'GARDENING IN EDEN': WASTED LIVES, OR DETOXIC IDENTITIES IN GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ'S *TURTLE VALLEY* AND BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *PRODIGAL SUMMER**

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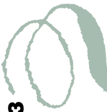
Abstract

This paper analyzes the inflection of a border-crossing ecological concern on the regional cultures of settlement through Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *Turtle Valley* (2007) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000). Their engagement with the contingent position of the farmers in the British Columbia Shuswap region, and the southern Appalachian Zebulon County resituates the self. The struggle for production is substituted by a revisionist attitude that relocates (wo)men and nature in a sustainable coexistence that approaches the human species and others. The ecological awareness of these novels uses a postindustrial landscape where human bodies and lives exhibit the malaise inflicted on the environment; they increasingly become waste(d) and toxic, and their habitat becomes a threat, also materialized in (post)natural catastrophes impelling the relocation of human communities, or business reinvention. The human wastification of Eden is instrumental to launch a revision that detoxifies identity thanks to a remodeled bond with nature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, *Turtle Valley*, Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer.*



'AJARDINANDO EL EDÉN': VIDAS MALGASTADAS, O IDENTIDADES DESINTOXICADAS EN *TURTLE VALLEY,* DE GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ, Y *PRODIGAL SUMMER,* DE BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la inflexión de una preocupación ecológica transfronteriza entre las culturas regionales de asentamiento a través de *Turtle Valley* (2007), de Gail Anderson-Dargatz, y *Prodigal Summer* (2000), de Barbara Kingsolver. En ellas, su compromiso con la posición contingente de los agricultores en la región de Shuswap, en la Columbia Británica, y el condado de Zebulon, al sur de los Apalaches, resitúa al sujeto. El compromiso con la producción deja paso a una actitud revisionista que posiciona a hombres, mujeres y naturaleza en una convivencia sostenible donde se aproximan la especie humana y otras. La conciencia ecológica de estas novelas surge de un paisaje postindustrial donde los cuerpos y las vidas humanas exhiben el malestar infligido al medio ambiente; se transforman crecientemente en desechos/desechados materiales y tóxicos, y su hábitat en una amenaza evidente en catástrofes (pos)naturales que fuerzan la reubicación de comunidades humanas, o la reinvención empresarial. La devastación humana del Edén es fundamental para lanzar una revisión que desintoxique la identidad, gracias a un vínculo transformado con la naturaleza.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, *Turtle Valley*, Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer.*

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> Jane began to notice news items of the kind she'd once skimmed over. Maple groves dying of acid rain, hormones in the beef, mercury in the fish, pesticides in the vegetables, poison sprayed on the fruit, God knows what in the drinking water. She subscribed to a bottled spring-water service and felt better for a few weeks, then read in the paper that it wouldn't do her much good, because whatever it was had been seeping into everything. Each time you took a breath, you breathed some of it in. She thought about moving out of the city, then read about toxic dumps, radioactive waste, concealed here and there in the countryside and masked by the lush, deceitful green of waving trees.
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> Margaret Atwood, "The Age of Lead"

INTRODUCTION

Filtered through the voice of the omniscient narrator, the excerpt above reveals the growing ecological awareness developed by Jane, the protagonist of Margaret Atwood's "The Age of Lead" ([1991] 1998). The story is one of the ten short narratives in the acclaimed *Wilderness Tips*. Atwood collects under that title the snapshots that, in mosaic form, photograph the iconic symbol once able to stabilize the tottering national imaginary of fraying identities. In this sense, "The Age of Lead" juxtaposes the late twentieth century, a time of ecocide and personal disorientation for Jane, to a time of direct strife with natural forces, the time of the Franklyn Expedition, which, in 1845, purported to find a northwest passage through arctic Canada to reach the Pacific, and open new trade routes to India. Its unhappy outcomes, a conjunction of adverse climatic hazards, and the lead poisoning of the sailors produced by the newly implemented technology of food durability, unveil an inhospitable wild nature, which also cemented a truly Canadian collective experience. Significantly, the lead of the story is a primeval antecedent of the postindustrial landscape of "toxic dumps" and "radioactive waste" (Atwood 1998, 172), which Jane detects as dangerously conspicuous, an inheritance of the juncture of colonialism and ecological disrespect that the story spreads on both sides of the US-Canadian border. In contrast to the seemingly pristine arctic nature of Franklyn's time, and her ecological interest notwithstanding, Jane's visibly polluted version is incapable of endowing her with the image of personal and national homogeneity that she desperately hankers after, while it also launches the need for an ethical relocation in relation to nature.

This paper moors the present-day production of (human) waste (Bauman 2004), the contemporary toxification of the environment (Deitering 1996), and the ethical reformulation of rural identities *vis-à-vis* ecological concerns (Guattari [1989] 2000; Campbell 2018), north and south of the US-Canadian frontier. The regional atmosphere of Canadian Gail Anderson-Dargatz's novel *Turtle Valley* ([2007] 2008)

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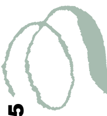
and American Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* ([2000] 2013) reflect an ethical stance of nonbinary, sustainable coexistence: it approaches the farmland and the woodlands, the human species and others. While both novels emphasize the effects of wastification, and the tangible connection between such a factor and communal spirit, they insist on detoxifying identity thanks to a remodeled bond with nature. As the result of their inescapable path to economic progress, their settings like "all localities [...] have to bear the consequences of modernity's global triumph," which makes them participants in what Zygmunt Bauman calls the "third, most prolific [...] 'production line' of human waste or wasted humans" (2004, 6). Significantly, those wasted humans are "the 'excessive' and 'redundant,'" or "the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay" (2004, 5). According to Bauman, the production of wasted humans needs to be read as "an inevitable outcome of modernization," and also "an inseparable outcome of modernity" (5). In the project of establishing and solidly rooting social order, Bauman affirms, "each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place,' 'unfit' or 'undesirable'" (5).

In *Prodigal Summer* and *Turtle Valley*, Bauman's unfit are the flagbearers of a detoxification process articulated via what Félix Guattari terms dissent ([1989] 2000; Pindar and Sutton 2000, 11); namely, a process of activation of social singularity and construction of subjectivity by restoring a mutually nurturing nexus with their natural and cultural habitats. Unlike the economic path promoted by globalization, that bond of interdependency dismisses "degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of 'making a living'" (Bauman 2004, 5). Instead of participating in and upholding the ancestral dualities that have institutionalized anthropocentric human rights of unlimited exploitation, both novels are nourished by a transversal type of ecology, since "nature cannot be separated from culture, in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems," as Félix Guattari states (2000, 28). Accordingly, he continues, understanding how the social and the universal realms function demands a type of reciprocity with the natural that disregards the clear-cut ideological scaffolds legitimating the narratives of capitalism and imperialism (28).



In "The Three Ecologies," Guattari blends philosophy and ecology to coin the portmanteau *ecosophy*. The term assembles the environment, human subjectivity and the social relations given among individuals, and it is governed by a balanced interaction among the intersecting ecologies, to eventually detect and fully exploit alliances among diverse regimes, like animal-non animal, natural-cultural, or signifying-non-signifying (Campbell 2018, 73). At first sight, the ecosophical principles are indebted to the deep ecology branded by Arne Naes in the early 1970s, especially concerning the value of all living beings, be they of practical use or not for humans, and their capitalist designs (Witoszek and Lee Mueller 2017). The matrix of dissensus is, therefore, easily visible to suture the traditional schism between the natural and the social. In turn, the former greatly determines the latter, and the reconceptualization of the exploitative reliance on nature will open an avenue for a reconfigured realm of individual subjectivity and social interactions of unitary solidarity. In light of the pressing ecological crisis, there is need of a response that, in Guattari's opinion, must be of "global scale, provided

that it brings about an authentic political, social and cultural revolution" (2000, 18). According to him, the ultimate aim will then be "reshaping the objectives of the production of both material and immaterial assets" (2000, 18). The global response, however, can hardly conceal its effects on minor spatial scales of locality or regionality, on the one hand, and, on the other, on "molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire" (Guattari 2000, 18). Both scenes have been filtered in different forms by the imbrication of colonialist and capitalist narratives, and their destructive effects on the environment, subjectivity and social relations. Detoxifying the identities of postindustrial landscapes through ecosophy is consequently an insurgent response that, in different forms, Anderson-Dargatz's and Kingsolver's novels implement. While the former sides with a reconfiguration of Canadian settler subjectivity in terms of new attitudes to the damaged environment, the latter implements a personal and collective reinvention, much of which is also nurtured on sustainable relations with the natural habitat. These relations part ways with massive production and deprecation. In both, as Guattari holds in his theoretical explanation, there reigns the principle that "ecology questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations" (2000, 35). Additionally, I would argue that the power asymmetry of colonialist ideology is also exposed, and, as happens with capitalistic structures, unveiled in its "sedative limitation" (Campbell 2018, 73).

GARDENING IN EDEN VS. ECOLOGIES OF RESINGULARIZATION

The role of modern mass media in that sedative homogenization of the human collective, involved in its struggle to tame the natural environment, comes to the fore in Kingsolver's fiction shortly after its start. In *Prodigal Summer*, "Gardening in Eden" is the title of a weekly column in the Egg Fork town gazette, which offers practical advice for farmers (Kingsolver 2013, 35).[1] The title resounds with biblical echoes on the preservation of paradise (Gen 2, 3; Eze 28, 31; Gen 2, 8), which needs to be further embellished, once given to its dwellers (Gen 2, 15).[2] Like *Turtle Valley*, *Prodigal Summer* is nurtured by a sense of community stitched by the mastery of the natural habitat, and the maximization of its production, which is partially fostered

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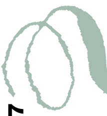
[1] Turner (1996) evocatively uses the myth of the American garden to suggest that it is construed on dualities like culture/nature or human/nature, and proposes a revision based on ecological lenses. His analysis uses the biblical gift to humans as the "lords of creation" to eventually suggest that it is imbued with responsibility for nature, and proposes going beyond its vernacular meaning of "patch" and "yard" to incorporate the interdependency between the poles, and introduce the role of humans as mediators. Accordingly, the American garden will use constructively the power to transform nature, evolve, and encompass death and change (Turner 1996, 51).

[2] Given the Christian background of most immigrants to North America, the right to natural resources was legitimated early. This anthropocentric right is established on the premise that "nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" (White 1996, 14).

from the pages of the newspaper. In this sense, most of the Shuswap Thompson area of the Canadian British Columbia, Turtle Valley in Anderson-Dargatz's narrative, and the fictional Zebulon County, US southern Appalachia in Kingsolver's, have turned at the end of the twentieth century into what Cynthia Deitering calls "riskscapes" (1996, 200), that is, spaces whose resources have been "used up" to no longer be "useful," but "harmful" for humans.[3] Deitering's study of the 1980s novel concludes that, in being a reflection of a society self-blamed for having produced postindustrial landscapes, these novels raise environmental consciousness (1996, 202), as Anderson-Dargatz's and Kingsolver's also do.

Both novels set in conversation two opposite impulses: first, one inspired on biblical genesis, which endows humans with free access to the environment, while the struggle with nature reinforces community building; and, second, the ecosophical response to such an unquestioned right in the form of an ecology of resingularization (Guattari 2000, 44), which can only be articulated on personal dissent as a primary step to a reorganization of subjectivity and social structures, and reliant on a nonbinary conceptualization of the relation between culture and nature. Anderson-Dargatz's region of Turtle Valley is a geography of toxic colonialist impulses, since for most of the twentieth century, John Weeks's homestead gradually expanded onto native lands to be a part of a riskscape of forest felling, plagued with farms of fast animal breeding, and exhaustion of productive fields, dependent, in turn, on native low-waged labor.[4] An extenuation of resources advances the contemporary abandonment of the fields inherited by John's daughter, Beth, and her husband Gus Svenson. The low prices of the early twenty-first century global recession are the last straw, which adumbrates the porosity of regional structures to global pressures, be they economic or ecological.



In such a state of affairs, the settler society of the novel and its appropriation of the land and resources have reached a dead end, broadly speaking, and apparent in an all-subsuming malaise. On the verge of the mandatory evacuation required by the proximity of an unstoppable wildfire, Katrine Weeks returns home to help her elderly parents (Goldman 2008): Beth, affected by dementia, and Gus, in the last stage of a terminal prostate cancer. In the company of her nurse sister, Valerie, Katrine triggers a frenzied collection of family possessions to be salvaged from destruction. Such an endeavor will bring about a fertile ground to read back and forth the stories that the

[3] Buell's "betrayed Edens" (1998, 647) reminds of Deitering's "riskscapes" in being part and parcel of an extreme deprecation of resources that has led to postindustrial landscapes of waste, but also to the collective consciousness of having started a major process of (self)destruction, as a first step to environmental consciousness.

[4] *Turtle Valley* is the second of the novels in the trilogy started by *The Cure for Death by Lightning* (1996), and closed by *The Spawning Grounds* (2016), all set in the Shuswap area, Anderson-Dargatz's birthplace. As Kingsolver has done with her Appalachia homeland, Anderson-Dargatz has found there the adequate setting to foster ecological pressures and critically approach the destructive zeal of settler policies, epitome of a slow, steady, but "quiet violence" (Pindar and Sutton 2000, 4; Nixon 2011), against the environment and its first human and animal dwellers.

(mostly) wasteful objects embody (Sugars 2014): the accounts of her grandfather's obsession with expanding the homestead in the midst of a struggle to master the land; his ill treatment of his family and workers, in parallel to a disproportionate zeal to maximize production, exhausting crop fields and farm animals in the process. The final destruction of the Weeks' home will sever the family's bonds to such a place, a meaningless space, once memories vanish. "All of us gave up possession [...] with the loss of my parents' home," Kat tells. "Nothing but the foundation was left, and it was [...] falling away to expose the stones John Weeks had unwisely mixed in the concrete" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 285).

The *unwise* foundations of the family's home transcend the literal batch of concrete and stones to mirror the bases of settler identity. Its theoretical analyses in the 1990s insisted on its ambivalent ontology on a precarious binary of self/other, as held then by Slemon (2004, 145). In a wider context, he stated that "ambivalence of emplacement is the condition of [its] possibility" (148), and indeed the supporting demarcation of locality lying underneath is now the target of international pressures that bring ecological causes to attention (Lawson 2004, 151). Settler identity, as Battell Lowman and Barker affirm, is "situated and process-based" (2015, 16), or established on very specific relationships with the environment (Laforge and McLachlan 2018; Stevenson 2016). These relationships, in turn, imply that ecological premises will directly sustain or shake the foundational pillars of that identity, and foster the changes apparent in ecofictions like Anderson-Dargatz's. Preservationist attitudes, or explicit denunciations of ecological disasters rework the settler's bond with the land, beyond that menacing presence that contributed to a primary sense of community in early settling. Kat's research in the family's archive sheds light onto her family's ecocide transversally, hand-in-hand with the testimonies on the regime of domestic terror imposed by her grandfather, and her grandmother's muteness when faced with his molestation of Beth, first, and Valerie, later. Her voicing of the silenced episodes buried within the home's partitions in the form of letters and diaries that escaped John's surveillance attests to that archaeological miniaturist labor: "layer after layer of my mother's renovations hid the home my grandmother knew," Kat explains. "Yet there were vestiges of that past here" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 17).

As a paradigmatic ecosophical dissenter, Kat delves into the local and familial history to assemble a renewed subjectivity, uprooted from a collective, traumatic past. Through her research on the rarely engaged disappearance of John Weeks, Kat gathers fragmented "components of subjectification" (Guattari 2000, 23), those minute elements of residual resistance to a dominant narrative of domesticity, public collectivity enforcement, and natural mastery: from her grandmother Maud's creativity in crafting a telling, alternative version in her codified scrapbooks (Tamas 2014), to her affair with the neighbor Valentine Svenson, the most (in)visible effort to contravene John's authority and his implementation of settler-capitalist designs at microcosmic levels. As a narrative of dissent, it is no less relevant the agreed weaving of a story that has disguised for forty years Beth's self-defense murder of her father, considered, in the public eye, an unresolved disappearance in the hills. All of these facts are situated under the spotlight in a present-day quest for historical and contemporary meaning, beyond the model of private domestic subjugation

and public effort to tame nature: "I thought I knew my family, and here were all these stories I had never heard before. Hearing them now [...] left me feeling like an outsider, uncertain of my place within my family" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 212).

The self-questioning, transformational process of the Canadian settler, in general–as well as in *Turtle Valley*, in particular–results from conceiving that identity as "interrogative, non-derogatory and disjunctive" (Battell Lowman and Barker 2015, 19), in an attempt at precluding the reproduction of colonialist forms of belonging, to disclose a future beyond exploitative behaviors. As a result, settling is likely to be seen as a process still open to (re)construction in which a direct confrontation with the communal past is required. As such, it demands a renewed interpretation of the liaison with nature: individual resingularization and dissent void the terror to be rootless and the fear to be ostracized by the collective. In literal and metaphorical terms, Anderson-Dargatz's fiction incorporates that panic in its decolonial depopulation forced by the wildfire that consumes the valley. Yet it also reflects that "settler people [...] relate to the land as the site on which their society is built," whereas "indigenous people relate to land as part of an integrated network of personalities" (Battell Lowman and Barker 2015, 53), thus producing an evident ideological clash. The Shuswap natives that resisted the early Weeks' settlement, however, are missing in the contemporary Turtle Valley, after being confined to a reservation. Incompatible with the Weeks' expansionist will, the reservation turns into a space in which alcoholism and unemployment are agents for the manufacture of toxic bodies, a further contribution to a landscape of metaphorical pollution. Significantly, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the white settlers that are expelled from *their* place, as the local natives were. The acceptance of the white settlers' responsibility in the colonialist endeavor that displaced overpowered indigenes and took up their territory and natural resources situates them in a more sustainable coexistence with a fiercely intervened environment. This does not veil, nevertheless, the existence of "structural and systemic continuities" between "the historical experience of colonialism and the intellectual and cultural situation of Canada today" (Hutcheon 1993-94, 149).

As in *Turtle Valley*, the global impact of economic pressures is a catalyst of ecological uncertainties in *Prodigal Summer*, where the exhaustion of *Eden* looms large over farming and harvesting: animal production is insufficient to pay for its costs, and tobacco crops provide meager incomes for dwellers (Jones 2006), now "piling up their belongings and racing for Knoxville like it was the California gold rush, since [...] they put in that Toyota plant" (Kingsolver 2013, 401; Jones 2006). As Bauman affirms, "[t]he global spread of the modern form of life set loose and put in motion enormous and constantly rising quantities of human beings bereaved of their heretofore adequate ways and means of survival in both the biological and social/cultural sense of that notion" (2004, 7). As a region of farmers, Zebulon is far from immune to the locals' migratory displacement to other areas based on industry, or to the immigration of temporary fruit pickers, whose presence is at times resented by the most hermetic dwellers: they were "young Mexican banditos who came up here for the tobacco cutting and hanging and stayed on until stripping time" (Kingsolver 2013, 398), the local teacher Garnett Walker explains about his neighbor's temporary hired hands. For him, the seasonal presence of these workers was "a sure sign of things

gone out of whack," since now "farmers had so little family to count on anymore that they had to turn to a foreign land to get help with their tobacco cutting and stripping time. You could hear those boys in town, summer or fall, making themselves right at home and speaking in tongues" (398). Although the dualities of first and third world that have historically delineated world cartography are over, as Guattari states, there is also a permanence of the old conflicts now engaged from a multipolar scale: a "Third-Worldization" of massive production coexists in northern countries with an increase of attitudes of racism (2000, 20-21), for example. As a whole, Egg Fork town is a community in which "social ecology will have to work towards rebuilding human relations at every level of the socius. It should never lose sight of the fact that capitalist power has become delocalized and deterritorialized" (Guattari 2000, 33).

Prodigal Summer presents readers with a threefold perspective of its female protagonists, forest ranger, coyote-expert Deanna Wolfe, entomologist Lusa Maluf Landowski Wadener, and organic apple producer Nannie Rawley, in parallel to the views of her antithetical neighbor, and former teacher, Garnett Walker (Hongekar 2018). In the microcosmic community of Egg Fork, the implementation of a social ecosophy will be based on "developing specific practices that will modify and reinvent the ways in which [they] live as couples, or in the family, in an urban context or at work" (Guattari 2000, 22). In different forms, the three women will reinvent their lives and interaction with their social environment, thus "reconstructing the modalities of 'group-being' [...] not only through communicational interventions but through existential mutations driven by the motor of subjectivity" (22). The three of them, as Guattari says, unfold a personal reinvention stemming from "implementing effective practices of experimentation" (22).

For their town folks, Deanna, Lusa and Nannie transit between "attraction and repulsion" to border that assigned category of human waste (Bauman 2004, 22), as their resistant and dissident modes of being and acting implement an unpopular "mental ecology" of socio-cultural causes and consequences. Drawing on Guattari, Neil Campbell uses that term to refer to a body of ideological premises immune to capitalist trends of consumerism, and production, averted by dissent, responsibility and mutuality (2018, 73). As such, it draws on a sustainable bond with human and non-human nature, and is the cornerstone of a reconfigured regionality, "a complex assemblage of human and non-human relations, intersections and 'bloom spaces'" (2018, 79). In different ways, the three female protagonists contribute to that reconfiguration of identity, from the self to the surrounding social sphere in concentric circles. Thus, discontented with her production-based university research and pointless teaching, Deanna abandons faculty life to live alone in Zebulon Mountain, "keeping an eye on Paradise" (Kingsolver 2013, 13), since "people act so hateful to every kind but their own" (177).[5] Lusa, in turn, leaves

[5] The image of a pure, pristine nature diametrically opposite to the human sphere that "green thinking" has created seems to reinforce a binary of human versus nature, which Dirt Theory and its material approach invalidate. Instead, some of its advocates underline that we dwell on earth,

Indiana University lab research to marry Cole Wadener, and is forced to reinvent the Wadeners' ransacked farm when Cole's part-time driving, to make up for the farm expenses, fatally ends in a motorway crash. Shortly before that, his wife "knew this outside job shamed him as a farmer, even though there was hardly a family in the whole valley that got by solely on farm profits" (50). Likewise, the death of her daughter Rachel, shortly after that of her late-life partner, Ray Dean Wolfe (Deanna's father), leaves Nannie aimless, were it not for her decision "to grow apples with no chemicals [...] in flat defiance of the laws of nature" (138), in the opinion of her neighbor Walker.

The three women devise forms to interact communally more effectively, suggested by their anti-anthropocentric position. Watching the natural spectacle outside her hut, Deanna notices that "[a] bird never doubts its place at the center of the universe" (Kingsolver 2013, 55). However, she does question her central position, like her fellow protagonists: Nannie is usually confronted by her neighbor Garnett on such premises: "are we humans to think of ourselves as one species among many", he wonders, unable to understand her denial of the biblical "to subdue the earth (Gen 1, 27-30)" (187), which she implements with her anti-pesticide activism. Together with their labeling as "unfit" (Bauman 2004, 5), they are also resilient. Despite her in-laws' opposition to stop tobacco harvesting, Lusa devises a different social interaction with her habitat, and reformulates strategies of socio-economic survival: "We're sitting on some of the richest dirt on this planet, and I'm going to grow *drugs* instead of food?" (Kingsolver 2013, 124; italics in original), she says to cloak her responsible plans. She reinvents the farm as an ecological goat meat production of timely breeding: kids will be ready for the Arab festivities of Id-al-Fitr, when the meat low season will boost prices, thanks to a New York market that offers local ecological produce. In addition, her business recycles Project H, a failed diversification of county animal production, which flooded local farms with goats. "You'd think I was hauling toxic waste off their land" (238), she concludes, while valuing her neighbors' willingness to hand her their animals, which will clean her meadows naturally, without herbicides. Usually othered for her Arab Palestinian-Polish Jewishness, Lusa's business reorientation partially draws on her transcultural filiations, and socially integrates her, while countering the town's self-centered views. As an in/outsider in the closed circles of family and community, Lusa's doubleness shatters some of the binary oppositions that have legitimated the ethnocentric stances of her fellows and in-laws, and adds up to her attempt at singularization. "Mom said you were... something," her nephew Rickie asserts. "She thinks I'm something, does

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rely on it for survival and our interactions are surrounded by dust, resulting from air pollution, or, as Sullivan observes, "the desiccated landscapes of a warming world" (2012, 515). In her view, "[d]irty nature is always with us as part of ongoing interactions among all kinds of material agents (2012, 515). In her obsession with erasing her own imprint from Zebulon Mountain, Deanna seems to ignore such a premise based on the interaction and interrelation that she herself needs to survive, as the end of the novel clarifies.

she?", Lusa answers back. "No, I mean some nationality," he retorts. Although for Lusa "[e]verybody's some nationality," Rickie believes that he is "just American" (152).

Powerfully imbricated in that ethnocentric position, a nationalist discourse counters all these views of singularization, mainly when yoked to a no less powerful rightful exploitation of nature of Biblical foundations. Garnett sustains that Zebulon stands for a promised land for God's elected people, and his own family had a remarkable place among them. Thus, "[i]t was lumber sales from Walker's Mill that had purchased the land and earned his grandfather the right to name Zebulon Mountain" (Kingsolver 2013, 131). According to his personal history of their settling in the area, "[s]tarting with nothing but their wits and strong hands, the Walkers had lived well under the sheltering arms of the American chestnut until the slow devastation began to unfold in 1904, the year that brought down the chestnut blight. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh" (131), he concludes. However, that divine design is far from terminated, as Garnet is convinced that "to restore the chestnut tree to the American landscape was also a part of God's plan" (131). Such is his personal mission, too, and hence his crusade to crossbreed the few surviving trees in the county with a Chinese species, featured by its resistance to the harmful fungus. This literal and metaphorical grafting of the foreign presence in the body of the American icon is all the most symbolic of the instability of the binaries that support ethnocentrism, and tangentially, the anthropocentric interventions that have transformed Zebulon into a postindustrial riskscape.

Consequently, the human and physical landscape of *Prodigal Summer* is prey to the overexploitation to which Deitering alludes, as also is that of *Turtle Valley*. It is significant then that a postnatural catastrophe, be that a summer wildfire in Anderson-Dargatz's novel ("Canada" 2016), or an epic storm in Kingsolver's, announces the end of human deprecation, the erasure of their imprint and their systemic violence, but also a plausible ethical rebirth (Wenz 2003; V. S. and Selvaraj 2020).[6] Accordingly, as Guattari sentences, "[p]erhaps this paroxysmal era of the erosion of subjectivity assets and environments is destined to enter into a phase of decline" (2000, 20). The process of resingularization that Guattari finds feasible in a new approach to nature, and its nonbinary relation with its traditional cultural counterpart also enlightens a route that, in the two novels, conceives of dissenters' transformative identity as detoxic.

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[6] For Susie O'Brien (2013), the lack of a tradition of apocalyptic narratives in Canada is due to a different history of settlement, if compared to that of the United States. Thus, while the expectation of economic thrift motivated immigration to both North American territories, those thinking of Canada as destination wanted to "enhance, not to transcend, their position within a pre-existing cultural structure" (180). Unlike their American counterparts, Canadian settlers had no images of an Edenic virgin land to be conquered, as their movement already counted on legal and economic infrastructures, which were perfectly imbricated in the imperial machinery. In the United States, on the contrary, the movement westward was fairly boosted by the premise of a national definition, and very indebted to "claiming a prelapsarian connection to [settlers'] environment, sanctified by natural law" (181).

WASTED LIVES OR DETOXIC IDENTITIES

When the Weeks' impoverished farm of recent times is eventually turned to ashes, roughly coinciding in time with Kat's discovery of a dark side to her family, the ecological disaster pairs the paving of a road for new detoxic identities. Once the place-based signifiers no longer exist, there blooms a nonbinary, ecosophical subjectivity beyond the easy culture/nature divide, one which also endows humans with responsibility, and identity provisionality (Campbell 2018, 83). Just as Kat's (re)search comes across a modified archive of unstable significations, in which so-far unquestioned stories are now unreliable, the settlement/forest duality loses ground. While John's medical files report persecutory ideas strongly motivated by the need for his wife "to stay out of the bush" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 106), Kat finds safety in her memories of a natural scene that does not exist anymore. "When I longed for home, it wasn't my parents' dark farm-house that I missed," she remembers, destabilizing the association between safety and the household, "but those trees and bushes: the poplar, spruce, and cottonwood, pin cherry, and Saskatoon that lined the driveway and hemmed the homesite, protecting it from the devilish winds of the valley" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 35). However, most of them, the former refuge from John's tyranny, end their unhealthy present when cauterized by fire, like that plum tree that Kat's husband, Ezra, tries to prune. Its trunk "was deeply scarred from disease, so like the photos I'd seen of the brains of Alzheimer's patients" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 37), Kat notices.

In consonance with this antibinary design of opposites, the destructive fire of the Ptarmigan Hills, which ends the place-based identities of settlers, has its counterpart in the tamed fire that Jude Garibaldi, Kat's former fiancé and neighbor, uses at work. It is the productive agent of art pottery, as he has reflected in his business card that Kat fingers: "The Jude Garibaldi Pottery. High-fired functional pottery and raku. Distinctive masks, lamps, vases and wall pieces" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 25). Similarly, Kat has been able to find in destruction a springboard to tackle a future that prominently parts ways with the wasted lives of her ancestors. In contrast, from her "out of place" stance (Bauman 2004, 5), she makes use of an ecology of resilience to come to terms with a past of ecological abuse in parallel to the toxicity of secrets that hinder her future (see Pedersen 2007). "Why hadn't my parents ever told me the story of how my grandfather was lost?" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 7), Kat wonders from a soon to be devastated riskscape of long, quiet interventions. "For centuries the settler society thought it could dominate the non-human world," Laurie Ricou says, because "industrial and post-industrial societies thought it possible to destroy others' habitat and still go on living" (2013, 62). Looking at the family's old flour sifter as one of these relics worth to be preserved from the fire (Sugars 2014), Beth recalls: "you sift flour not only to get rid of lumps and impurities [...] but to aerate the flour [...]. My mother used to say that time works like that: it [...] takes the sting out of events that seemed so painful at the time" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 87). In a process of renewal inside out, from her genealogical tree to the environment, Kat's mental ecology of assimilation supplements the lack of ethical liability of her ancestors and present-

day neighbors, those "sitting out on lawn chairs, drinking beer and watching the fire creep over the hills above" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 4).

The same lack of ecological respect has accounted for a fast-path production, which has altered the ecosystem's equilibrium and the cultural sense of place, thus breaking once again the binary nature/settlement. Looking at the blackened space that used to host her parents' home, now a space of sorrow and loss (Buell 2005, 62-96), Kat remembers Beth's explanation of the local toponymy: "When I was a girl, the turtles crossed that road to lay their eggs in such numbers you couldn't drive without running over them, [...] this was how Blood Road got its name. Now there are so few turtles" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 55). As Kat watches in her driver's rear-view mirror when definitely leaving the few surviving ones still cross, but their announced extinction will soon leave the place meaningless, too, as well as the whole of Turtle Valley, since when nature is deprecated, the signification of settler toponymy fades out. In a similar form, close to the Shuswap Lake, "the town of Salmon Arm was named for the fish that were so abundant that farmers pitchforked them from the lake, and the river that fed into it, to slash into the land for fertilizer" (81). Nowadays, however, "the highway cut the city lengthwise drawing curve-nervous Albertans down to Shuswap Lake and into houseboats. A tourist town" (81).

Like the human diversion of creeks that has disrupted the habitat of turtles in Anderson-Dargatz's fiction, most of that loss of equilibrium is also man-made in *Prodigal Summer*: from the formerly abundant American chestnut tree, felled for its wood quality, to the red wolf, now extinct for threatening cattle, which has produced an unfilled slot in the local chain of species. As farms increased in number, and so did the size of herds, coyotes also became a menacing presence to be controlled, and were eventually wiped out from the mountains of Zebulon. In this sense, "Deanna knew enough to realize that she lived among ghosts" (Kingsolver 2013, 62). Her labor as park ranger has contributed to a partial restoration of the previous balance, and thus, "two years after her arrival, one of the most heavily poached ranges of southern Appalachia was becoming an intact ecosystem again" (61). She acknowledges also that the return of a particular species to this habitat involves the rearrangement of all others, preys and predators. And, in this context, the return of coyotes to Zebulon that she has recently noticed fills the slot vacated by the disappearance of red wolves. "There were hundreds of reasons for each death – pesticide runoff, silt from tilling, cattle in the creek – but for Deanna each one was also a piece in the puzzle she'd spent years working out" (65). Human interventions partially led to the almost extinction of the local chestnuts, filled the valley with goats in a futile attempt at diversifying farm production, and introduced nonautochthonous fodder varieties for their rapid growth. As Garnett Walker states, "whatever happened to the bobwhite? You never heard him anymore" (140). The answer seems to lie with the imported fescue, which grows too thick for the quails to stroll through and feed.

As Nannie does with her ecological antipest strategies, Deanna defends an evenness of opposites, of preys and predators, which self-regulates the working of the system. Her affair with the maverick hunter Eddie Bondo may be read in the light of this *natural* equilibrium of social implementation, based on the premise that "ecologic dialectics no longer imposes a resolution of opposites" (Guattari 2000,

34). Zebulon Mountain brings together the fierce protector of coyotes, able to live "capably on junk [...] useless to humans" (Kingsolver 2013, 63) and breed more under pressure (329), and the furtive poacher who personifies the motto "hating coyotes is my religion" (326). For the socially disgruntled Deanna, many of the redneck premises that Bondo represents are incompatible with her life options: to begin with, his unclear participation in the "bounty hunt" (177), an interstate massive killing of coyotes, which might explain Bondo's sudden (dis)appearance in Deanna's territory. Approaching opposites sustainably seems as effective as adopting ethically the natural patterns for social relations: after Bondo's departure, a pregnant Deanna realizes that their child needs a social environment, and inspired by coyote all-female groups, plans to return to the valley and Nannie's home (Jaggi 2000), leaving aside her period of isolation for a more social enclave.

Likewise, such a symbiosis of otherness and selfhood in blooming spaces of mental ecosophy is also apparent between Nannie, defined by Garnet Walker as "one of these Unitarian witches, whizzing around Egg Fork on a broomstick" (Kingsolver 2013, 145), and Garnett himself, a member of "the Masters and keepers of Eden" (141), in Nannie's view. Their antagonistic ideological stances as regards agricultural methods, religion, morality, and the wellbeing of the Egg Fork community are far apart. Their irreconcilable positions notwithstanding, they are eventually able to find common ground, and cooperate in a mutually supportive effort: while Garnett provides the antique hand-made shingles that Nannie needs to amend her roof, she is happy to grant him the permit to enter her property and help himself to the pollen of the American chestnut trees that still survive in Nannie's side of the fence (376). As Deanna has done, they have been able to appreciate how the self-reliance of opposites in the natural realm leads to an unfailing functioning of the social system, which, in that form, ensures its survival. Their diametrically opposite ecological views do not avert their shared concerns, while they are able to find as well a space for a dialectic struggle that does not aim at any final space of resolution, or the annulment of the second element of the opposition. Their vicinity is at the end of the novel a tangible evidence of how the natural order infiltrates the social when the ecological is given a primordial role, resulting from the blooming sites of intersection. As such, these enclaves feature the irresolution of binaries as a ground of productive coexistence, which permits to think transversally, and reinvent social and economic practices.

While capitalist and consumerist trends have demanded an acceleration of production, which in turn has viciously damaged the landscape of Zebulon, they have also deteriorated the cultural liaisons that individuals used to entail with their habitat and its localized knowledge. With minimal crops produced by depleted fields, and the consequent scarcity of incomes, many Egg Fork inhabitants need to root their subsistence somewhere else, which brings about a palpable disconnection from the land: "everyone around here used to grow their own wheat and corn for bread, plus what they needed for their animals," Lusa explains to her twelve-year-old niece Crystal Wadener. "Now they buy food at Southern states and go to Kroger's for a loaf of god-awful bread that was baked in another state" (Kingsolver 2013, 294). The delocalization of subjectivity that Crys and her generational fellows show is the outcome of the absence of a first-hand contact with farm life, which makes

her unaware of the source of corn or honey, for example. In contrast, the global trends of consumerism that the girl finds quotidian pauperize locals, thus making visible, on the one hand, the wasted, unproductive land that Zebulon has turned into, and, on the other, its role in the production line of wasted humans, as Bauman states. The toxic identity of Lusa's niece, ignorant of the potentiality of her habitat, is common to the younger generations, and not unfamiliar either to some of Lusa's sisters-in-law: Louis, for example, "would tear [the old family's] house down and build something brick with plastic ducks in the yard and a three-car garage" (309). Conversely, Lusa's affective ecology that unmarks the boundary between the farm and the forest, human and nonhuman animals, restores the land a social constituent that further breaks the natural/cultural split.

As part of their detoxifying ecosophy of mutual nurturance, the fictions by Kingsolver and Anderson-Dargatz present readers with human bodies, victims and victimizers, that mirror the toxicity of their riskscapes. *Turtle Valley* pairs the decline of their homestead to that of the owners, with Gus's mortal cancer, and Beth in the midst of her increasing, chronical forgetfulness; Kat's husband, Ezra, still recovering from a recent ictus, is unable to accomplish the most basic chores, is linguistically affected, and identifies himself with one of the few remaining animals in the farm, a lame calf in need of being butchered. Ezra takes upon himself the sacrifice of the ailing calf before concluding that, he, like the calf, is also "a gimp" (Anderson-Dargatz 2008, 219). Kingsolver's novel, in turn, epitomizes that malaise in the cancer that one of Lusa's sisters-in-law suffers. Aware of her impending end, Jewel asks Lusa to adopt her kids, to shortly afterwards exhibit the side effects of an aggressive chemotherapy, which, for her daughter Crys, "makes mama poison" (Kingsolver 2013, 292). While the same illness killed Garnett's wife, Rachel Carson, Nannie's daughter, struggled for life with a neurological and motor disorder of unclear causes: "For a long time," Nannie explains, "I blamed the world, the chemicals and stuff in our food" (Kingsolver 2013, 391), and Garnett confesses that Nannie's dread of pesticides is indebted to the illness of her child. Not in vain, she "named [her] after that lady scientist who cried wolf about DDT" (Kingsolver 2013, 138).[7] The lack of pesticide smell is precisely what the coyote that guides readers in the epilogue of the novel notices while crossing Nannie's solitary orchard, a postcatastrophe landscape as devoid of any human presence as the burned soil of the former Weeks' farm. Both novels, therefore, head to the same ecological path of consciousness rising by intending to resituate humans more ethically in a riskscape of improbable reversibility.

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[7] Developed in the 1940s, DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane) was effectively used against malaria, typhus, and diseases transmitted by insects to humans. As well, it was used to control bug populations in crop and livestock productions. Its widespread recurrence as a broad pesticide in the United States resulted in the development of resistance and immunity by a wide range of pests (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Anderson-Dargatz's and Kingsolver's fictions and their border-crossing impetus presented here abounds into a refashioned conceptualization of nature that transcends dualistic designs to pose a renewed referential axis for the self.[8] From the Biblical interpretation of Eden as a gift given to man, which justifies anthropocentric rights of unlimited exploitation and stitches community consciousness, the emphasis has been placed on the ecological crisis that produces landscapes of waste and the necessity to refashion the position of the subject. The conjunction of the resistance to dominant modes of being and acting associated to Bauman's wasted humans, and the proposal of premises enclosed in ecosophical ethical postulates by Guattari pave the ground for alternative codifications of the natural/social divide, which aim at a more sustainable coexistence of species.

The process of detoxification via mental ecosophy is in both novels also a form to reflect on the wastification of the environment, which additionally opens social interrelations of natural inspiration, contributing to an image of mutual nurturance between the traditionally separated social and natural realms. Capitalist trends of consumerism and colonialist designs of settler ideology are revised while the disruption of the binary dialectics underneath natural overexploitation, in turn, opens a new territory away from present and past toxic attempts at gardening in Eden.

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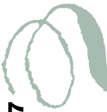

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[8] I am indebted to an anonymous referee for reminding me of how the dismantling of the classical dualities, like nature/culture, has been omnipresent in any ecocritical agenda. The relevance of such an aim is indeed a foundational principle in this paper, in need of being further nuanced for a more strategically effective use.

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