

Fear of an Adversarial Wilderness in Quebec Canada in the select Short Stories of Alice Petersen

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Abstract: Canada has an astounding variety of pieces of writing in literature. A ponderous phrase 'Francophone writing in Canada' refers more accurately to the factual, dimensional and the conquering range of literature written in French by the French-speaking people in Canada. Quebec Literature began with the broad overview that has articulated their feelings about nature through literary expressions. One of Quebec's famous living writers, Alice Petersen's debut collection of short stories *All the Voices Cry*, acts as the mournful lamentation of human solitude and their inevitability to change. The women characters occupy the minds and hearts of the reader. These stories are about the people who suffer from loneliness and were unable to connect them with the wilderness either outside or inside. This collection of short stories renders and explores the space and landscape of Quebec and it also establishes the link with the transformation of the protagonists' psyche and their mental world. This paper thus investigates the issues regarding the relationship between the landscape and the mindscape through the presentation of the heroic past.

Key Words: landscapes, development of time, human psyche, mobility, unsettling memories.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The article centralizes the troubled relationships among space, place, landscape, narrative, and notion in the context of Alice Petersen's collection of short stories. Space, place, and landscape are the longstanding themes in Quebec literary and cultural studies. Quebecois cultural narratives have proven fertile ground for spatial analysis. In her influential collection of short stories *All the Voices Cry*, Alice Petersen argues that the narrative forms are, in the Quebecois context, profoundly tied up with national myths of land, landscape, and identity. This collection of short stories won her the Quebec Writers Federation Concordia University First Book Prize in 2012.

Her first work, *A Will to Win* (2001), republished as *Another Alice* (2008), was autobiographical in tone, and it reveals her childhood days as a Tennis player. Her other novels were *Look the World in the Eye* (2005), *You Me and Him* (2007), *Things We Do For Love* (2015), *A Song for Tomorrow* (2017) and *If You Were Here* (2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Canadian Literature is the body of written works produced by Canadians. Reflecting the country's dual origin and its official bilingualism, the literature of Canada can be split into two major divisions as English-speaking Canadians and French-speaking Canadians. In an exploration of French-Canadian literature in Quebec across time, a focus on the landscape, its verbal description and its visual representation open an avenue that enables the French-Canadians to pass from seemingly simple imagery to the exceedingly complex question of national identity. The call of the wilderness counterweighted by nostalgia for culture has long characterized the French perception, construction, and representation of the North American landscape.

3. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS:

The sixteen stories in the collection of short stories, *All the Voices Cry*, balance exquisite renderings of the natural landscapes of rural Quebec and New Zealand with the rich interior landscapes of characters caught up in the moments of transition. This article projects four of the stories from the collection *All the Voices Cry*, which emphasize the rural landscape of Quebec and the people who are trying to connect themselves with the natural world. They also depict the characters on the fringe of potential loss to cancer and other serious diseases.

In 'After Summer', the fact that two children Jake and the narrator grew without their mother, reveals their loss of closeness with their father when he moves in with a new woman. While the narrator thought about her life with her brother when they were kids she could recall the moment they spent with their father in a rented boathouse. It is during the winter days he would rent a boathouse on every Saturday mornings, and start writing poems that he would carry in his head during the rest of the year. A couple of years later he hooked up his hands with Valmae, and therefore Jake

went out of the house and stayed out. It is the time for them to leave everything behind the boathouse that is not going to be theirs. Nature here proves as a cure for distress proves. But it is only temporary since human voices continue to dominate and fail to offer comfort. Jake and the narrator think about their life during winter where Jake says,

Thinking of the time when it had been boreal forest, and how the rustling leaves must have roared in the wind, like the sea in the fall . . . After Valmae came, there was none of the tangy essence of bat left about my father. (4)

Alice Petersen's characters talk more to themselves than with others, and many of them suffer from the awkwardness of human connections. Their connection to the natural world is restricted by their inability to receive a response from it. The description of the submerged vegetation, the suck and pull of marsh life in 'The Frog', offers a striking exception. A single mother, Sandrine, feeling stuck in the routine of her life, goes on a hike with her son Carl and her sister Robyn on a woodland trail. Carl walks along the riverbank and is startled by a large green frog jumping back into the water. Robyn wants to return the frog to its habitat, but Carl is determined to let the frog in the next lake. Robyn thinks of the golden rims of the frog's eyes which Carl caught. 'Amphibian', is the word which draws Robyn closer to the wilderness, and it is the same word with which she wants to describe the way a person without children moves through the world. She compares herself to the amphibian. Alice Petersen describes as,

"A frog knows where it wants to go", said Carl. It took ten minutes of effort, but he caught the frog in a net and put it in his collecting jar where it scabbled at the plastic sides, its scythe like swimming toes still kicking. "It will start a new colony there", he said. (62)

In 'Where the Corpse Weed Grows', a young woman Isabella, searches for a herb in the woods, to add it to a mixture with a hope that it would cure her dying mother. Isabella's mother Moira Delacourt, the lounge singer, suffers first with paralysis of the face and then with cancer. Her journey to search for a list of herbs, that would cure her dying mother, begins with a pamphlet from the health-food store. The pamphlet describes a herbal product called Elcarim, proclaiming its value as a potent cure for cancer. It is the recipe received from the Indian healer. Isabella decides to gather the ingredients and prepare the Elcarim herself to offer her mother a cup of liquid that would protect her from deathbed. If only the wilderness guide by name Pascal could show her the plants that she has never seen before, she could make the recipe for herself. Pascal raises his eyebrows and utters,

"You are not the first person to ask me about this Elcarim. Just buy it off the Internet."

Can't you at least show me what the plants look like?

He sighed, "Okay, but you cannot take the plant. It is a National Park."

"I know hands off the pristine wilderness."

"What is on your list?"(58)

The search for the list of the recipes end with the identification of all the herbs. At the end of the journey, Pascal shows Isabella a plant and asks her about the use of the herb. The plant which he shows normally looks to be dead, but is alive and it is called as Corpse Weed, the living dead of nature. Pascal opens her eyes by instructing her that Death grows, and it lives with them, he wants Isabella to spend time with her mother and listen to her emotions.

The title story 'All the Voices Cry', presents the helpless condition of a woman who slowly understands that she is lost in the place which is familiar from her childhood days. She was accompanied by the imaginary death souls of her husband and her father. The memories of her husband Otto, who died eight years haunts the life of Freya. Her father used to say her that "Forest is the best teacher for a boy". (33) So, following her father's advice, Freya follows the footprints of the deer when she feels that she is really lost inside the woods. Only after the sudden calls of the crow inside the woods the narrator comes to know that she is all alone in the woods. The characters in all these stories reveal that they are not lost outside but they are lost within themselves. They try to connect each other with the natural world which is far away from them.

4. CONCLUSION:

The theme of nature and wilderness has also been reflected throughout Quebecois literary tradition. Adopting the northern concepts of early explorers and settlers, most literature about the Quebecois wilderness are written by male authors. Alice Petersen, a female writer points out the different representations of women and nature in her collection of short stories *All the Voices Cry*. She provides an insight into the relationship of people and society with the species and ecosystems with which they share Quebec.

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