

Kincentric¹ Eco poetics: Sympoietic² Place-Based Eco poetry in Montreal's Old Port

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¹ Kincentric—from Enrique Salmón's (2000) *kincentric ecology* (or *iwígara*)—is the fundamental idea that humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans are deeply interrelated.

² Sympoietic means *making-with*—it is the idea that nothing makes itself (Haraway, 2016).

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Abstract

Kincentric Eco poetics: Sympoietic Place-Based Eco poetry in Montreal's Old Port
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This research-creation project considers how the creation of sympoietic place-based eco poetry can help nurture kincentric relationships with non-human and more-than-human beings in Montreal's Old Port. The sympoietic place-based eco poems that I wrote throughout this process—*wayward* (45.501506, -73.552840), *wildfire season* (45.511746, -73.546049), and *rivered* (45.499305, -73.552108 & 45.497048, -73.551593)—call my human relationship with place into question and articulate the loss and destruction of the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies relationships. I undertook this research in response to the overwhelming pollution of the St. Lawrence waterway and out of a desire to spend time listening to and being *with* the waterway. My research-creation process involved taking fieldnotes at four sites within the Old Port and actualizing Robin Wall Kimmerer's *grammar of animacy* through their translation/transformation into sympoietic place-based eco poems.

Keywords: *ecopoetics, grammar of animacy, kinship, sympoiesis, waterways, non-humans, more-than-humans, multispecies relations*

Relationships

This research-creation project is the result of bringing all of myself into one place—my positionality as a poet, as someone who has deep admiration for the natural world, and as a scholar. I have been writing poetry to make sense of the world around and within me since I can remember. It remains one of the only things that truly makes sense to me in this world. Thus, using sympoietic place-based ecopoetry as an apparatus to make sense of my relationship with the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements just made good sense.

I want to express my deep and profound gratitude for my supervisor Liz Miller. Without her enthusiasm and openness, I may very well have never had the courage to bring my artistic self into academia. She introduced me to research-creation and forever changed my perception of what is possible within graduate school. From the first time I met with Liz and throughout this entire process, she has been in my corner. Thank you, Liz, for your kindness, your energy, and your trust in my abilities.

I would like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Monika Gagnon, and Dr. Peter van Wyck, for their eagerness in being part of this project despite their incredibly busy lives. Thank you, Monika, for ushering me to pursue a poetic path during my proposal defence. And thank you, Peter, for bringing a writer's sensitivity to my work.

Boundless, immeasurable, monumental gratitude to Anna Sigrithur and Cori Volfson for their camaraderie, moral support, and solidarity throughout this (sometimes harrowing) process. If not for them, this last year would have felt far more isolating. In every moment of disillusionment, they were there to help me find balance and humor. A special thank you as well to Ash Bilokin for setting me on this multispecies path and for inspiring the earlier iterations of this research. As well, thank you to the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* for their generous funding through the CGS-M scholarship.

I dedicate my research-creation thesis and ecopoetry to all of my relations—the waters within which I always want to be, the lands that breathe beneath my feet, the red-winged blackbirds along the St. Lawrence waterway, my late grandfather Kenneth who saw the whole world in my eyes, my late grandmother Ann whose footsteps I walk in with admiration, my father Dave who adopted me into a world of possibility, and my partner Alex who saw me through all of this.

We need biodiversity of thought. The empiricism of science, the imaginative and cognitive leaps of poetry, the close observation of both ... we need it all.
(Magrane & Cokinos, 2016, p. xvi)

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Introduction

we stood in thin place together, the water / and I—my feet on the wide, worn-out asphalt / that corrals her bucking body between / borders—thick, gray, yellow, and tarnished³

I have lived my whole life by the water—the Ottawa River (Kitche Zibi), the Gatineau River (Te-nagàdino-zibi), and now, the St. Lawrence River (Kaniatarowanenneh) in Montreal (Tiohti:áke). Growing up and living within these watersheds has shaped my sense of self, my artistic work, my thinking, and my academic scholarship. I have always desired to be at the water's edge—to swim, to read by the shore, to canoe, to write, to be *with*, to world *with*. In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Haraway (2016) advocates for a mode of “becoming-with each other in response-ability” (p. 125) as a code of ethics. Throughout the process of my research-creation project (both research and writing), I have become-*with* the waterway and their multispecies entanglements in response-ability. What I understand this to mean is that the waterway, their multispecies relations, and I are implicated in multidirectional relationships. We respond to one another; we change *with* one another; we are responsible to and for each other.

When I began my research-creation project, I thought that my relationship with the waterway was new, but this was entirely false. In the summers of my childhood, my grandparents and I would take alternating road trips to the West and East coasts of Turtle Island⁴—either passing through the Great Lakes (the St. Lawrence River's headwaters) or to the Atlantic Ocean where the St. Lawrence flows into saltwater. As it turned out, the St. Lawrence waterway was the connective tissue of my childhood summers. The seeds of my relationship with the St. Lawrence waterway had been planted at the age of five—collecting rocks at Lake Superior's edge and walking out in low tide in search of starfish and hermit crabs on the Nova Scotian coast.

Years later, my relationship with the St. Lawrence was eroded. In August of 2019, a friend of mine passed away in the St. Lawrence River by Île Sainte-Hélène. He had been attending the *Osheaga Music and Arts Festival* for his 18th birthday when he drowned. The

³ These are the first four lines from my eco-poem entitled *wayward (45.501506, -73.552840)*.

⁴ Turtle Island is the original name given to North America by Indigenous peoples—unless I am specifically referring to the colonial state, I will use this terminology.

coroner ruled that it was most likely accidental as there were no signs of defensive injuries. For some time, I was mad at the river as though it were a person (with mal intention).

In 2021, I moved to Tiohti:áke/Montreal for my MA in Media Studies at Concordia University—near the very body of water that connected my childhood and took my friend’s life. Though my research intentions were far removed from the waterway when I entered the program, I kept feeling myself being pulled to the waterway—geographically, in the texts I was reading, and in my own personal writings. My relationship with the St. Lawrence waterway is one that I have been mediating for over two decades.

The biodiversity of the *Kaniatarowanenneh*⁵—also known as the St. Lawrence River—has been greatly impacted by habitat fragmentation, invasive species, waste, and pollution (Neufeld et al., 2015). Within Western and colonial thinking, the waterway has been framed through resource-related discourses—as a human right, a disposal site for human and industrial waste, and as leisure space (Dagenais, 2017). These discourses generate a lexicon for thinking *about* water in lieu of thinking *with* water. Alternatively, Architect and Communications scholar Cecelia Chen (unmarked) (2013) asks us to think *with* watery places—to unlearn this resource-centric vocabulary, to establish deep familial bonds with water, and to respect water’s own agency. When we think *with* bodies of water—the destruction of their⁶ health, biodiversity, and interspecies relationships becomes unintelligible.

My research-creation work, which involves place-based sympoietic ecopoetry, is invested in the protection of the *Kaniatarowanenneh*—with a specific focus on Montreal’s Old Port and, by extension, the Lachine Canal. The significance of this field site, and the reason that I decided to focus on it, is its accessibility as well as the confluence of distinct (yet interconnected) waterways within the city. In my research, I take an arts-based approach—using the practice of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry as method—to question and unpack my human relationship with the waterway and their multispecies relations, to make the loss and destruction of the waterway and surrounding land visible, and to offer alternate realities. The term *sympoietic* means *making-with* and is the idea that nothing makes itself (Haraway, 2016). The importance of

⁵ The Kaniatarowanenneh—translating into ‘big waterway’—is the Mohawk name for what is referred to colloquially as the St. Lawrence River (Bonaparte, n.d.).

⁶ In alignment with Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *grammar of animacy*—which will be discussed at length in the theory section—I will be using animate pronouns when referring to our non-human kin (e.g., waterways, flora, fauna, etc.). My use of animate pronouns throughout this paper is an acknowledgement that non-human beings have their own agency and animacy. This is also inspired by the editors of *Cascadia Field Guide*.

using this term in my articulation of this method is to stress the collective nature of creating ecopoetry in place. In essence, my research is about learning how to be in good relationship with non-human beings, waterways, and lands. The main research question that guides my project is as follows: *How can the creation of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry help nurture kinship relationships with non-human and more-than-human beings in Montreal's Old Port?*

As a poet in academia⁷, I sometimes struggle with the legitimacy of my creative work—whether ecopoetry has a place within the institution. When these feelings arise, I often turn to speculative fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin (American⁸). Le Guin expresses that we require both the languages of science and poetry if we are to prevent further exploitation of the earth and their multispecies entanglements—that science describes from the outside what poetry can describe from the inside (Tsing et al., 2017). While we undoubtedly need hard sciences, we also desperately need art—we need alternate ways of seeing and understanding from the inside.

In *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, Craig Santos Perez (Chamoru from the Pacific Island of Guåhan) writes that “[eco]poetry reawakens our senses to nature, reenvisions our interconnections with the more-than-human world, asks critical questions about environmental justice, and emotionally moves us to write our own ecopoetry” (Fisher-Wirth & Street, 2013, p. xxvii). Ecopoetry, like other creative practices, can be understood as “the production of knowledge or philosophy in action” (Barrett, 2007, p.1)—as praxis. The knowledge that I have gathered through writing—both my thesis and my ecopoetry—originates in place and stems from my sensorial perceptions. Through my sympoietic place-based ecopoetic practice, I aspire to arouse in my readers a hankering to question their own relationships with place (specifically watery place) and to inspire them to action—whether artistic, scientific, or otherwise.

Throughout the thesis portion of my research-creation project, I will do the following: offer a positionality statement (which includes my human acknowledgement), describe the

⁷ Worry not, I will formally introduce myself in the following section entitled *Positionality and Human Acknowledgement*—in order to understand my research, it is important that you know who I am and where I come from.

⁸ Following in the steps of Dr. Max Liboiron (Red River Métis/Michif), I will mark all of the people whose work I draw from. Liboiron (2021) explains that they “take up this method so we, as users of texts, can understand where authors are speaking from, what ground they stand on, whom their obligations are to, what forms of sovereignty are being leveraged, what structures of privilege the settler state affords, and how we are related so that our obligations to one another as speaker and listener, writer and audience, can be *specific enough to enact obligations to one another*” (p. 4). However, if and when I come across authors who have not introduced themselves or their relationships to land, I have left them as ‘unmarked’.

various networks of my theoretical framework, offer a walkthrough of my methodologies, reflect on my sympoietic place-based ecopoetic practice, and conclude my research.

My positionality statement is a sub-section of my introduction—this is where I discuss who I am in relation to my research as well as the inescapability of my physical body and my positioning as a multispecies assemblage. Following is the theoretical framework section wherein I discuss the two groupings of theories that guide both my research and literary work: kinship and relationality, and the grammar of animacy. My relational literature review is comprised of two sections (or pillars): *Thinking with (Watery) Place* where I bring various scholars who are thinking alongside water into conversation and *Situating Ecoliterature in the Chthulucene* where I offer a genealogy of ecopoetry (this is continued in the *Sympoietic Place-Based Ecopoetry* subsection of *Methodology*) and provide analyses of the following three ecopoems: *Tickling the Scar* by Matthew Hollett (Canadian), *generation, generations at the mouth* by Daphne Marlatt (Canadian), and *The First Water Is the Body* by Natalie Diaz (Aha’ Makav). In the *Methodology* section, I provide an overview of writing and poetry as qualitative research methods and offer ecopoem-by-ecopoem breakdowns of how each set of field notes led to their corresponding sympoietic place-based ecopoem. As well, I discuss each ecopoem in relation to the tenets of ecopoetry as explained in the *Situating Ecoliterature in the Chthulucene* section of the relational literature review. Following is the *Critical (and Uncomfortable) Reflexivity* section where I reflect on my methodology and the research-creation process as a whole.

Positionality and Human Acknowledgement

Say you have a fire, and you have people sitting in a circle around the fire. And you ask any person to describe the fire. While they are describing it, and you are looking at the same fire, it’s not the same thing. But that doesn’t mean they are wrong. They are at a different vantage point altogether. (Wilson, 2008, p. 112)

My name is Hana⁹ (she/they)—I am an ecopoet-researcher, a photographer, and a published creative writer. I am a white settler (of Austrian and French-Canadian descent) who is currently residing on the ancestral lands of the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation. I also have roots in

⁹ Hana is pronounced [H AA - n uh] and rhymes with fauna.

Ottawa—on the territory of the Algonquin-Anishinabeg Nation—where I lived for the first twenty-six years of my life. I moved to Tiohtià:ke (pronounced Joh-jaw-gay) in 2021 for my graduate studies.

I believe that it is imperative that scholars situate themselves and are transparent about their personal and political ideologies because their ideas help shape our collective reality—*the personal is political*¹⁰ (Hanisch, 1970). I am a Media Studies master’s student at Concordia University and received my bachelor’s degree from Carleton University where I majored in Media and Communication Studies and double minored in Indigenous Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies. I believe in and support Indigenous land-back movements, police and prison abolition, trans- rights, womyn’s rights (grounded in intersectional feminism), and environmental conservation. My politics inform and permeate throughout my interdisciplinary research-creation work. With this said, I understand that I cannot perfectly embody my personal and political doctrine in the world as we know it. We live in an inherently capitalist and colonist society and the undoing of these systems exists in tandem with their ongoing operation (e.g., paying rent for homes that are situated on stolen Indigenous lands and exchanging money for goods and services). Who I am, where I am situated, and what I believe in are all deeply entangled in my research-creation work—in the theories I have chosen, the methods I have employed, and the ecopoetry I have written.

The materiality of my body is inescapable—my thoughts do not exist beyond the fleshy confines of my bodily existence. Even as my words are seemingly disembodied on this very page, I am still deeply entangled with them and responsible to them. As a person and as a poet, my words are embodied. As I acknowledge the materiality and inescapability of my body, I also want to acknowledge my microbial relationships. I am not an island. My body is comprised of “bacteria, fungi, archaea, and a few animals invisible to the naked eye” (Lorimer, 2016). I am a multispecies assemblage. This understanding—that I am not ontologically separate from my relations—is a key framework in my research. As Haraway (2016) writes:

Critters are at stake in each other in every mixing and turning of the terran compost pile. We are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities. Philosophically and materially, I am a compostist, not a posthumanist. Critters – human and not – become-with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale

¹⁰ The phrase ‘the personal is political’ was popularized by radical feminist activist Carol Hanisch’s (unmarked) 1969 essay aptly titled “The Personal is Political.”

and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in ecological evolutionary developmental earthly worlding and unworlding. (p. 97)

I am compost, not posthuman. I am my body, and my body belongs to and *with* the lands and waterways. I was born in womb waters and will, in time, become the earth's fertilizer. As a human, I am merely one being amongst the diverse, churning, entangled multispecies melange of compost—living and dying together.

Theoretical Framework

Theory isn't just an intellectual pursuit. It is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion. It is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives. Most important, theory isn't just for academics; it's for everyone. (Simpson, 2017, p. 151)

In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, Māori) (2012) writes the following:

I am arguing that theory at its simplest level is important for indigenous peoples. At the very least it helps make sense of reality. It enables us to make assumptions and predictions about the world in which we live. It contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritizing and legitimating what we see and do. Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. (p. 40)

As a non-Indigenous poet-researcher, I understand that this was not written for me. As such, I feel conflicted in my use of this scholarship—on the one hand, I am citing Smith's knowledge and actioning her interpretation of theories in my work but on the other hand, I am another white scholar borrowing from the labour of Indigenous peoples. I am navigating this tension and discomfort as best as I know how—with respect and care, and with the acknowledgement that this is an ongoing process. As it stands, I have decided that to omit her scholarship would be wrong as Indigenous knowledges are so often pushed to the margins of academia.

In *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Margaret Kovach (Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux ancestry from Treaty Four, Saskatchewan and an enrolled member of Pasqua First Nation) (2009) quotes Indigenous scholar Marlene Brandt-Castellano (Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte) who says that “the challenge of and responsibility for Indigenous research lie with all of us” (p. 156). In her book, Kovach offers six ways in which non-Indigenous scholars can “genuinely support Indigenous knowledges” (p. 168). These include the decolonization of self and institution, learning about Indigenous histories, “mentoring Indigenous researchers on the intellectual aspects of academia related to operational requirements” (Kovach,

2009, p. 170), meaningfully evaluating Indigenous scholarship, redefining the roles of non-Indigenous scholars within Indigenous research, and engaging in relational work. My research-creation work is situated on the former end of this spectrum. While my work does not materially engage with Indigenous peoples and communities, it is invested in the process of “decolonizing one’s mind and heart [...] exploring one’s own beliefs and values about knowledge and how it shapes practices [...] examining whiteness [and] examining power” (p. 169). As well, while I have a broader understanding of Indigenous histories on Turtle Island, I am further educating myself through the research process about Indigenous histories and presents (presence) in Tiohtià:ke. As will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper—upon outlining my future directions for this work—I intend to bring my eco-poetic practice outside of the institution and to find ways to respectfully engage with Indigenous artists in Tiohtià:ke.

My theoretical framework is rhizomatic¹¹ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)—each individual theory overlaps and feeds into the others. I have grouped the theories I am using into two sections: kinship and relationality, and the grammar of animacy. Despite the fact that I have drawn a line through these two groups for the purposes of clarity and organization, they work together to form a holistic research paradigm—all three theories are interdependent and in conversation with one another.

Kinship and Relationality

I have been making kin for my whole life. Assembling chosen family. Building fairy houses made from moss and birch bark. Burying the lifeless body of a bird in my family garden. Swimming as water weeds wrap their way around my ankles. Collecting rocks along the Atlantic shoreline. Turning plums into jam. Sitting in crab-apple trees. Feeding pigeons on the university campus as their feet clasp around my fingers. I believe that our kinship to one another—whether human or more-than-human—is innate and is something which we have been indoctrinated to unlearn over time. This unlearning is a prerequisite for us to live and die in a capitalist, colonial society. I would argue that this indoctrination occurs first and foremost in our education systems

¹¹ In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze (French) and Félix Guattari (French) use the terms *rhizome* and *rhizomatic* to describe theory and research as places wherein multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points can exist and relate to one another.

which support and perpetuate anthropocentric ideas within which (certain) humans are separate from and superior to nature.

In *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*, Nick Montgomery and carla bergman (2017) write that empire—“the interlocking systems of settler colonialism, white supremacy, the state, capitalism, ableism, ageism, and heteropatriarchy” (p. 48)—poisons our relationships. They assert that kinship has been circumscribed to the nuclear family but that we can break this down through the implementations of “new and resurgent forms of intimacy through which people come to depend on each other, defend each other, and become dangerous together” (Montgomery & bergman, 2017, p. 82). While Montgomery and bergman present a more anthropocentric understanding of kinship, I see a throughline. Their concept of empire also stifles our relationships with non-human beings and the environment. As such, I make use of their human-centric conception of kinship as a jumping off point into multispecies waters—into the work of Donna Haraway and Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi).

Ecofeminist scholar Donna Haraway (2019) describes kinship as “an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can’t-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences.” Furthermore, Haraway (2019) expresses that “[t]o be any kind of animal at all is to be within obligate mutualisms with a whole range of other plants, animals, and microbes and living as a holobiont, not as a single organism or individual.” For Haraway as well as for Robin Wall Kimmerer (and her co-editor Gavin Van Horn)—whose theories I will delve into shortly—kinship stretches beyond the human realm and networks out into our relationships with non-human and more-than-human beings (or ‘critters’ as Haraway might say).

In the series *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*, Gavin Van Horn (unmarked) frames kin as a verb—as *kinning*. He writes:

Kinning does not depend upon genetic codes. Rather, it is cultivated by humans, as one expression of life among many, many, many others, and it revolves around an ethical question: how to rightly relate? We are kinning as we (re)connect our bodies, minds, and spirits within a world that is not merely a collection of objects but “a communion of subjects.” (Van Horn, 2021, p. 3)

This excerpt articulates that we are not kin in a static sense but rather, we are in cyclical relationships with our non-human and more-than-human relatives. And when we are in relationship with other beings, we become responsible to those relations—“I have a cousin, the cousin has me; I have a dog, a dog has me” (Haraway, 2019). Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree)

would describe this as relational accountability. In his book, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson (2008) addresses four kinds of relations: those between humans, those with the natural environment/land (including waterways), those with the cosmos, and those with the ideas of others. Within my research-creation project, I am largely invested in relational accountability as it pertains to my relationships with the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements as well as the ideas of the scholars and artists that I have drawn from. Throughout the process of researching, writing, editing, and creating, I feel an immense responsibility to uphold respectful and kind relationships with place and with the scholars/artists whom I have borrowed from and cited. This will be further discussed in my methodology section as well.

The Grammar of Animacy

It is said that we are known by the company we keep, and I wonder if English sharpened its verbal ax and lost the companionship of oaks and primroses when it began to keep company with capitalism. I want to suggest that we begin to mend that rift—with pronouns. As a reluctant student of the formalities of writing, I never would have imagined that I would one day be advocating for grammar as a tool of revolution. (Kimmerer, 2023, p. 213)

In *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*, Gavin Van Horn (2021) discusses the idea of animism—he writes that religious studies scholar Graham Harvey (English) expresses that from an animistic perspective, “the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human” (p. 4). This articulation paints non-humans/more-than-humans as beings who are imbued with animacy and agency. When referring to agency, I am referring to the notion that all beings—human, non-human, and more-than-human—possess the inherent capacity to act, to exert power, and to communicate. As Vanessa Watts (Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee) (2013) writes:

this agency is not limited to innate action or causal relationships. Thus, habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies from an Indigenous point of view; meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society. (p. 23)

While non-human beings may form structures, treaties, and agreements differently than humans, their unintelligibility to Euro-Western thought does not diminish or compromise their inherent agency and their positions as members in society.

In Kimmerer's (2023) essay *Speaking of Nature* published in *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape*, she proposes language (specifically grammar) as a revolutionary tool that can lead us back to kinship. She explains that while English encodes human exceptionalism through its noun-based structure and its reservation of animate pronouns for human beings, her Indigenous language—Potawatomi—is largely verb based and is encoded with an inherent understanding that all beings are animate (Kimmerer, 2023). In her chapter *Learning the Grammar of Animacy* in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer (2013) writes:

A bay is a noun only if water is *dead*. When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and constrained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to *be* a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. “To be a bay” holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. (p. 55)

Kimmerer (2023) writes that using *it* to gesture towards non-human beings is a form of distancing ourselves—of absolving ourselves of our responsibilities to our non-human kin. I believe, as Kimmerer does, that feeling the weight of our actions is a good thing and is something that can move us towards an ethic of relational accountability.

In her essay, Kimmerer also provides a historical and contextual explanation as to why Indigenous languages were forbidden. Kimmerer (2023) discusses the use of *linguistic imperialism*—how Indigenous languages were disappeared through the usurpation of place-names and how they were forcibly replaced by languages that inherently objectify non-humans and more-than-humans. Furthermore, she expresses the pervasiveness of a *language of objectification*—that it colonizes the mind. Indigenous languages were perceived as an affront to colonization as they regarded all relations as animate and agential.

One of the primary ways in which Indigenous languages were disappeared was through the violent enforcement of colonial languages—English and French—in residential schools. With this said, there are many language resurgence efforts taking place. In 2018, *SGaawaay K'uuna* (Edge of the Knife)—the first feature film to be recorded entirely in the Haida language—was released; in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer writes that her home is covered in sticky notes in Potawatomi; and in 2017, Renison University College began offering Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) language courses. This is only a microcosm of the resurgent efforts that are taking place across Turtle Island. The resurgence of Indigenous languages and Kimmerer's proposition of using animate pronouns when speaking of *all* earth beings (which I will delve into momentarily) are acts of decolonizing the mind. This weaves into Kovach's (2009) avowal that

“decolonizing one’s mind and heart” (p. 169) is central to supporting Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

Kimmerer (2023) proposes that we animate the English language by adopting the word *ki* from Anishinaabemowin as an animate pronoun for earth beings in place of using the word *it*. *Ki* is derived from the Potawatomi word *aakibmaadiziiwin* which means “a being of the Earth” (Kimmerer, 2023, p. 216). As well, she suggests the English *kin* as the plural animate pronoun for *ki*. Regardless of the fact that I wholeheartedly consider all earthly beings to have inherent agency, I still found it difficult to shift my use of language at first. Shifting to the habit of using the pronouns *they/them* to refer to non-humans was natural but the transition into using *ki/kin* took more time. I reflect on this further in the *Critical (and Uncomfortable) Reflexivity* section.

There are two things that helped me better embody Kimmerer’s grammar of animacy. First was reading the examples that she so eloquently presents in her essay: “Ki runs through the branches on squirrel feet, ki howls at the moon, ki’s branches sway in the pine-scented breeze [...] Kin are ripening in the fields; kin are nesting under the eaves; kin are flying south for the winter” (Kimmerer, 2023, p. 216).” Second was stepping outside, walking around the Plateau neighbourhood, and actioning (or embodying) the use of Kimmerer’s grammar of animacy—addressing my non-human and more-than-human relations aloud. While this felt strange to do and I often turned some heads, it felt freeing to practice a certain childlike wonder of the world again—to bring it into my adult life. *Ki is singing to their kin. Ki is bringing the scent of lilacs my way. Kin are roosting on the bookshop ledge.* The grammar of animacy is not only theory, but also praxis. As means to transfigure the noun-based structure of English and to honour Kimmerer’s proposition of *ki* and *kin*, I use both sets of animate pronouns throughout my thesis and in my body of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry.

Relational Literature Review

A relational literature review process does not necessarily start with literature: it begins with your own relationships to people, places, and knowledge. A relational literature review process shifts the purpose of a literature review, not to extract data, establish a territory or find the gaps, but as an obligation to extend your relations, and therefore your work, for future generations. Respectfully engaging with scholarship. (Tynan & Bishop, 2023, p. 506)

Before plunging into my literature review, I will first position it in relation to my overall research design and ethics. In *Decolonizing the Literature Review: A Relational Approach*, Lauren Tynan (trawlwulwuy woman from tebrakunna country in northeast lutruwita/Tasmania) and Michelle Bishop (Gamilaroi woman from western NSW) (2023) offer two ways in which scholars can conduct their literature reviews from a relational paradigm: “first with respect as a starting place, and second through relational citation practices” (p. 499). Conducting a relational literature review contests the institution’s prescription to preform expertise. Eve Tuck (Unangax) and K. Wayne Yang (unmarked) (2014) explain that “most research rhetoric waxes the poetics of empire: to discover, to chart new terrain, to seek new frontiers, to explore, and so on” (p. 813). Dissimilar to Western notions of the literature review which encourage researchers to find gaps in the scholarship of others and to occupy a niche, a relational literature review is invested in “honoring scholars’ work as if they were people you were sitting down with” (Tynan & Bishop, 2023, p. 504). Wilson (2008) expresses that

critiquing others’ work does not fit well within my cultural framework because it does not follow the Indigenous axiology of relational accountability. Criticizing or judging would imply that I know more about someone else’s work and the relationships it represents” (p. 43).

Furthermore, he explains that “by doing a review in a style that is not critical, but builds upon the work of others, it can also form the context for relational accountability” (Wilson, 2008, p. 44). I will be conducting my literature review with Wilson’s Indigenous axiology of relational accountability in mind—in a review style that critiques but does not criticize and that is respectful of relationships. Lastly, I am borrowing from Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall’s concept of *two-eyed seeing*: “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing [—] using both of these eyes together” (Hatcher, et al., 2009, p. 146). *Two-eyed seeing* “intentionally and respectfully brings together [...] different ways of knowing, to motivate people to use all our gifts so we leave the world a better place” (Hatcher, et al., 2009, p. 146). In alignment with his concept, I center Indigenous worldviews and perspectives while also incorporating critical feminist and communications texts that are rooted in Western ways of knowing. This relational literature review is meant to weave together the thinkers who have shaped my research and who have shifted my perception of the (watery) world.

Thinking *with* (Watery) Place

Water is the lifeblood of my research-creation project—all aspects have been shaped by and through fluvial processes (water’s communication with my senses, my mind, and my words). As explored earlier, water is often spoken of as a resource or commodity—as a human right, a disposal site, and as leisure space (Dagenais, 2017). These discourses generate a lexicon for thinking *about* water in lieu of thinking *with* water. Architect and Communications scholar Cecelia Chen (2013) writes:

This limited and limiting approach to water has become a part of humanity’s relation to itself, to nature, to the world, and to its internal and external others...[w]ater is much more than a resource. It is a socio-natural *force*—an active agent of overflow, creation, and destruction. (pp. 276-277)

Chen’s (2013) proposition of thinking *with* watery place necessitates the dissolution of “land-based preconceptions” (p. 275) and asks us to recognize place as “always permeable and permeated with water—as shaped by water quality, scarcity, or abundance” (p. 275). As well, it asks us to acknowledge (and embody) the multidirectional and rhizomatic interspecies relationships that water is part of. Throughout the process of my research-creation project, I have come to understand that thinking *with* water also involves thinking *with* their kin—e.g., flora, fauna, plastics¹², and liquified long-dead Mesozoic beings¹³.

Environmentalist Deborah McGregor (Anishinaabe from Whitefish River First Nation) writes that water is our relative; that we, as humans, are watery bodies—deeply entangled in our biotic and abiotic surroundings. Furthermore, grandmother and water walker Josephine Mandamin (Anishinaabe) refers to women as “carriers of water” (Anderson et al., 2011)—linking water in the womb to the water that flows through our streams, rivers, and oceans. Here, I want to call attention to the reality that trans- and non-binary people are also carriers of water. When we conceive of humans and the environment as linked through shared water, it becomes

¹² In *for the wild*’s podcast episode entitled *Dr. MAX LIBOIRON on Reorienting Within a World of Plastic*, Liboiron discusses the idea of plastics as kin. They explain that plastics are an inextricable part of living systems—from plastics in the human body to plastics used in airplanes (Young, 2022). Liboiron further explains that “plastics challenge the often-fetishized concept of kinship as an inherent set of good relationships” (Young, 2022)—that they can lead us to ask how we can be in good relationship with bad kin.

¹³ In *Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in amiskwaciwâskahikan and Treaty Six Territory*, Zoe Todd (Métis) (2017) writes that “long-dead dinosaur-era beings, liquified as they are, now manifest their presence as bitumen, oil, natural gas and the plethora of materials produced from petrochemical processes that humans consume everyday” (p. 104).

easier to understand how the pollution of waterways is the pollution of bodies—human, non-human, and more-than-human (both born and still in the womb).

In *Presence and Absence in the Watershed: Storytelling for the Symbiocene*, Communications scholar Emily Plec (grew up in the rural/urban divide of Michigan) (2021) writes:

It is my contention that ‘thinking with watersheds’ can produce the kinds of insights and intimate relationships that can bring an end to the agony caused by careless anthropocentric contamination in the forms of dams, pollution, habitat destruction, deforestation, and intensive agriculture. (p. 36)

When we think *with* water—as a living being—the destruction of their health, biodiversity, and interspecies relationships becomes unintelligible. Plec (2021) offers the idea of *compassionate contamination*—which is grounded in Anna Tsing’s (American) notion of *contamination as collaboration*¹⁴—as a way of encapsulating our “intentional engagement in acts of loving care with unique (named) and precarious (potentially mourned) others in particular moments of assemblage” (p. 38). In other words, *compassionate contamination* is the idea that we are implicated in respectful, kincentric relationships with our non-human and more-than-human relatives—even those who are perceived as contaminants themselves (e.g., plastics and long-dead Mesozoic beings). For instance, conceptualizing plastics as kin opens us up to the question of how we can be in good relationship with *bad* kin (Young, 2020) and reframing bitumen, oil, and natural gas as liquified versions of “long-dead dinosaur-era beings” (Todd, 2017, p. 104) allows us to redefine pollutants as kin. When we think with the St. Lawrence waterway—a body within which we cannot swim or eat from due to various forms of pollution—through the lens of *compassionate contamination*, we can start ruminating on how to be in good relationship with kin no matter how they are perceived.

Throughout the ideation of my research-creation work, my intention has been to think *with* watery place—specifically the St. Lawrence waterway by the Old Port and Lachine Canal—as a way to engage in meaningful relationship. Haraway’s concept of *staying with the trouble* is helpful as a way to conceptualize this act of relationship building. Haraway’s (2016) concept of *staying with the trouble* is rooted in the messiness of the present—it asks for us to work together

¹⁴ In *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Tsing (2015) writes: “[c]ollaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die” (p. 28). Tsing’s (2015) idea of contamination as collaboration refutes purist logics of “self-contained evolutionary tracks” (p. 29). Inherent to our collective survival is the understanding that human, non-human, and more-than-human beings are inextricably entangled in one another’s lifeways.

with our multispecies relations within the understanding that our mutual existences are imperfect and, at times, backbreaking. Haraway (2016) urges us not to imagine utopic pasts or doomed futures but to instead focus on what we can do in the murky present. The waterways of the past were not Edenic and, if proper radical action is taken, their futures are not so ill-fated—we must learn how we can *stay with the trouble* of polluted waters and ecosystems.

Situating Ecopoetry in the Chthulucene¹⁵

“[L]anguage—the Word—is not something that separates us from and elevates us above the rest of this planet. Rather, language is an integral part of our biological senses [...] We are language-making creatures in the same way that spiders are web-making creatures” (Fisher-Wirth & Street, 2013, p. xxxix).

It is essential that Indigenous ecopoetics are foregrounded in my discussion of ecopoetry. Not only are Indigenous peoples at the frontline of environmental justice movements but their creation stories and laws have always centered around care and stewardship for the natural world. For instance, the *Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace* (known as *Kaianere'kó:wa* in Mohawk) has its roots in a “governance model of participatory democracy grounded in shared responsibility for ecological and human well-being” (Manno, 2015, p. 27). This legal document was created in ceremony near the Lake Ontario watershed nearly a thousand years ago (Manno, 2015). While there are Western guidelines for what comprises ecopoetry that date back to the 1990’s, Indigenous ecopoetics (and the ethics that guide this writing form) have been in practice much longer.

In his article *Teaching Ecopoetry in a Time of Climate Change*, Professor Craig Santos Perez (2020) explains that Indigenous ecopoetics are grounded in the “interconnection and interrelatedness of humans and the non-human world; the centrality of land and water in the conception of indigenous genealogy, identity, and community; and the importance of knowing the indigenous histories of a place” (Perez, 2020). Perez (2020) also posits the centrality of

¹⁵ While the Anthropocene is the proposed geologic epoch of our time, I will instead draw from Donna Haraway’s conceptualization of the Chthulucene to demarcate this epoch in my research. While the Anthropocene and Capitalocene “lend themselves too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions” (Haraway, 2016, p. 56), the Chthulucene is “made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet” (p. 55). By demarcating our current geologic epoch as the Chthulucene, equal importance is placed on human, non-human, and more-than-human beings as well as on our natural ecosystems—it breaks down the human/non-human hierarchy.

creation stories within Indigenous ecopoetics as they are “often encoded with ecological ethics” (Perez, 2020). More broadly, Perez (2020) describes ecopoetry as poetry that addresses “ecology, ecosystems, environmental injustice, animals, agriculture, climate change, water, and even food.” I will now discuss the lineage of ecopoetry in a more general sense.

Nature poetry—the precursor for ecological poetry—has existed as long as poetry itself; the central tenet of nature poetry being that nature exists solely as subject matter and inspiration. However, in the 1960s, in tandem with the rise of environmental awareness and activism, poets began to question the implied naturalness of nature poetry—new iterations of nature poetry became requisite and environmental poetry and ecological poetry emerged (Fisher-Wirth & Street, 2013). While environmental poetry is easier to explicitly define¹⁶, ecological poetry is more elusive. In *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, Ann Fisher-Wirth (American) and Laura-Gray Street (American) (2013) explain that the central principles of ecological poetry are that it brings the poetic and historical form of the self into question, is often characterized as experimental, and plays with language.

In *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction*, bibliographic services librarian Jim Dwyer (unmarked) (2010) offers four criteria—similar to those of Lawrence Buell (unmarked)—for determining whether a piece of literary work constitutes ecoliterature:

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (p. viii)

While Dwyer does provide this criterion, he also acknowledges that the debate over what exactly constitutes ecoliterature is in constant flux and evolution and that there is a plethora of well-grounded perspectives (e.g., those of Fisher-Wirth and Street).

While this section of my literature review provides a short history of the genre and describes what ecopoetry can be, the *Sympoietic Place-Based Ecopoetry* subsection of the methodology section will explore the how: the process of sympoietic place-based poetic creation.

¹⁶ Fisher-Wirth and Street (2013) characterize environmental poetry as “poetry propelled by and directly engaged with active and politicized environmentalism [...] greatly influenced by social and environmental justice movements and is committed to questions of human injustice, as well as to issues of damage and degradation to the other-than-human world” (p. xxix).

Ecopoetry Mediography

In the following subsections, I offer brief summations of three ecopoems—*Tickling the Scar* by Matthew Hollett, *generation, generations at the mouth* by Daphne Marlatt, and *The First Water Is the Body* by Natalie Diaz (Aha' Makav)—that have shaped my own ecopoetic process. As well, I reflect upon what they have taught me about structure, form, and/or content. I have decided to present them in the following order as this is the order in which I came to know them.

Tickling the Scar by Matthew Hollett

Matthew Hollett's *Tickling the Scar*¹⁷ was the 2020 CBC Poetry Prize winner. I came across his poem just after it was published by the CBC—in the height of the Covid pandemic. In his poem, Hollett records what the beginning of the pandemic felt like for him in a new city (Montreal). In an interview with the CBC, Hollett explains that “[he] wanted to capture the deeply disconcerting abstraction of the pandemic in Montreal—walking along the canal, seeing downtown in the distance, and understanding the city as the epicentre of a kind of bomb detonating in slow motion” (Mann, 2020).

When I initially read Hollett's poem, I felt something in the pit of my stomach. What he had written was relatable and honest, and so beautifully articulated. Upon reading his words, it became starkly apparent why his poem had won—he had managed to write about a collective period of grief with precision, care, and beauty. In particular, his precision stood out to me. For instance, in the first two lines of his poem, he writes “In spring the ice on the Lachine Canal melts / into algae blooms and great blue herons” (Hollett, 2020). Due to his precise and sparing use of language, he was able to communicate the passing of time as well as show the reader what this new time (spring) looked like—this is a tactic that carries through the entire poem.

While Hollett's poem may seem to place more importance on humans through its focus on human health and Hollett's own personal experience in the pandemic, he also places importance on non-human health. He does not simply employ the canal and its non-human companions as a metaphor to reflect human life. Rather, he foregrounds how non-human and human histories are implicated in one another: “Grackles / and red-winged blackbirds warble urgent duets / with distant ambulances [...] Along the path, / freshly-dredged jumbles of

¹⁷ This poem can be found in Appendix A.

crossbars and wheels / are so consumed by zebra mussels that you can barely tell / they used to be bicycles [...] Songbirds build nests with discarded masks [...] There was a lake here, before it was torn / into an industrial corridor. A long blue lung. / It's slowly healing over. You can sit on the grass / and watch herons stitch it back together / while your phone shows you horror after horror” (Hollett, 2020). Eco-poetry does not necessitate the displacement of human experience. Rather, it asks for writers to consider how human and non-human/more-than-human experiences are interwoven. These lines from his poem also demonstrate his skill at bringing the reader into place. In a time when many were unable to access such spaces, Hollett was able to use poetry to transport the reader to the Lachine Canal.

Matthew Hollett’s *Tickling the Scar* reaffirmed my stance on using precise language—exact nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.—when writing poetry, helped me better understand how to balance my focus on human and non-humans/more-than-humans, and demonstrated how poets can bring their reader into material space from afar.

generation, generations at the mouth by Daphne Marlatt

I came upon Daphne Marlatt’s eco-poem *generation, generations at the mouth*¹⁸ while reading through the book *Thinking With Water* edited by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod (unmarked), and Astrida Neimanis (unmarked). In Marlatt’s poem, she illustrates the impact that systems have had on her protagonist: the salmon. She explores how humans have disturbed salmon habitats—making it impossible for them to find their way back home. In an interview, Marlatt explains that salmon feed whole ecosystems (ModPo, 2020). She remarks that while she only included bears and eagles in her poem, that it is important to appreciate how salmon end up in the soil and how the forest draws upon their bodies for nutrients (ModPo, 2020).

In her poem, Marlatt centers non-human/more-than-human beings by focusing primarily on the lifeways of salmon—they are not used merely as a framing device for human life. As well, human accountability and responsibility are a central ethical tenet of the text: “return what is solid to water, the first peoples said – / returned, every bone intact / generates the giving back of race, kind, kin. (Chen, 2013, p. 38)” While this is the only line that specifically focuses on human responsibility, the poem as a whole—through its focus on human disruption of the

¹⁸ This poem can be found in Appendix B.

environment (cans, barbeque leavings, garbage bags, farmed salmon, toxicity)—asks us as the reader to reflect on our complicity and complacency around the lifeways of salmon. As well, as per the tenets of ecopoetry, Marlatt presents salmon lifecycles as an ongoing process by writing the poem in such a way that the ending (where salmon are gathered at the mouth of the river) circles back to the beginning (“clans of salmon, chinook, coho, gathering just off shore” (Chen, 2013, p. 38)).

What I deeply appreciate about Marlatt’s poem is its experimental nature—something that Fisher-Wirth and Street (2013) express as a central principle of ecological poetry. In her poem, Marlatt stops words halfway through, uses ampersands generously, places periods in the middle of sentences, and even aligns one sentence on the right side of the page (while the rest of the poem is aligned on the left). Marlatt’s poem reminds me to play with language and structure—to be flexible and creative. Sometimes, when I am in the midst of academic and technical writing, it is helpful to be reminded how to loosen up and play with words.

The First Water Is the Body by Natalie Diaz

In March 2023, I attended Arizona State University’s *Ecologies of Justice: Wasteland, Wastewater and Human Disposability* symposium with fellow Media Studies MA student Anna Sigrithur. During the *Wastewater: Ecologies, Infrastructures, and Imaginaries* workshop, Jeremy Chow (American) and Sage Gerson (American) prompted participants to read sections of Natalie Diaz’s poem *The First Water Is the Body*¹⁹ aloud and in relation to one another—her words filled the room.

Diaz’s poem, which is part of a larger body of work entitled *Postcolonial Love Poem*²⁰, is about the vulnerable and permeable relationships between our waters and our human bodies; she brings attention to the idea that water is “not external from our body, our self” (Diaz, 2020, p. 51). In her poem, Diaz advocates for the protection of waterways in the same way we would protect human life. *The First Water Is the Body* demonstrates the inseparable relationship between human and non-human/more-than human beings, legitimizes the health interests of water bodies, places emphasis on human accountability, and—throughout the entirety of the poem—frames the environment as a process and not as a static *thing*.

¹⁹ This poem can be found in Appendix C.

²⁰ Natalie Diaz’s book *Postcolonial Love Poem* won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.

When we read Diaz’s poem aloud in that classroom on the ASU campus, something came alive in the room—something that only art can conjure. The weight of her words were palpable—a call to action to protect not just the Colorado River but all bodies of water and everyone in the room could feel it. I’ve since read the poem in Montreal and must confess that there was something especially moving about reading her poem while in place—a mere three-hour drive from the Colorado River. This experience reminded me of the power of poetry to move people to understanding and to action.

Methodology

“[W]riting is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967).

“As I wrote, I watched word after word appear on the computer screen – ideas, theories, I had not thought before I wrote them. Sometimes I wrote something so marvelous it startled me. I doubt I could have thought such a thing by thinking alone” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970).

When I first entered Concordia’s *Media Studies* program, I was fixed on continuing my honour’s research: asking how insight from Indigenous art as resistance could inform how the Canadian news media represents Indigenous land-based activism. Though, as I have learned, it is alright (even encouraged) to change your mind and follow new streams of thought. Through this process, I began working with Professor Elizabeth Miller—working at the intersection of environmental justice and poetry.

In this section, I will discuss the embodied *how* of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry by exploring writing and poetry as method, delineating a macro-overview of my ecopoetic process, and providing specific walkthroughs that demonstrate how each ecopoem came to be. Before delving into the ensuing subsections of my methodology, I want to stress that the process of generating this *new* hybrid method has been deeply subjective (as per my positionality statement and human acknowledgement).

Writing and Poetry as Method

In this section, I will offer an overview of Laurel Richardson (unmarked) and Elizabeth St. Pierre’s (unmarked) analysis of writing as method and Sandra L. Faulkner’s (unmarked)

insight into using poetry as method. These two methods are the jumping off point for my practice of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry.

In *Writing: A Method of Inquiry*, Laurel Richardson, and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2005) explore writing as a method of qualitative inquiry and knowledge creation. They offer insight into how the use of writing as method helps researchers both learn about themselves and their research areas. Furthermore, they stress the subjective nature of using writing as a qualitative research method. They explain that there was a breakdown in the 20th century where scientific and literary writing—fact and fiction; true and imagined—began to blur (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Literary writing holds space outside of scientific writing where words are often conceptualized as “objective, precise, unambiguous, noncontextual, [or] nonmetaphorical” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) position language as the setting where

social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where one’s sense of self – one’s subjectivity – is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses – competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world – makes language a site of exploration and struggle. (p. 961)

Through the act of writing as method, researchers construct their own subjective realities wherein they can explore and contest hegemonic narratives. In my research-creation project, I use the English language as a tool to question and unpack my human relationship with the St. Lawrence waterway by Montreal’s Old Port. One of the most salient points that these authors make is as follows:

As I wrote, I watched word after word appear on the computer screen – ideas, theories, I had not thought before I wrote them. Sometimes I wrote something so marvelous it startled me. I doubt I could have thought such a thought by thinking alone (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970).

The act of writing—whether freeform or structured—can behave as a second skin to thought. For instance, epiphanic thoughts often occurred throughout my ecopoetic process that could not have happened via thought alone.

While the focus of Richardson and St. Pierre’s *Writing: A Method of Inquiry* is quite broad, Faulkner offers more specificity on the use of poetry as method. In *Poetry as Method: Reporting Research Through Verse*, Faulkner (2009) addresses “poetry as a form of arts-based research and research representation” (p. 9). She explores how poetry can help us move “closer to what it means to be human” (Faulkner, 2009, p. 16). I would also argue that within poetry’s

ability to bring us closer to our humanness, that it also presents us with the potential to come into closer and more intentional relationships with the non-human world.

Crafting poetry involves acts of noticing and being *with*; it begs for us to pay attention; and it allows for us to expand our understandings of the world in which we live. Unlike scientific writing which focuses more heavily on comparative frameworks, “[p]oetry makes writing conspicuous and pays attention to particulars” (Faulkner, 2009, p. 25). Alike Richardson and St. Pierre’s assertion that writing and language are places where power can be contested, Faulkner (2009) writes about “the intersection of poetry and social science research as a challenge to dominant discourses inside and outside of the academy” (p. 33). The use of poetry as method allows for the researcher to both contest hegemonic discourses within their topic area (in relation to my research, ecological thinking in and around the St. Lawrence waterway) and push back against dominant forms of research within academia.

Sympoietic Place-Based Ecopoetry

Sympoietic place-based ecopoetry brings together writing and poetry as method, Haraway’s (2016) idea of sympoiesis (making *with*—in this case, making *with* the waterway and their multispecies relations), and ecopoetry (as explored in the *Situating Ecopoetry in the Chthulucene* section of my *Theoretical Framework*). In this section, I will detail the original parameters of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry as method that I had in place and demonstrate how these parameters changed over the course of my research-creation project. I will then provide detailed walkthroughs for each sympoietic place-based ecopoem that I wrote during the research-creation process.

When I initially began developing this method, my idea was to visit multiple different sites along the St. Lawrence waterway in Montreal. Some of the tangential places were Boucherville Islands National Park, St. Helen’s Island, Verdun Beach, Montreal’s Old Port, Île Bizard, and Saint Thérèse Island. I was interested in casting a wide net in order to get, what I thought was, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the waterway. I began my research in Boucherville Islands National Park where I wrote a poem entitled *hot spell september (45.604845, -73.462246)*²¹. This ecopoem detailed the park’s white-tailed deer population—how

²¹ This ecopoem has not been included in the final grouping of sympoietic place-based ecopoems and is therefore not included in my research.

the St. Lawrence's inability to freeze over due to climate change had impacted the deer's capacity to leave the island and had set in motion a plan to euthanize many of them. My second site visit was to Montreal's Old Port where I took the fieldnotes in *Appendix D* and wrote the ecopoem entitled *wayward (45.501506, -73.552840)*. I will discuss the specifics of this ecopoem in its respective subsection.

In March 2023, I attended Arizona State University's *Ecologies of Justice: Wasteland, Wastewater and Human Disposability* symposium in Tempe, Arizona. During this symposium, there was a group workshop which centered around the following question: *How do you build trust among your team when you engage in collaborative work?* While the question was framed to discuss human teams, my group primarily focused on answering this prompt based on collaborative work with non-human and more-than-human beings. My group brainstormed the following in relation to building trust: spending time *with* land, tending to land, learning about ecosystems, relationship building, showing up and being consistent over long periods of time, asking what others need, emphasizing safety, being honest and transparent, showing up on bad days, asking for help, and establishing collective values.

This workshop led me to reconsider the wide net that I had cast for my site visits. When I returned to Montreal from Arizona, I decided that in order to cultivate meaningful relationships with the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements, that it was important to hyperfocus on one site. Hyper-focusing meant that I would be able to build trust with my non-human teammates through spending time with them, tending to them, learning about them, and being consistent. This alteration of my research method led me to select Montreal's Old Port as my sole research site.

I chose the Old Port as my singular research site due to its accessibility within the city (as someone whose primary mode of transportation is biking, this site was easily navigable) as well as its ideal encapsulation of Donna Haraway's concept of natureculture.

The term natureculture was coined by Haraway as a provocation for collapsing and transgressing the dominant metaphysics that dichotomizes nature and culture, and through which culture and all that is human is constituted as discontinuous with the rest of the world. As Haraway points out, nature cannot stand outside of culture, just as culture cannot stand outside of nature. This is because the meaning of nature – what we identify as natural – is not just determined by culture but is also the result of specific historical, material and political conditions of possibility (Latimer & Miele, 2013, p. 11).

Natureculture, as theorized by Haraway, is the synthesis of nature and culture—one that appreciates their inseparability. Montreal’s Old Port is a prime example of the theory of natureculture as it is a space within which what is perceived of as natural (the St. Lawrence waterway, islands, trees, wildlife, etc.) is confronted with human activity, tourism, and infrastructure. The importance of natureculture for my research-creation project is that it helps break down commonly held beliefs that humans are separate from the *natural* world.

Throughout my research-creation process, I conducted four site visits in Montreal’s Old Port (their respective field notes can be found in Appendix D-G). It is important here to note that I chose to move outside of the boundaries of the Old Port as demarcated on Google Maps. I found that it was important to include observations from sites along the Lachine Canal as this body of water is entangled in the larger scope of the St. Lawrence River.

Before delving into the process behind each individual sympoietic place-based ecopoem, I first want to address the purview of my field notes. As Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) explain, qualitative field notes “aid in constructing thick, rich descriptions of the study context” (p. 381). In the instance of my research-creation project, my field notes prompted me to closely observe my environment, document the physical environment (sights, sounds, smells, and impressions), and provided the context for my sympoietic place-based ecopoems. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) also explain that literature on qualitative field notes “provides little concrete guidance on the content” (p. 382). As such, my field notes are based on intuition and sensory engagement with place—they include date, time, temperature, weather, and personal feelings as well as sights, sounds, smells, and impressions.

In the following subsections, I will describe the research-creation process from field notes to ecopoem and analyse each ecopoem in relation to the tenets of ecological writing as explained in the *Situating Ecopoetry in the Chthulucene* section of my *Theoretical Framework*.

wayward (45.501506, -73.552840)²²

we stood in thin place together, the water
and I—my feet on the wide, worn-out asphalt

that corrals her bucking body between
borders—thick, gray, yellow, and tarnished

²² This ecopoem is based on *Appendix D: Field Notes (August 9, 2022—6:32pm)*.

the slow slippage of spray paint muddying
her wet flesh, her meniscus threshold, [chokehold]

foam lapping against concrete shorelines
plastics eddying in aquarium edges

of worry

we were where two worlds *almost* meet—
layers of naturecultures bleeding out, sticky

and tired—an audience watching as if
she was a soapbox or canvas or backdrop

passersby marking breached membrane, pulling
freshwater film through teeth, whalebone filtering

low-frequency moans, high-frequency cries, songs
sung far from salt, following fishfolk—finding

wastewaters, boat traffic, raw sewage—microplastics
entangling in bodies in bodies in bodies

in liquified long-dead Mesozoic kin

mysticetes holding their breath, aching in underwater
sound pollution—a symphony of scraping, ambient noise

the city wraps its mouth around *our beloved cetacean*
crossing estuary to us—

postponing the covid quotidian, we bystand, witness wide
eyed, eyes closed and back

to business as usual—their big, blubbery bodies capsize
under river water weight

we pull back, peel back flesh
re-redden our red, red hands

The first ecopoem that I wrote throughout the research-creation process—*wayward*—was written based on fieldnotes that I took on August 9, 2022. I was situated on a bench in Montreal's Old Port just across from Habitat 67. After recording my observations and feeling

surrounding the site²³, I returned to the Webster Library and began researching for news articles on the area. Through this process, I came upon two news stories that were separated by two years—both about whales that had found themselves in the waters of the Old Port²⁴. These news stories intermixed with ideas that emerged from my fieldnotes (the waters as living beings that felt imprisoned/corralled, the waters feeling like a blank canvas, and the spray paint that lines the edges of the water) drove my ecopoetic practice.

This ecopoem primarily addresses human accountability in relation to the minke and humpback whales that found themselves in the Old Port in 2020 and 2022. It focuses on how human infrastructure has corralled and contained the St. Lawrence Seaway as well as the role that anthropogenic climate change plays in these whales' ability to navigate salt and fresh water. The final lines of the ecopoem—*we pull back, peel back flesh / re-redden our red, red hands*—allude to the necropsies that were performed on the whales to determine their cause of death as well as pointing to the detrimental role that humankind (in relation to mass pollution driven by capitalist greed) has on waterways and aquatic animals.

wildfire season (45.511746, -73.546049)²⁵

the tech crew climbs up and places a red gel
on the floodlight. adjusts it just so. and I know

that we're not meant to stare directly into her
but how. how when she is a neon red bingo dot

I could peel from the sky. she is not millions
of kilometers away—she is right here. hovering

just above the river. I reach and lift at her edge,
itch to know her every curvature. the small

of her back. I extend myself into her orbit. and
orbit her. and orbit her. blood red. swollen on the

ghost town horizon, she splinters our city-wide

²³ If you would like, you can read these fieldnotes in Appendix D and then return to this section.

²⁴ These news articles included the following: [2nd minke whale swims off shores of Montreal, hundreds of kilometres from usual habitat](#), [Wandering humpback whale spotted from Montreal's Old Port](#), [Wandering whale still hanging around Montreal's Old Port area on Sunday](#), [Experts worry about humpback whale's safety in Montreal waters](#), and [How will Montreal's Old Port whale get home?](#).

²⁵ This poem is based on *Appendix F: Field Notes (July 6, 2023—6:26pm)*.

sense memory. the rollercoasters at LaRonde
 are still in operation though I cannot imagine
 wanting to be so close to the sky today. I wonder
 how the waters *feel*—her breathy body filled with
 ash, thick smoke obscuring her undulations. the
 breathways of fish whose algae bloomed waters
 tighten their air supply, the microscopic organisms—
 life submerged below her surface. montrealers already
 inhale the equivalent of 124 cigarettes per year without
 ever lighting one themselves. now she too is a heavy
 smoker—coughing river water, a blue lung filled
 with smoke. I leave her, my throat raw. ride up
 berri hill into a sealed off home—air conditioners at
 full tilt, windows closed. I wonder where the waters
 will go, what new homes her entanglements must find.

The second ecopoem that I wrote—*wildfire season*—was written based on fieldnotes that I took on June 25, 2023. The reason for the large time gap between the first and second ecopoem is, as detailed in the *Sympoietic Place-Based Ecopoetry* section, that there was a turning point where I moved from focusing on many geographic areas to solely focusing on Montreal’s Old Port. The fieldnotes from this day were the sparsest as they were taken when Montreal had the poorest air quality of any city in the world—the air quality index was 226. As someone with asthma, staying at this field site for a prolonged period of time was not possible.

The process of moving from the fieldnotes that I recorded to the ensuing ecopoem involved returning from the field site and conducting online research into the state of the air quality in Montreal and how said air quality impacts aquatic life. In one of the first articles that I came across—CTV News’ *These are the most polluted cities in Canada*—I learned that Montreal’s air quality is so dirty that inhaling its pollutants equates to smoking 124 cigarettes per year (Amanat, 2023). This data was assembled before the wildfires in Northern Quebec that covered Montreal in smoke this summer.

The second direction that this research took was researching the effects of poor air quality and wildfire smoke on aquatic animals. This line of questioning speaks directly to one of the questions that I wrote down in my fieldnotes: *Where does the wildlife go when their homes are filled with smoke?* Through this, I found a *National Geographic* article that explained that while there is little research on how wildfire smoke affects aquatic animals, that it is likely that inhaling ash and particulates will inevitably cause them harm (Basu, 2020).

The eco-poem that resulted from this field site primarily deals with the wildfire smoke that was blanketing the city. This eco-poem focuses on the blood red sun, the air quality/wildfire smoke, and the impacts of this on non-humans. The central takeaway from this eco-poem is the distinction between humans (not all) being able to return to their airconditioned homes while the waters and wildlife must remain in these polluted spaces. In relation to the tenets of eco-poetry, this eco-poem reverses the use of non-humans as framing devices and foregrounds human accountability. This eco-poem uses humans as framing devices—using the fact that Montrealer’s inhale the equivalent of 124 cigarettes annually to question how the smoke impacts the waterway and their aquatic animals; and holds humans accountable to the fact that the natural world cannot escape pollution in the same ways that many humans can²⁶.

*rivered (45.499305, -73.552108 & 45.497048, -73.551593)*²⁷

from here, I cannot see her
only her reflection on the underbelly of the bridge
only a mediation, a life she lives in between

from here, she is light writhing on human infrastructure—
unable to touch the sky

locked between concrete walls: green algae blooms, plant debris,
orange-colored wrappers, half-smoked cigarettes, plastic film,
bread bags, water bottles, straws, single-use coffee cup lids

line her bifurcated body

a river rivered but not revered, crawling through rotted wood,
pushing her waterlogged body through locks that slice

²⁶ I also want to stress here that humanities desire to *escape* pollution is a non-starter—we cannot *escape* the realities of the current climate crisis.

²⁷ This poem is based on *Appendix F: Field Notes (July 6, 2023—6:26pm)* and *Appendix G: Field Notes (July 13, 2023—1:57pm)*.

through her flesh, that rupture holobiont

a river stream-ing, creek-ing, ditch-ing—
hallucinating rivering through, breaking down
bridges and buildings and locks and pollutants

green seeping through cement, bursting into yellow

it is thirty-one degrees and
the thundering of post-spa feet across metal grid drowns
out the chatter of red-winged blackbirds, the hush of wind—
a revolving soundscape

the echo of footsteps boom, separating thought

this liminal space—like a waiting room—is strangely
idyllic, still undiagnosed: couples embracing, a woman
walking her dog, legs peeking out from hammock edges

The third and final ecopoem that I wrote for my research-creation project—*rivered*—was written based on field notes that I took on July 6, 2023, and July 13, 2023. The process of writing this ecopoem diverged from the first two in that it combined the ideas from two separate instances of field notes. When I read through them in tandem, I noticed that they both addressed ideas of containment, waste, and liminal space. The first thing that I did upon noticing this similarity was highlight the words and phrases that stood out to me. From July 6, 2023, they were the following: locks / her reflection on the underbelly of the bridge / leak in the locks / plants (weeds) growing through the cracks in the cement / feels peaceful / the river is still between locks, stagnant / green algae blooms and plant debris / waste / orange-colored wrappers, cigarettes, tissues, plastic film; and from July 13, 2023, they were the following: containment / waste / interconnection / plastic garbage / bread bags, water bottles, straws, chip bags, lids / (the same bifurcated body) / white, plastic trash / there are four garbage bins in my eyeline and still there is garbage in and around the waterbody.

Through the process of highlighting the most salient terms, I recognized that the story that these field notes were presenting me with was one about human impact on the waterway (primarily via plastic pollution) as well as nature's resiliency in the face of this impact. I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that nature will recover without human effort but that, even in moments of harm, there are cracks where healing can take place. In relation to the tenets of

ecopoetry as describe earlier, this eco poem focuses on presenting the river as an agential body (through the use of verbs such as stream-ing, creek-ing, ditch-ing, and river-ing), placing importance on the water's own health interests, and shows the waterway as a process of containment and push back.

Critical (and Uncomfortable) Reflexivity

Wanda Pillow (2003) argues that researchers must depart from comfortable uses of reflexivity and immerse themselves in “uncomfortable reflexive practices” (p. 175). She writes that “[p]racticizing uncomfortable reflexivity interrupts uses of reflexivity as a methodological tool to get better data while forefronting the complexities of doing engaged qualitative research” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). Instead of treating reflexive practices as a box to be checked or as something to be confessed, uncomfortable reflexivity involves “exposing the difficult and often uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar” (p. 177).

Reflexivity involves the examination of one's own values, judgements, and practices in relation to both the research process and the representation of research findings (Pillow, 2003)—this is present in the positionality statement and human acknowledgement at the beginning of this thesis. As well, this practice involves a circular relationship between intent and impact. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater offers insight into the “distinction between reflexivity and reflection: ‘to be reflective does not demand an *other*, while to be reflexive demands both an *other* and some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny’” (Pillow, 2003, p. 177). Within the context of my research-creation project, the perceived *other* is the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements and the self-scrutiny is this section of my research-creation project (which, if honest, spanned the entirety of my research-creation process).

In this section, I engage in a process of critical and uncomfortable reflexivity where I reflect on my research-creation process. This practice captures what Margaret Kovach (2009) describes as inward knowledges: “feelings, intuitions, and reflections on the research process” (p. 127). While this section will focus primarily on my methodology, it will also speak to the research-creation project more holistically.

When I had originally conceptualized this project, I was much more ambitious than was feasible. I wanted to conduct 10+ site visits and write an entire chapbook of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry that I would later print and disseminate. Over the course of my research and through discussions with my supervisor, it became clear that I needed to scale down the scope of

my research. I was able to fully accept this once I realized that I could carry this research with me outside of academia and continue it as a passion project on my own time. This revision was how I ended up conducting four site visits and writing three ecopoems—choosing quality over quantity. With this said, if I were to go back, I would have conducted at least two more site visits to take in more details of the site and to spend more time *with* the waterway and their multispecies relations. However, due to the realities and constrictions of life—needing to work, eat, and sleep—I couldn't possibly read or create nearly as much as I would have liked.

Over the course of both my research and ecopoetic process, I came to understand just how difficult it is to let go of the conventions of the English language. Though my intellectual brain understands the logistics of the *grammar of animacy*—the idea of using verbs in place of nouns and using animate pronouns for non-humans and more-than-humans—the application was met with mind-body/inner struggle. I found it difficult to deviate from the spelling and grammatical structure of English. However, I see this project as a pilot for future creative work. This process has helped undo a lot of the preconceived ideas that were subconsciously embedded in my writing and has opened me up to further experimentation in my poetic craft. As well, with the knowledge I have gained throughout this research-creation process, I will be able to move into future creative endeavors with a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of how to structure them. For instance, it was only after this process that I was able to fully understand how to go about structuring my field notes. In the future, I would create more stringent parameters in relation to what data I would collect while still being open to freewriting with more flow. I realize now that having more structure at the outset would have allowed for more creativity in the later steps of my research-creation process.

Throughout the research process (during my site visits), I found myself coming into closer relationship with the waterway and their multispecies relations at Montreal's Old Port. The purpose of this research was to question and unpack my human relationship with the waterway and their multispecies entanglements, to shed light on the loss and destruction that is taking place, and to show how things might be different. At its heart, my research has been about learning how to come into better relationship with more-than-human beings, waterways, and lands. Though this was the jumping off point for my research, I found that this strayed and took new shape throughout the research-creation process. While the sympoietic place-based ecopoems that I wrote mediated my relationship with place and demonstrated the loss and destruction of the

natural ecosystems in the Old Port, they did not necessarily provide alternate presents and futures. I have come to realize that this would be where the continuation of this research lies. Step one has been situating myself in place and assessing the current reality of the waterway and their multispecies entanglements and the next step would be to reflect on this and begin conceptualizing what the present and future might look like if we did things differently. Here, I want to acknowledge that this is an ongoing process, and I will be continuing this line of questioning outside of academia as I move forward through my life.

Conclusion

“Poetry is the human language that can try to say what a tree or a rock or a river is, that is, to speak humanly for it, in both senses of the word ‘for.’ A poem can do so by relating the quality of an individual human relationship to a thing, a rock or river or tree, or simply by describing the thing as truthfully possible. Science describes accurately from the outside; poetry describes accurately from inside. Science explicates; poetry implicates. Both celebrate what they describe. We need the languages of both science and poetry to save us from merely stockpiling endless ‘information’ that fails to inform our ignorance or our irresponsibility. By replacing unfounded, willful opinion, science can increase moral sensitivity; by demonstrating and performing aesthetic order or beauty, poetry can move minds to the sense of fellowship that prevents careless usage and exploitation of our fellow beings, waste, and cruelty” (Le Guin, 2017, p. M16).

Over the course of this research-creation project, I have sought to address the following: how the process of researching for and writing sympoietic place-based ecopoetry can facilitate better and more kincentric relationships with the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements in Montreal’s Old Port. More specifically, my research-creation work has focused on 1) calling my human relationship *with* this place into question, 2) articulating the loss and destruction of this place in a new way, and 3) helping to bring more ecologically thoughtful presents and futures into focus. As articulated in the *Critical (and Uncomfortable) Reflexivity* section, my sympoietic place-based ecopoems primarily address the first two parts of my research question and the third is something that I want to work with and through in future creative projects.

As a poet who has previously only created art outside the parameters of academia, I had initially thought that there would be more friction when poetry brushed up against research. However, what I found was that the practice of sympoietic place-based ecopoetry within an

academic setting provided me with a better understanding of the taxonomy of ecopoetry's inner life—how it functions and what it is in conversation *with*. All creative work involves some kind of research, and this process allowed me to pilot a new form of creative writing—sympoietic place-based ecopoetry. As well, it helped me better understand and articulate poetic processes that I had already been practicing in my non-academic life in relation to brainstorming ideas (notetaking, fieldnotes), online research, and editing. Secondary to the research itself, this process helped me better understand myself as both a poet and academic (as an ecopoet-researcher). I practiced something that I have been preaching for as long as I can remember: we cannot bifurcate ourselves, we must bring all of who we are into whatever we are doing.

This project has been hyper-focused on method—on learning how to write *with* nature instead of *about* it, on actioning Robin Wall Kimmerer's *grammar of animacy*. As reflected upon in the previous section, learning about and embodying Kimmerer's *grammar of animacy* is not something which I believe can be achieved in the span of one academic year. Rather, it is an ethos—an enduring practice that involves time, commitment, and care; it is something that we work towards in our quotidian lives. This circles back to the prompt that my group was given at the conference at Arizona State University about how we can build trust with our teammates when engaging in collaborative work. To build trust, we need to spend time *with* our partners (human and non-human/more-than-human), tend to our relations, build and nurture our kincentric relationships, and show up consistently. I believe that the same can be said for the act of making kin. While I do believe that I have come into more attentive and compassionate relationships with the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements, I still have a ways to go in terms of acting as good kin.

My hope in this undertaking this project is that the three ecopoems that I have written—*wayward*, *wildfire season*, and *rivered*—influence readers to question their own relationships with place and inspire them to some form of environmental protection action. For instance, throughout this research process, I have decided to become involved with *Climate Justice Montreal*. While I do consider poetry to be a form of activism in and of itself because of how it calls others to action, I want to also work collaboratively with others in a more-boots-on-the-ground form of environmental protection.

When I think about this entire research-creation thesis as a pilot project, it allows me the freedom to explore what I might do differently in future ecopoetic endeavors. For example, I

have learned that in the continuation of this ecopoetic work, I yearn to work in collaboration with other environmental enthusiasts and literary artists. While there was something magical about working in a silo and having the time to explore my own preconceptions in relation to place, I believe that the next step in this process involves bouncing ideas around with others—this is the place in which I think we could begin to imagine alternative presents and futures in which the St. Lawrence waterway and their multispecies entanglements are protected from anthropogenic harm.

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Appendix A: *Tickling the Scar* by Matthew Hollett*Tickling the Scar* by Matthew Hollett

In spring the ice on the Lachine Canal melts
into algae blooms and great blue herons. Grackles
and red-winged blackbirds warble urgent duets
with distant ambulances. Thousands of Montrealers
are drowning in their beds. I walk the canal
because I'm grateful to breathe, even through a mask,
and because it feels spacious. Less petri dish. Along the path,
freshly-dredged jumbles of crossbars and wheels
are so consumed by zebra mussels that you can barely tell
they used to be bicycles. A survivor of the virus describes
feeling as though a bag of rice was being dropped on her chest
every time she took a breath. Seagulls drop bivalve shells
on the canal's concrete walls, where they split open
into pairs of tiny desiccated lungs. Whenever I see a single one,
I imagine its partner coughed up on the opposite side of the water.
There are nursing homes where staff have deserted en masse.
A man takes a job at one because it's the only way
to be with his father. He sobs when describing to a reporter
"the stench of urine, feces and disinfectant." A rainbow
is painted over its front entrance. At CHSLD Herron,
a relief nurse finds ninety-year-olds so dehydrated
they're unable to speak, "with urine bags full to bursting."
They bring the army in, repurpose refrigerated trucks
as morgues. Songbirds build nests with discarded masks.
I think of walking the canal as *tickling the scar*.
Tracing a fault line between "before" and "normal."
There was a lake here, before it was torn
into an industrial corridor. A long blue lung.
It's slowly healing over. You can sit on the grass
and watch herons stitch it back together
while your phone shows you horror after horror.
They're reopening the restaurants tomorrow.

Appendix B: *generation, generations at the mouth* by Daphne Marlatt

generation, generations at the mouth by Daphne Marlatt

clans of salmon, chinook, coho, gathering just off shore, backbones no longer intact, stream-pressured in millions of cans, picked clean barbeque leavings in a thousand garbage bags ripped open by cats, rats, they can't find their way back

what is the body's blueprint?

return what is solid to water, the first peoples said –
returned, every bone intact
generates the giving back of race, kind, kin

choked in urban outfalls, fished as they aim for rivers sediment-thick with runoff, *tamahnous* of the wild they hover, sonar streaks, impossible vision-glitches, outside pens where farmed lookalikes grow pale & drugged

kin, wild skin, wild & electric at the mouth where rivers disappear in the that that is not that, the chinook can't find their way back

come out of the blue: this flow, these energy rivers & wheels, radiant giving unlocked. & not this frozen, this canned product eagles once stripped, eagles, bears going, gone, hungry & wild outside shut doors where light pools & we pore over stock market news, refuse, refuse our interrelation, refuse to pour back

what *is* the body's blueprint? impermanent, shifting energy blocks in its own becoming, a stream & streaming out to the void where rivers lose themselves

in the bardo as many beings as waves gather at any opening, those in-between and not-yet ones that race a river of sperm to be here now, light-pour, each cell in its dying turn returns

what is the mouth of the river now? a toxic O of emptiness? teeming hold of ever-becoming we create? re-entry. re-turn. verbing the noun of its stuck edges into an occurrence, currents, *curre-* ... we've lost the verb in our currency, a frozen exchange streaming emptiness

(they're fishing in London now)

at the mouth of the river, clans of the possible are gathering, the chinook, the coho rivering just offshore are us

Appendix C: *The First Water Is the Body* by Natalie Diaz

The First Water Is the Body by Natalie Diaz

The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the United States—also, it is a part of my body.

I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘Aha Makav. This is not metaphor.

When a Mojave says, *Inyech ‘Aha Makavch ithuum*, we are saying our name. We are telling a story of our existence. *The river runs through the middle of my body.*

So far, I have said the word *river* in every stanza. I don’t want to waste water. I must preserve the river in my body.

In future stanzas, I will try to be more conservative.

→

The Spanish called us, *Mojave. Colorado*, the name they gave our river because it was silt-red-thick.

Natives have been called *red* forever. I have never met a red Native, not even on my reservation, not even at the National Museum of the American Indian, not even at the largest powwow in Parker, Arizona.

I live in the desert along a dammed blue river. The only red people I’ve seen are white tourists sunburned after staying out on the water too long.

←

‘Aha Makav is the true name of our people, given to us by our Creator who loosed the river from the earth and built it into our living bodies.

Translated into English, ‘Aha Makav means *the river runs through the middle of our body, the same way it runs through the middle of our land.*

This is a poor translation, like all translations.

In American imaginations, the logic of this image will lend itself to surrealism or magical realism—

Americans prefer a magical red Indian, or a shaman, or a fake Indian in a red dress, over a real Native. Even a real Native carrying the dangerous and heavy blues of a river in her body. What threatens white people is often dismissed as myth. I have never been true in America. America is my myth.

→

Jacques Derrida says, *Every text remains in mourning until it is translated.*

When Mojaves say the word for *tears*, we return to our word for *river*, as if our river were flowing from our eyes. *A great weeping* is how you might translate it. Or *a river of grief*.

But who is this translation for and will they come to my language's four-night funeral to grieve what has been lost in my efforts at translation? When they have drunk dry my river will they join the mourning procession across our bleached desert?

The word for *drought* is different across many languages and lands. The ache of thirst, though, translates to all bodies along the same paths—the tongue, the throat, the kidneys. No matter what language you speak, no matter the color of your skin.

←

We carry the river, its body of water, in our body.

I do not mean to imply a visual relationship. Such as: a Native woman on her knees holding a box of Land O' Lakes butter whose label has a picture of a Native woman on her knees holding a box of Land O' Lakes butter whose label has a picture of a Native woman on her knees...

We carry the river, its body of water, in our body. I do not mean to invoke the Droste effect—this is not a picture of a river within a picture of a river.

I mean *river* as a verb. A happening. It is moving within me right now.

→

This is not juxtaposition. Body and water are not *two unlike things*—they are more than *close together* or *side by side*. They are *same*—body, being, energy, prayer, current, motion, medicine.

The body is beyond six senses. Is sensual. An ecstatic state of energy, always on the verge of praying, or entering any river of movement.

Energy is a moving river moving my moving body.

←

In Mojave thinking, body and land are the same. The words are separated only by the letters 'ii and 'a: 'iimat for body, 'amat for land. In conversation, we often use a shortened form for each: *mat-*. Unless you know the context of a conversation, you might not know if we are speaking about our body or our land. You might not know which has been injured, which is

remembering, which is alive, which was dreamed, which needs care. You might not know we mean both.

If I say, *My river is disappearing*, do I also mean, *My people are disappearing*?

→

How can I translate—not in words but in belief—that a river is a body, as alive as you or I, that there can be no life without it?

←

John Berger wrote, *True translation is not a binary affair between two languages but a triangular affair. The third point of the triangle being what lay behind the words of the original text before it was written. True translation demands a return to the pre-verbal.*

Between the English translation I offered, and the urgency I felt typing ‘*Aha Makav* in the lines above, is not the point where this story ends or begins.

We must go to the place before those two points—we must go to the third place that is the river.

We must go to the point of the lance entering the earth, and the river becoming the first body bursting from earth’s clay body into my sudden body. We must submerge, come under, beneath those once warm red waters now channeled blue and cool, the current’s endless yards of emerald silk wrapping the body and moving it, swift enough to take life or give it.

We must go until we smell the black root-wet anchoring the river’s mud banks. We must go beyond beyond to a place where we have never been the center, where there is no center—beyond, toward what does not need us yet makes us.

→

What is this third point, this place that breaks a surface, if not the deep-cut and crooked bone bed where the Colorado River runs—a one-thousand-four-hundred-and-fifty-mile thirst—into and through a body?

Berger called it the *pre-verbal*. *Pre-verbal* as in the body when the body was more than body. Before it could name itself *body* and be limited, bordered by the space *body* indicated.

Pre-verbal is the place where the body was yet a green-blue energy greening, greened and bluing the stone, red and floodwater, the razorback fish, the beetle, and the cottonwoods’ and willows’ shaded shadows.

Pre-verbal was when the body was more than a body and possible.

One of its possibilities was to hold a river within it.

←

A river is a body of water. It has a foot, an elbow, a mouth. It runs. It lies in a bed. It can make you good. It has a head. It remembers everything.

→

If I was created to hold the Colorado River, to carry its rushing inside me, if the very shape of my throat, of my thighs is for wetness, how can I say who I am if the river is gone?

What does 'Aha Makav mean if the river is emptied to the skeleton of its fish and the miniature sand dunes of its dry silten beds?

If the river is a ghost, am I?

Unsoothable thirst is one type of haunting.

←

A phrase popular or more known to non-Natives during the Standing Rock encampment was, *Water is the first medicine*. It is true.

Where I come from we cleanse ourselves in the river. I mean: *The water makes us strong* and able to move forward into what is set before us to do with good energy.

We cannot live good, we cannot live at all, without water.

If we poison and use up our water, how will we clean our wounds and our wrongs? How will we wash away what we must leave behind us? How will we make ourselves new?

→

To thirst and to drink is how one knows they are alive and grateful.

To thirst and then not drink is...

←

If your builder could place a small red bird in your chest to beat as your heart, is it so hard for you to picture the blue river hurtling inside the slow muscled curves of my long body? Is it too difficult to believe it is as sacred as a breath or a star or a sidewinder or your own mother or your beloveds?

If I could convince you, would our brown bodies and our blue rivers be more loved and less ruined?

The Whanganui River in New Zealand now has the same legal rights of a human being. In India, the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers now have the same legal status of a human being. Slovenia's constitution now declares access to clean drinking water to be a national human right. While in the United States, we are teargassing and rubber-bulleted and kenneled Natives trying to protect their water from pollution and contamination at Standing Rock in North Dakota. We have yet to discover what the effects of lead-contaminated water will be on the children of Flint, Michigan, who have been drinking it for years.

→

America is a land of bad math and science. The Right believes Rapture will save them from the violence they are delivering upon the earth and water; the Left believes technology, the same technology wrecking the earth and water, will save them from the wreckage or help them build a new world on Mars.

←

We think of our bodies as being all that we are: *I am my body*. This thinking helps us disrespect water, air, land, one another. But water is not external from our body, our self.

My Elder says, *Cut off your ear, and you will live. Cut off your hand, you will live. Cut off your leg, you can still live. Cut off our water, we will not live more than a week.*

The water we drink, like the air we breathe, is not a part of our body but is our body. What we do to one—to the body, to the water—we do to the other.

→

Toni Morrison writes, *All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was*. Back to the body of earth, of flesh, back to the mouth, the throat, back to the womb, back to the heart, to its blood, back to our grief, back back back.

Will we remember from where we've come? The water.

And once remembered, will we return to that first water, and in doing so return to ourselves, to each other?

Do you think the water will forget what we have done, what we continue to do?

Appendix D: Field Notes (August 9, 2022—6:32pm)

I'm situated across from Habitat 67—a brutalist housing complex built in 1967.

Life: pigeons, people, bees, gulls flying just above the water, trees behind me.

I am sitting. The water, something alive, a whole world, feels imprisoned; corralled by borders—thick, gray, yellowish, tarnished pillars and walls.

There is graffiti on the water's edge across from me; boats (mostly blue, one red—the red one has black lifesavers all of it, seven at least on the one side that I can see).

The water shimmers from a slight breeze—gray, reflecting overcast skies. Pigeons use it as a washroom. The sky is mostly clouds—a tiny sliver of blue peeking through. There is something sad about all this (*objectively or subjectively?*). I am in a period of depression and my judgement may be clouded.

A hornet circles me. Light wind, 17 degrees. The water feels like a blank canvas though I know otherwise. I can feel that the water is sad. A small boat makes its way across my eyeline. All of this is raw data. I wonder if there is something to see here, something to uncover.

Pigeons make pigeon sounds—they coo and grunt. Though this space was made for the waterway, it does no good for it. How polluted is the water in the Old Port? How harmed? How hurt? I biked here: Lafontaine → Cherrier → Berri → Viger → St. Laurent → here. I'm sitting on a wooden bench (anti-houseless architecture) with an armrest so that no one can sleep here. Why am I more distracted by what is around the river than the river itself?

VM/S HERCULES is the name of the biggest ship across from me. There is new construction on the port. Pigeons are dancing around, silly. BOTA BOTA spa—interesting—access? class? pollution? It's strange to see a place of relaxation and restoration next to a body so polluted that it cannot be swam in; a place of capitalist gain next to a *resource* that has been drained of its health.

[END]

Appendix E: Field Notes (June 25, 2023—4:05pm)

We currently have the worst air quality in the world. The city is blanketed in smoke. LaRonde looks like a strange ghost town—the rides are still operating. The water and the air both feel and look thick.

There are very few people down at the Old Port today. I shouldn't even be here with the Air Quality Index at 11/11. There are wildfires in Northern Quebec, and this is how they present themselves in Montreal. The air smells of campfire—a smell I usually cherish but not now, not like this.

I can see a green buoy floating in the water, faint. The air is thick, I could almost pinch it between my fingers. Everything looks apocalyptic, the sun is blood red. I shouldn't be here. The river shouldn't have to undergo this. Where does the wildlife go when their homes are filled with smoke? How does the smoke impact aquatic life?

[END]

Appendix F: Field Notes (July 6, 2023—6:26pm)

I can hear the chatter of red-winged blackbirds. My arm keeps sticking to the page because of the heat. It is 31 degrees—partly cloudy, sticky, and hot; even the breeze is hot. I'm right near the railway crossing signs. The locks are practically under me. BOTA BOTA to my left. There are red-winged blackbirds everywhere. I can't see the water from this vantage point, but I can see her reflection on the underbelly of the bridge.

There's a small child crying in their father's arms. A couple kissing on the bench to my right—the girl seems upset with her partner, indifferent to him. There are interesting buildings across from me—covered in rust and spray paint. The tagging reads: MARSHALL, GONSO, RTP RED 10.1. I wonder how humans propelled themselves so as to make this possible. The tagging is extremely high up on the buildings. After searching on Google Maps, I see that one of the buildings I'm looking at is Silo #5—it is owned by the *Canada Lands Corporation* and has been closed since 1996 (trespassing is forbidden). One of its reviewers writes: "This building is a majestic, pre-brutalist work of art. Unmistakably Montreal."

There is a weeping willow near the sign for BOTA BOTA.

I walk down gray cement steps that are far too wide for normal human-sized steps onto a small patch of grass. This is just about the closest that I can get to the water without moving my body over the safety railing.

It smells fishy. I can hear the water lapping up against a small red pleasure craft. People are moving to and from the spa. I've chosen to stay in the shade. The Air Quality Index (AQI) is 4/11—*Moderate Health Risk*—a large improvement from having the worst AQI in the world.

I've moved further down—the closest to the water I can get. The smell of fish intensifies. The ground feels like a hot stone massage. There's a leak in the locks—*is it intentional?* Plants (weeds) are growing through the cracks in the cement, in the edges of the locks. If I really pushed myself, I could touch the water.

Ants and other small bugs keep crawling around on my legs. Even though I'm in the middle of the city, it feels peaceful here. The soundscape is rushing water, loud feet across the bridge (booming), motorcycle exhausts, bird chirps/calls.

The river is still between the locks, stagnant. Filled with green algae blooms and plant debris. There's waste mixed in: orange-colored wrappers, cigarettes, tissues, plastic film.

It's strangely idyllic as you walk further up the locks. Calm. There's a fancy restaurant bustling with patrons; potted flowers; laughter. A bit further down there are people in hammocks, on the grass reading in the sunshine, tanning. The *Daniel McAllister* tugboat is parked on the still water. It smells like fresh grass/fresh corn but with hints of fish.

[END]

Appendix G: Field Notes (July 13, 2023—1:57pm)

These site visits seem to have become all about containment and resource and partially about waste. And always about interconnection—I cannot talk about the river without considering all of the life and infrastructure that surrounds and embeds itself. It is 26 degrees and there is a tornado warning. It is humid, muggy, and overcast. The air quality is 3/11—low health risk.

It's muggy out. The sound of rushing water overtakes my ears. The only other sound: some high-pitched bird chirps. They're beautiful, I wonder what they're communicating. There's a man across from me, just staring out at the water. Another man is walking his German Shepard to my far left. There are very few people here at this time. Until this point, all of the water in the locks has been still but now it is rushing, gushing over the edge.

As I walked over to where I am now, I had to cross the locks. The metal bridge was narrow and silver and made to look like a grid. I could see right through it to the water. I found so much plastic garbage in the water—bread bags, water bottles, straws, chip bags, lids—all of it too far for me to scoop out.

It's so windy here between the two bodies of water (the same body bifurcated) that the pages of my notebook keep flipping. There are sirens in the near distance. I can see white, plastic trash by the edge of the water. The falls make the water white and foamy.

Moths keep landing on my skin, there are lots of bugs crawling around in the grass. It's quite quiet—the falls sound like white noise. There's indiscernible blue graffiti on the gray brick of the locks. The windows in the buildings across from me are mostly broken. The buildings feel haunted. I find it so strange that these giant buildings in such a remarkable Montreal area have just been left abandoned. It's both beautiful and strange.

There's a man behind me leaning on a tree—staring out across the water. It seems much calmer on his side, just a handful of meters from me. The trees are rustling in the wind—their sound intermixing with the white noise of the water.

There are four garbage bins in my eyeline and still there is garbage in and around the waterbody. There are two security vehicles in this small area. I can only assume that they are here to secure the abandoned buildings (Silo #5) across from me. Why are we securing abandoned buildings but not caring for the water with the same intentionality?

[END]