
“Le poids de la neige” (“Lume raskus”)**

Dalibor Žíla, Masaryk University (Tšehhi)

**Resümee** – Christian Guay-Poli奎ni romaan „Le poids de la neige“ motiiviks on inimese üksindus saladusliku elektrikatkestuse ajal. Peatege-lane satub äärmuslikesse olukordadesse ja peab kohe pärast sügaval Québeci metsades asuvasse eraldatud sünnikülasse naasmist seisma silmitsilooduse vaenulikkusega. Maad võtab dihhotoomia sise- ja välismaailma vahel. Autor vaatab hütti, kus elavad jutustaja ja tema eest hoolitsev mees, ning mis omakorda on eraldatud külast, mida ümbritseb läbitungimatu mets. Kaitset pakkova ruumi ja tundmatu ohtlik-ähvardava maailma vahelist pinget suurendab talvine aeg, mille käigus loo tegevus toimub. Dihhotoomia uurimiseks rakendab autor Northrop Frye garnisonimentaliteedi põhimõtet ja Margaret Atwoodi ellujäämispõhimõtet. Omalt poolt vaatab autor, kuidas need kaks põhimõtet – ellujäämine ja garnisonimentaliteet – on seotud üksinduse, eraldatuse, eemaloleku, hirmu ja ähvarduse tunnetusega, mis tuleneb siinsel juhul metsakeskkonnast.

**Märksõnad** – Christian Guay-Poliquin, Quebeci kirjandus, „Lume raskus“, kujutlused Põhjast, maailmalõpu kujutlused, postapokalüptilisus, ellujäämine, talv, üksildus, mets, Québeci maapiirkonnad

## Eesti mets maalikunstniku vaatenurgast

Jane Remm, Eesti Kunstiakadeemia

**Resümee** – Loodusmaastik, vaatamine ja maalikunst on läbi ajaloo olnud tihedalt põimunud. Loodusmaal ei ole enamasti olnud maalikunsti peavool, kuid ka see on esindanud ajastu vaimu, suhtumist nii loodusesse kui pilti. Mets on multisensorne keskkond, kus vaateväli on piiratud ning sama oluliseks muutuvad teised tajud. Peatükk vaatleb, milline on olnud eesti maalikunstnike vaatepunkt Eesti metsa kujutades, kuidas on kunstnikud saavutanud metsas olemise tunde. Analüüs aluseks olid Eesti kunstimuuseumites olevad metsa kujutavad maastikumaalid. Selgus, et eesti kunstnikud on metsa maalinud peamiselt kaugemalt vaadatuna, tihti talude, põldude ja karjamaade taustal. Vaated metsale kaugemalt annavad nauditava ülevaate kodumaast. Vähem on vaateid metsa seest. Need, ükskõik kas vaadatud on metsas ringi, metsast välja, vaadet takistavale metsale või metsaalusele, loovad tugevama tunde metsa sees olemisest ja edastavad paremini metsa multisensorset kogemust. Sellistel piltidel on ka rohkem liike ära tunda.

**Märksõnad** – Mets, Eesti maastikumaal, Eesti metsamaal, maastik kui vaade ja kui multisensorne kogemuslik keskkond

**Represeenteerimine ja elunemine.  
Soome metsad neljas  
Eija-Liisa Ahtila videoinstallatsioonis**

Sara Bédard-Goulet, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Luues pealtvaatajate jaoks teistmoodi ruumi võivad videoinstallatsioonid viidata teistsugusele elunemisiisile, mis võib muu hulgas välja viia nihkeni inimeste suhestumises mitteinimestega. Käesoleva peatüki eesmärgiks on analüüsida Soome kunstniku Eija-Liisa Ahtila nelja videoinstallatsiooni [„Maja“ (2002), „Kuulutus“ (2010), „Horisontaalne“ (2011) ning „Uurimused draamaökoloogiast“ (2014)], mis seavad küsimärgi alla antropotsentristliku represeenteerimise ning pakuvad uuendatud vaatenurka puudele ja metsadele, peamiselt näidates Soome metsades levinud harilikku kuuske (*Picea abies*). Pöörates tähelepanu videomontaažile ja sellele, kuidas vaatajad seda laiendavad, ning žanride dekonstrueerimisele ja segamisele, näidatakse peatükis, kuidas need installatsioonid seovad metsa maailma ja inimesega, kuidas nad viitavad mitmeliigilisele tajumisele ja kooselule ning kuidas esitlevad inimeste ja mitteinimiste, näiteks puude, ühist materiaalsust.

**Märksõnad** – Mets, maastik, videoinstallatsioon, representatsioon, elunemine, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, mitteinimene

## Eesti- ja Liivimaa libahundipärimus ja metsa koht selles. Muutused ajas

Merili Metsvahi, Tartu Ülikool

**Resümee** – Peatükis antakse lühike ülevaade eesti libahundipärimusest 16.–17. sajandil ja põodus sissevaade 19.–20. sajandi eesti libahundiustikku mustesse ning vörreldakse varasema ja hilisema perioodi libahundikuju telma. Erinevusi nende kahe perioodi libahundi kujutelma vahel selgitatakse Tim Ingoldi ja Philippe Descola lähenemiste kaudu, mille abil saab talurahva maailmanägemises toimunud muutused seostada üleminekuga eel-modernsest ühiskonnast modernsesse.

16.–17. sajandi Eesti- ja Liivimaa talupoja mõttemaailm ei sisaldanud kategooriat „loodus“ ning inimese ja looma ning organismi ja keskkonna vahelised piirid ei olnud nii jäigad, kui need on tänapäeva inimese maailmamõistmises. Hundiks muutumise võimet tajuti ühe lisavõimalusena uute kogemuste ja hüvede hankimisel. Et 19. sajandi II pooleks oli rahvapärane ontoloogia teisenenud – inimteadvus oli tõstetud ülimuslikku positsiooni ning looma tajuti inimesest alaväärsel asemal – näis inimese loomaks muutumine, kui seda üldse enam tõsiselt võeti, võõra ja ebaloomulikuna.

Ka kujutelm metsast muutus negatiivsemaks. Kui 16.–17. sajandil oli eestlaste seas veel säilinud austav suhtumine metsa, siis 19. sajandi lõpus ja 20. saj alguses tajuti metsa pigem ohtliku ja võõra paigana. 16.–17. sajandi pärimuses oli libahundi tegutsemispaik metsa kõrval sageli nurm, ent 19.–20. sajandi pärimuses tegutseb libahunt valdavalt metsas.

**Märksõnad** – Libahunt, rahvausund, rahvaluule, Eesti- ja Liivimaa, nõiaprotsessid, neoanimism, rahvapärane maailmanägemine



# **Sissejuhatus.**

## **Põhjamaade metsa paigad<sup>1</sup>**

Sara Bédard-Goulet  
Tartu Ülikool (Eesti)

Daniel Chartier  
Université du Québec à Montréal (Kanada)

Prantsuse keelest tõlkinud Reeli Pärn

### **Põhjamaade metsa defineerimine**

Prantsuse sõnaraamatutes<sup>2</sup> on metsa defineeritud puudega kaetud maa-alana, aga ka sellel alal kasvavate puude kogumina. Vanemad viited lisavad, et sinna on istutatud majandusmetsa, et riik võib selle osas järelevalvet teostada ning et sellest kasu-saamine võib olla vaid suverääni privileeg. Samas viitab mõiste etümololoogia pigem millelegi eemal olevale, st „eemal” seal, kus elavad inimesed, ja mitte niivõrd käidavale paigale. Taoline ambivalentsus kirjeldab hästi metsa, mis on ühtaegu tuttav ja küllastatav paik, aga teistpidi ka tundmatu, maailmast eraldi seisev, metsik paik. Siit nähtub ka komplekssus, mis väljendub

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<sup>1</sup> Antud väljaanne on saanud põhiosas toetust Tartu ülikooli projektist ASTRA PER ASPERA, mida rahastab Euroopa Regionaalarengu Fond ning lisarahastust ülikooli Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) kunstide teaduskonnast ja UQAMi rahvusvahelisest põhjala, talve ja Artikaga seonduva tajuruumi uuringute keskusest, Québeci kirjanduse ja kultuuri uuringute keskusest (CRILCQ), UQAMi sihtasutusest ja ettevõttest Énergir; täname neid kõiki.

<sup>2</sup> Littré, Trésor de la langue française, Petit Robert, Prantsuse Akadeemia sõnaraamat.

siinses kogumikus avaldatud põhjamaade metsa erinevates kujutamisviisides ja metsaga seotud kujundites, mis on meie mõistes kaasavad ja – nagu artiklitest välja tuleb – erinevaid teadmisvaldkondi hõlmavad (kirjandus- ja teatriteadus, folkloor ja kunst, semiootika). Põhjamaine mets seostub ka ulatuslike geograafiliste aladega ehk põhjapoolsete piirkondadega kuni metsavööndi piirini, milles mitmeid mainitakse selle raamatu tekstides, nt Soome, Eesti ja Läti, USA, Québec, Akaadia, Briti Columbia.

Metsa esmaseks tunnuseks on puud. Kui aga lähtuda geograafide loodud kaartidest, on metsainventuurid erinevad sõltuvalt sellest, milliseid kriteeriume kasutatakse puude määratlemiseks (liik, kõrgus, nendega kaetud pindala, tihedus jms.). Nii on sellistest inventuuridest vahel jäetud välja need metsad, mille puude kasvu pidurdab kliima, nagu näiteks meid huvitavates põhjapoolsetes piirkondades, kus jookseb paravöötme metsa ja taiga piir. Botaanika aga ei huvitu vaid puudest ja peab metsi taimekooslusteks, kus teised taimeliigid elavad koostoimes puudega, kes ei saaks ilma esimesteta hakkama. Ökoloogias lähenetakse koostoime ideele süsteemselt ning räägitakse metsast kui ökosüsteemist, st teatud keskkonnas elavate ja selle keskkonnaga suhestuvate elusolendite kogumist. See, kui erinevalt tajutakse loodusteadustes metsa, näitab, kui keeruline, suhteline ning mitmetahuline see paik on. Laiemalt võttes võib metsa ökosüsteem pakkuda analoogi teistelegi valdkondadele, näiteks tänu oma imelisele taastumisvõimele, mis hoiab kõduneva ainese mälupangana alles.

Metsa kujutamisel kultuuris tuleb välja ambivalentsus, mis valitseb puude vertikaalsuse ehk mõnede arvates hierarhia sümboli<sup>3</sup> ning puude suhete „kogukondliku” horisontaalsuse

<sup>3</sup> Siewers, A. K. (2014). Trees. In: Inhuman Nature [Koostaja: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen], 101-113. Washington: Oliphant Books.

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vahel, mis viitab pigem risoomi-teooriale<sup>4</sup>, see *elunemine*<sup>5</sup>, mida ühtede arvates tuleks hallata ja kasutada ning teiste sõnul hoida ja kaitsta – ta on kas tuttav elupaik või võõras koht. Kui sellistes käsitlustes esinebki mets vahel lihtsustatud kujul ja vastandub tsivilisatsioonile (v.a põlisrahvastel, kes tajuvad metsa ühe sotsiaalse, vaimse, kultuurilise ja loodusliku tervikuna), siis tuleb neist siiski õigesti välja see, et mets on „paik, kus piiritlemise loogika kaob”<sup>6</sup>, ja nii jõutakse ökoloogiaga samale seisukohale, mille järgi on metsas elavad liigid üksteisega nii tihedalt põimunud, et neist oleks raske üht esindajat välja tuua, kui just ei lähtuta tänapäevase teaduse seisukohast, mis üritab luua eraldiseisvaid teadmiste objekte ja mille petlikkust demonstreeris Bruno Latour<sup>7</sup>. Toogem vaid üks näide sellest liikidevahelisest põimumisest ehk puud ja seened, kelle kooskasvamist on palju uuritud<sup>8</sup>. Metsad panevad niisiis koosluseid tajuma viisil, mida kajastavad mitmed siin raamatus käsitletavad lähenemised ehk näidates eeskätt seda, kui tihedalt on metsa representatsioon seotud metsa endaga. Taoline semiootikas ja ökokriitikas<sup>9</sup> esiletoodud side<sup>10</sup> kujutamis- ja eluprotsesside vahel on eriti silmatorkav põhjapoolsetes piirkondades, kus ilmastikust tingitud

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze G., Guattari, F. (1980). Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie II. Paris: Minuit.

<sup>5</sup> Sandilands, C. (2017). Vegetate. In: Veer Ecology. A Companion for Environmental Thinking [Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen ja Lowell Duckert], 22. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>6</sup> „a place where the logic of distinction goes astray.” Harrison, R. P. (1992). Forests. The Shadow of Civilization, 22. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>7</sup> Latour, B. (1991). Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique. Paris: La Découverte.

<sup>8</sup> Nääts Simard, S., Durrall, D. M. (2004). Mycorrhizal Networks: A Review of Their Extent, Function and Importance. Canadian Journal of Botany, 82, 1140-1165.

<sup>9</sup> Iovino, S., Oppermann S. (2014). Material Ecocriticism [Ed. Serpil Oppermann], Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>10</sup> „connection between representational processes [...] and living ones” Kohn, E. (2013). How Forests Think. Toward and Anthropology beyond the Human, 7. Berkeley: University of California Press.

väljakutsed on vähemalt viimase ajani<sup>11</sup> tekitanud keskkonna osas kõrgendatud tähelepanu. Siinsed mõttearendused käsitavad põhjamaid ühest küljest mõttelise- ja diskursusliku ruumina<sup>12</sup> ning teisalt semiootilise, kultuurilise ja füüsilise realsusena.

### Põhjamaade metsa kasutus, ajalugu ja kujutised

Vastupidiselt vahemerelistele metsadele, mida kreeklased ja seejärel Rooma impeerium väga aktiivselt kasutasid<sup>13</sup>, olid Euroopa põhjaalade metsad keskaja alguses veel suuresti puutumata. Toona vastandusid need antiikajast alles jäänud asulatele ning seostusid heidikute ehk ärapõlatute, hullude, bandiitide, pidalitõbiste, lindpriide, põgenike ja teiste taolistega<sup>14</sup>, kes olid leidnud varjupaika metsast, kuhu seadused ei ulatunud. Sel ajal väga mõjuvõimas kristlik kirik suhtus metsa vaenulikult, sest seda peeti inimesele sobimatuks paigaks ning paganluse viimseks kantsiks. Samas tõmbusid just metsa erakud ja pühakud, kes soovisid elada kaugel ühiskonnas lokkavatest pahedest ning olla võimalikult lähedal oma jumalale. Rüütliromaanides otsivad usu teenistuses olevad rüütlid seiklusi samuti just metsast, küll oma vaprusel proovile panemiseks, aga ka selleks, et metsa agentsuse kaudu oma tulevikku kujundada<sup>15</sup>. Samamoodi on muinasjuttudes mets

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<sup>11</sup> „évoluant vers une dénordification différentielle” du Nord. (Hamelin, L.-E. (1975). Nordicité canadienne. Géographie. Les cahiers du Québec, 121. Montréal: Hurtubise HMH.).

<sup>12</sup> Chartier, D. (2020). Mis on kujutlus põhjast? Eetilised põhimõtted. Isberg, 158. Montréal: Imaginaire | Nord et Harstad. In: „Arctic Arts Summit” konverents.

<sup>13</sup> Attenborough, D. (1987). The First Eden: The Mediterranean World and Man. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

<sup>14</sup> Harrison, R. P. (1992). Forests. The Shadow of Civilization. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, J. J. (2014). Introduction: Ecotential. In: Inhuman Nature [Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen], v. Washington: Oliphant Books.

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tegelaste jaoks muutumise paik, soodustades nende arengut juhul, kui nad oskavad seal leiduvaid märke õigesti lugeda<sup>16</sup>.

Järgmisel ajajärgul muutub mets võõrast kohast ja ärapõlatute pelgupaigast rahusadamaks inimestele, kes soovivad ilmakärist pääseda<sup>17</sup>, loodust tajutakse idüllilisena. Varem metsale omistatud metsikus ja tumedus seostuvad nüüd ühiskonna ja inimhingega, mis peaks janunema metsas valitseva rahu järele. Euroopas hallatakse metsi sihipäraselt aga aina enam, sest riigid võtavad metsad enda kontrolli alla ning objektistavad puid, hakates puitu kui ressurssi süsteemselts kasutama. Metsandus haakub niisiis kontseptsiooniga kodustatud loodusest ja metsadest, mille modernne paradigma<sup>18</sup> inimesest kaugele tõukab, eraldades vaatlejad (inimesed) oma keskkonnast. Samuti luuakse kaitsealasid: rajatakse loodusparke ja pannakse paika majandatavad alad, mis piirab veelgi metsade vaba olemust, lõimides neid pigem kartesiaanliku piiride, seaduse ja korra süsteemiga. Selline epistemoloogiline raamistik ning sellest tulenev maailm, kus „lummus” on hajunud<sup>19</sup>, muudab suhtumist metsa jäädavalt. Metsa kui harmoonia ja rahu idüllile vastanduvad romantismi pingutused metsa „lummust” taastada, rõhudes selle tumedamale poolele. Romantismi kontekstis on põhjamaine mets pidepunktiks: „Põhi, see on igatsus, tumedad tunded, lõputus.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Zipes, J. (1987). The Enchanted Forest of the Brothers Grimm: New Modes of Approaching the Grimms' Fairy Tales. *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 62(2), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Náiteks Alexandre Chenevert, peategelane Gabrielle Roy romaanis: „Ta kujutles sügavat metsa. Ta läks ja rajas endale teed täielikus vaikuses. Ta leidis mahajäetud hurtsiku. [...] Seal polnud ei ajalehti, ei raadiot ega äratuskella. Alexandre rahunes. Ta käed hakkasid tasapisi lõdvestuma. Ta suu polnud enam nii pinges. Tuul raputas puid metsas.” (1964 [1954]. Alexandre Chenevert. Montréal: Beauchemin, 24).

<sup>18</sup> Latour, B. (1991). Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. *Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*. Paris: La Découverte.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, J. (2001). *The Enchantment of Modern Life. Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Guéguan, S. (1995). *L'abécédaire du Romantisme français*, 12. Paris: Flammarion.

Kui veel 19. sajandil peeti metsa looduse eeskujul piirituks, siis järgneval sajandil, kui saadakse teadlikumaks inimtegevuse mõjust keskkonnale, muutub ta piiratuks, hapraks, kasulikuks ja ihaldusväärseks. Kuigi „loodus” on jätkuvalt suuresti väline piiraja, milles tuleb vabaneda, et jõuda autonoomiani<sup>21</sup>, siis mõistavad nii mõnedki, et individuaalsed ja kollektiivsed vabadused sõltuvad metsataoliste ökosüsteemide tervisest. Paraku pole selles küsimuses kõik metsad võrdsed: kui troopiliste metsade hävitamine sai ja saab palju tähelepanu, siis põhjamaade metsade hävingut tihti ei märgata. Kui 2019. ja 2020. aasta metsapõlengud Amazonases, Austraalias ja Californias pälvisid meedia laialdast kajastust, siis keegi ei teinud väljagi miljonite hektarite metsade põlemisest Siberis. Muide, kaasaegne põhjamaade metsaga seostuv kujutuspilt tuleneb metsa muutumisest: paljudes paikades on ürgmets suuresti hävinud ning selle asemel laiuvad istandikud, kus on vähem liigirikkust ja seetõttu ka väiksem metsade vastupanu- ja taastumisvõime. Lisaks sellele, et sellised hübriidsete põimingutega loodusladad<sup>22</sup> tekitavad muret loodusloiu seisukohast, peavad inimesed ja teised liigid leidma seetõttu ka uued viisid, kuidas kõrvuti koos elada. Paljud kaasaegsed romaanid on välja pakkunud lahendusi, kuidas jõuda omavahel tihedalt läbipõimunud ökoloogiani, mis võimaldaks olla senisest palju tundlikum metsas elavate liikides suhtes, kes on kannatanud „kriisis, mis tekkis meie tundetusest eluslooduse vastu”<sup>23</sup>, nagu ka pideva majanduskasvu narratiivist.

<sup>21</sup> Charbonnier, P. (2020). Abondance et liberté. Une histoire environnementale des idées politiques. Paris: La Découverte.

<sup>22</sup> Mäekivi, N., Magnus, R. (2020). Hybrid Natures – Ecosemiotic and Zoosemiotic Perspectives. Biosemiotics, 13, 1–7.

<sup>23</sup> Zhong Mengual, E., Morizot, B. (2018). L'illisibilité du paysage. Enquête sur la crise écologique comme crise de la sensibilité. Nouvelle revue d'esthétique, 22, 87.

## Põhjamaade metsa semiootilised ja kultuurilised tegelikkused

Põhjamaade metsa võiks vabalt võrrelda sellega, mida Michel Foucault nimetab „heterotoopiateks”, nendeks ühiskonna-välisteks paikadeks, mis on ruumiliselt piiritlemata ja kus ajal on omapärane võime jaguneda ühikuteks eri tasanditel<sup>24</sup>. Et metsades valitseb eristamatus, võivad nad muutuda meditatsioonipaikade moodi „kogemuse (taas)loomise ja sellega kohanemise aladeks ja kaasata meid osalistena sellesse protsessi.”<sup>25</sup> Kuna metsa on kujutatud tihti katsumuste paiga või ebapüsiva identiteediga kohana, siis võimaldab ta esile kerkida omapärist laadi kogemusel ja seda tänu oma „virtuaalsele, lõpetamata ja avatud olemusele,” oma „liigendatud, mitmetasandilisele olemusele” ja oma „autopoetilisele olemusele”<sup>26</sup>. Kujutades metsa selle materiaalses ja pragmaatilises mõõtmes, mõistame, et seeläbi muutuvad võimalikuks olukorrad, kus määramatus korricks lahendatakse ja olemasolevad entiteedid tuvastatakse<sup>27</sup>. See tähendab, et metsa representatsioone tuleb kindlasti käsitleda osana fenomenidest, milles osalevad nii vaatlejad kui lausujad ning pidada meeles, et võime põhjamaade metsast saada vaid olukorralise teadmise<sup>28</sup>.

Siias kogumikku koondatud artiklid kompavad põhjamaise metsa poeetika tingimusi, rääkides eeskätt selle väljendamiseks kasutatud sõnadest, aga ka sellest johtuvatest meebleistest kogemustest ja tema tekitatud seisunditest. Nagu tekstidest nähtub, ei saa metsa kogeda vaid silmadega, seda enam, et

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, M. (2009). Le corps utopique, Les hétérotopies. Paris: Lignes.

<sup>25</sup> Klein, A., Brackelaire, J.-L. (1999). Le dispositif: une aide aux identités en crise. Hermès, 25, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 72-73. Rõhutused kursiivis pärinevad originaalist.

<sup>27</sup> Barad, K. (2007). Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. Feminist Studies, 14(3), 575-599.

sõltuvalt aastajast ei pruugi nägemismeel metsa mitmekesisuse tabamiseks sobivaim ollagi ja vaja läheb eeskätt haistmis-, kuulmis-, kompamis- ja sealt leitavate toiduallikate puhul isegi maitsmismeelt. Nii on ka põhjamaades kõneldavad keeled tuntud selle poolest, et suudavad hästi väljendada metsa vaikuste olemust, valgust, mis kas kumab läbi puuvõrade või mitte, asjade omavahelist mõõtkava, ääretult väikese ja tohutult suure vahelist vastandumist. Sellest võiks tuletada omaette meetodi metsa omaduste kirjeldamiseks ja seda siis ka kasutada, kombates põhjamaade metsa nii geograafilisi piire (kus lõpeb põhjamaine mets?) kui ka selle ontoloogilist otsa: „Ma elan metsas, kus pole puid,” kirjutab innu luuletaja Joséphine Bacon; „Mets kui mahajätud vaikuse paigad,” kirjutab rootsi poeet Tomas Tranströmer. Metsal on oma toime- ja suhtlusviisid, mis kasutavad ühtaegu jäälvate ja muutuvate, omavahel läbipõimunud märkide kogumi.

Põhjamaist metsa on tihti kujutatud koos seal elavate või seda külastavate inimestega: matkajate, jahimeeste, põliselanike, puuraidurite ja teistega. Nende kaudu väljendatakse eri diskursuseid (kultuurilisi, ökoloogilisi, majanduslikke jne), tavasid ja metsaga suhestumise võimalusi. Looduskeskkonna, aga ka sotsiaalse paigana on mets ühtlasi soopõhine, võttes eeskätt vastu mehi<sup>29</sup> või vastupidi, olles koduks naistele<sup>30</sup> ning annab nii oma panuse looduse kujutamisele diferentseeritud sümbolite kaudu. Põhjamaade metsa kujutamisviisides esineb ka mitteinimestest metsaelanikke, kes inimsoost peategelasi kas takistavad või aitavad, kusjuures vahel on nad hoopis ise peategelaseks, mis võimaldab metsa ja selle osi nende vaatepunktist avada.

<sup>29</sup> Nagu juhtub näiteks Kanada metsi kujutavas Saksa lastekirjanduses (vt Seifert, M. (2017). Appropriating the „Wild North”: The Image of Canada and Its Exploitation in German Children’s Literature. In: Imagining Sameness and Difference in Children’s Literature. From the Enlightenment to the Present Day [Ed. Emer O’Sullivan ja Andrea Immel], 215–234. London: Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>30</sup> Näiteks Marie Le Franc’i raamatus „Hélier, fils des bois” (1930, Paris: Rieder).

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Põhjamaade metsa visuaalsed representatsioonid pööravad küll tähelepanu ka inimvälistele elementidele, kuid väljendavad seeläbi samas seda, kui keeruline on inimpublikule nende perspektiivi edastada ja kajastavad niiviisi metsa üldist ambivalentust.

### „Õigus” metsale<sup>31</sup>/Metsa „õigus”

Põhjamaade metsi puudutav elupaikade muutumine ja hävamine, metsade pindala ja elurikkuse pidev vähenemine, kliima-soojenemise kahjulik mõju ja aina sagedasemad ning ulatuslikumad tulekahjud saadavad hädasignaali nende metsade olukorra ja isegi nende taastumis- ja ellujäämisvõime kohta. Kuigi veel hiljuti näisid põhjamaised metsad lõputud, siis nende allakäik muudab nad hinnaliseks, olgu siis tööstuse või puhkekorralduse seisukohast või ka nende loomuomase väärtsuse tõttu. Nii muutuvad metsad teatud põhjamaiste kultuuride nagu eestlaste jaoks identiteedimarkeriks, sest peetakse end metsa suhtes eriti hoolivaks ning hoitakse au sees kauget ja mütologiseeritud minevikku, mis on neist kujundanud n-ö metsarahva. Selline sümbol tekib metsa vastu uut tüüpi huvisid, mis ei piirdu enam metsa kaitsmisega ökoloogilises või metsamajanduslikus mõistes, vaid mis tõukuvad tihti õigustatud „õigusest” metsale ja ka metsa kui juriidilise isiku „õigusest”. Debatide keskmes on mitmed põlisrahvad põhjamaades (näiteks atikamekid, kes peavad end „metsa vereks”<sup>32</sup> või Sahha Vabariigi jakuudid, kes nimetavad end metsa vardjaiks), sest nad on juba ammu röhutanud metsa tähtsust ja väärtsust ning rääkinud avalikult metsa liigsest ekspluateerimisest.

Ajalooliselt on põhjamaiseid metsi peetud nõudlikuks keskkonnaks, kus ellujäämine eeldab teatud tüüpi oskusi, tänapäeval

<sup>31</sup> Viide Nunavikist pärit inuiti looduskaitsja Sheila Watt-Cloutier’ esseele: (2019 [2015]). Õigus tunda külma [The Right to Be Cold]. Parcours. Montréal: Écosociété.

<sup>32</sup> Näiteks dramaturg Véronique Basile Hébert’i näidend „Notcimik, là, d'où vient notre sang” („Notcimik, koht, kust pärineb meie veri”; esitati 2021. aasta festivalil „Présences autochtones”).

on nad aga osa (taas)avastamist ja säilitamist väärivast pärandist. Sel ajal kui puudest luuakse üha enam kirjandus<sup>33</sup> ja kunstiteoseid<sup>34</sup>, kus tõstetakse esile nende erilisust ja isikupära, kõrvutades neid vaat et inimestegagi, ilmub ka teadustöid<sup>35</sup> ja raamatumiügi edetabelites troonivat populaarteaduslikku kirjandust<sup>36</sup>, kus röhutatakse liikide omavahelist põimitust ja koostööd metsas, nagu ka metsa seost maailmaga. Mõlemal juhul põöratakse tähelepanu puudele, seotusele metsaga ja metsa mitmetahulisele elujõulisusele, milles oleme osalised ka meie. Taandades inimese uuesti vaid üheks elemendiks selles mitmeliigilises ja keerulises kogukonnas, mis moodustab metsa, saame rääkida metsa „õigusest” ja võimalusest maailma sümboolseks ümberkorraldumiseks, kus inimene pole enam kesksel kohal ja kus seosed omandavad oma õige tähenduse.

\* \* \*

Kogumik on jagatud neljaks suuremaks osaks, mis kajastavad metsateemalisi mõtisklusi eri põhjamaade kontekstis: „Mõeldes metsast”, „Tunnete metsad”, „Mõttmetsad” ja „Kujutatud metsad”. Oleme soovinud röhutada elusa, elutu ja metsa vahelist pidevat ja loomuomast sidet, ent ühtlasi pakkuda võimalust näha metsa mõtteviisina, mis tekib tundeid ja avaldab mõju, mis paneb teatud moel mõtlema ja mida võib võtta nii kujutatu enda kui kultuurilise kujutamise allikana.

Palusime Timo Maranil ja Rachel Bouvet'l arutleda, kuidas „Mõelda metsast” ja nad tegid seda üksteist täiendaval moel:

<sup>33</sup> Vaid üks näide sellest oleks Suzuki, D., Grady, W. (2007). Tree: A Life Story. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

<sup>34</sup> Näiteks Annette Arlanderi teosed: <https://meetingswithtrees.com/>

<sup>35</sup> Lowenhaupt Tsing, A. (2015). The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>36</sup> Wohlleben, P. (2016). The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate. Discoveries from a Secret World. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

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Bouvet analüüsib kirjandusteoseid ja arutleb varjupaiga teemadel, piiritledes metsaga seotud kujundite ruumi. Ta lähtub Marie Le Franc'i, Sylvain Tessoni ja Audrée Wilhelmy teostest ning näitab, kuidas peidupaik (või hütt) esindab vahepealset ruumi, mis võimaldab metsas elada või vähemalt seal viibida, luues mugava ja turvalise paiga. Maran soovib omalt poolt liikuda semiootikast edasi ökosemiootikani ja tugineda metsale, vabanedes seeläbi kujunditest, mida on tavapäraselt seostatud inimkultuuri ja -kommunikatsiooniga. Tema sõnul on mets semiootiliste omadustega ökosüsteem. Ta väidab, et metsamudelit saaks tänu oma aktiivsetes protsessides tekkinud materjali liiasusele rakendada teisteski valdkondades, näiteks kultuuriuuringutes või sotsioloogias. Metsast mõtlemine tähendab seega ühtaegu mõtlemist maailmakorrrast ja võimaldab pakkuda mudeliteid, mis ei tugine inimtegevusega seotud alustele.

Mets võib tekitada ka teatud emotsiioni, õrnust, isegi armastust. „Tunnete metsade” avaloos uurib Sven Blehner inimeste ja metsa vahelist afektiivset suhet. Ta analüüsib Emily Fridlundi romaan „History of Wolves” ning pakub välja, et eri tüüpi metsad võivad tekitada erinevaid afekte. Ta leibab, et inimene võib kokkupuutest metsaga areneda ja oma käitumist muuta. Monique Durand tegeleb korraga teaduse ja loominguga ning uurib inimeste poolt metsale omistatud võimsat sümboolset jõudu, mis paneb neid vahel ka kirjutama. Tema sõnul on meie mõttemallidesse peidetud sügavad „sisemised metsad”, mis avavad ühtaegu püha ja ilmaliku maailma, mis on nii lumnav kui ka ohtlik ja kus kerkib esile lugusid ja legende. Raili Marling huvitub ühest loost, kus mets pole pelgalt tegevuspaiak, vaid hoopis ühtaegu nii tegelane kui lõuend: Richard Powersi romaan „The Overstory” tööstab tema sõnul, et kirjandusteos võib võtta eeskuju puust ja siduda erinevad lood omavahel keeruka juurestiku abil, mis kohanduvad metsa kasvule omase aeglusega. Rūta Šlapkauskaitė uurib lõpetuseks seda, kuidas Kanada maalikunstniku Emily

Carri loomingus võib taimemaailm olla korraga inspiratsiooni, kasutusvõimaluste, mälu ja heitluse allikaks, nagu seda kujutab Susan Vreeland temast kirjutatud romaanis „The Forest Lover”. Põliselanike mõttelaadist mõjutatud Carr arendas välja subjektiivsuse, mis võimaldas tal taimemailmaga suhestuda.

„Mõttemetsade” osas uurivad Luule Epner ja Anneli Saro seda, kuidas mets, mis mängib määrama tähtsusega rolli soomeugrilaste ja eeskätt eestlaste enesetunnetuses ja maailmatajus, on leidnud laval käsitlust kujundi, maastiku ja keskkonnana. Anne-Marie Dionne üritab omalt poolt välja selgitada, kas see, kuidas on metsa käsitletud akaodialaste küüditamist kujutavates noorsooromaanides võib mõjutada seda, kuidas nüüdisaegsed noored metsakeskkonda tajuvad. Mõlemal juhul uurivad autorid seost metsa tunnetamise ja selle kultuuriliste representatsioonide vahel. Ene-Reet Soovik analüüsib kaht Jaan Kaplinski luuletust ja tõdeb, et ökosemiootilist suhet võivad muuta välised valdkonnad nagu näiteks metsaressursside majanduslik kasutamine või poliitiline olukord. Metsa kujutamistel kirjanduses võib esile kerkida täiesti uusi mõttemallide, nagu töestab Žila Dalibor, kes leiab ühest hiljutisest Christian Guay-Poliquin’i romaanist garnisonimentaliteedi, mis väidab, et mets on ohtlik paik ja eraldatud maja kaitset pakkuv ruum.

Viimases ehk „Kujutatud metsade” osas tegeleb Jane Remm maastikumaaliga, et tabada ühe ajastu vaimu ja suhtumist loodusesse: uurides Eesti metsamaale, väidab ta, et metsa on neis kujutatud eeskätt kaugemalt vaadatuna, muuhulgas võib-olla seetõttu, et metsa seest oleks raske tajuda tervikpilti, mis on maastiku puul oluline aspekt. Seestpoolt kujutatud metsamaalidega kaasneb aga multisensorne kogemus. Sara Bédard-Goulet analüüsib Soome kunstnik Eija-Liisa Ahtila videoloomingut ning märgib, et kunstnik seab küsimärgi alla metsa inimkeskse kujutamise ning pakub eluks metsas välja

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teistsuguse viisi, mis võimaldaks inimeste ja mitteinimiste vahelise suhte ümber kujundada. Merili Metsvahi pakub omalt poolt välja, et see suhe on ajas arenenud. Ta uurib libahundi kujutamist viimase viie sajandi jooksul ja tõdeb, et suhtumine loodusesse on muutunud ning et vanasti oli inimeste ja muu eluslooduse vaheline suhe harmoonilisem.

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# The Northern Forest

## *La forêt nordique*

This book puts forward the continuous and intrinsic relationship between the living, the non-living, and the forest as well as the possibility of seeing the forest as a model of thought that evokes emotion and affects, induces ways of thinking, and which can be seen both as a representation and the source of cultural representations.

*Cet ouvrage permet de mettre de l'avant le rapport continu et intrinsèque entre le vivant, le non-vivant et la forêt, mais aussi la possibilité de voir la forêt comme un modèle de pensée qui suscite de l'émotion et des affects, qui induit des modes de pensée et qui peut être vu tant comme une représentation que comme la source de représentations culturelles.*

Sara Bédard-Goulet, Sven Blehner, Rachel Bouvet, Daniel Chartier, Anne-Marie Dionne, Monique Durand, Luule Epner, Timo Maran, Raili Marling, Merili Metsvahhi, Jane Remm, Anneli Saro, Rūta Šlapkauskaitė, Ene-Reet Soovik, Dalibor Žíla.

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