SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

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Spatial Ecologies of Not-Belonging: Dwelling as Drift in M. Wylie Blanchet's *The Curve of Time*

> [T]he stories [landscape] tells will need to be as much about not-belonging, about the distant and the estranged, as they are about connection and belonging (John Wylie, "Landscape as Not-Belonging" 184)
>
> "Give us nowhere to stand, and we shall care for the Earth" (Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* 24)
>
> This is neither a story nor a log; it is just an account (M. Wylie Blanchet, *The Curve of Time* 1)

Near the beginning of Muriel Wylie Blanchet's seafaring memoir *The Curve of Time* (1961), the travelers—Blanchet and her five children—sail their little boat, the *Caprice*, over the sand-flats of Desolation Sound in the Pacific Northwest. Blanchet's description of the sea below them evokes the complex intersecting modes of perception that inform their experience of this place:

> The tide must have been slack as well as low, for not a ripple nor a current stirred the surface of the water as we drifted silently over the sandy bottom and the surprised boulders . . . trying to blend ourselves in with the life of the sand-dwellers below.

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> Big red crabs with enormous claws would sidle across at an angle—making for the shelter of a boulder. We didn't know who their enemies were. Perhaps they didn't know who we were. We must have appeared like strange two-headed beasts to them—our faces joined nose to nose with our reflections in the water. (40–41)

This passage, with its dynamic oscillation between stillness and drifting movement, identification and estrangement, brings into focus an emphasis on spatial and ecological experience that pervades this text. While the attempt to "blend . . . in" evokes a desire for belonging and emplacement that has long been foregrounded in environmental writing, the recurring emphasis on shifting perceptions defamiliarizes the travellers from their environment in ways that anticipate recent critiques of place and rootedness. Thus, the crab's angular movement across the sea floor is not merely an ecological image. It is also a spatializing one: the word "angle" highlights the relative situatedness of embodied existence and perception as well as the corresponding slipperiness and fragmentariness of the world. Along with the physical angle of the crab's movement, angles of perception divide the scene into unstable planes that the human and nonhuman observers navigate above and below the surface of the water. From the "surprised boulders" to the humans contemplating the life below through the distorting medium of the water, imagining the crabs returning their gazes in similar bewilderment, the text draws attention to the divided and refracted worlds occupied by different inhabitants of this environment and the uncertainty of knowledge on all sides. As the narrative imagines perceiving things from different angles, it defamiliarizes, surprises, and renders strange and slippery the world through which Blanchet and her children drift.

This moment, with its drifting movements through and shifting perceptions of the world, draws together the central concerns both of Blanchet's book and of this article. Intertwining space and ecology, *The Curve of Time*, we argue, develops a phenomenology of drift and slippage that offers an alternative to stable forms of attachment and belonging. Read alongside selected essays by the cultural geographer John Wylie, who prompts us to reject such securely anchored senses of place, as well as through broader phenomenological conceptions of landscape and seafaring, Blanchet's memoir helps us to think beyond existing conceptions of spatial phenomenology centred on homeland and dwelling to the possibility of geographical attachment without home, knowledge without full understanding, and spatial experience without a fixed sense of place. Through its drifting, navicular narrative,

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The Curve of Time reimagines both place and landscape as an embodied experience of what Wylie calls "not-belonging" that is precarious and unmoored. Its world is constantly in motion: carried along by their boat, Blanchet and her children live among but do not fully inhabit the islands and shores they encounter; even their own home, to which they return at the end of the book, is but a temporary sojourn. This feature of the book at once depends upon and complicates their settler–colonial relationship to Indigenous land, illuminating the limits as well as the possibilities of Wylie's theory of not-belonging in a colonial place like Canada. The implications of these drifting and slippery experiences of space are ecological as well as geographical. Ultimately, the idea of place in *The Curve of Time* opens up radically not just to movement and transitory inhabiting, but also to a multiplicity of forms of life in their shared, multivalent, intersecting planes of space and time.

The Drifting Narrative

First published in 1961, *The Curve of Time* quickly became a classic West Coast memoir. In its pages, Blanchet recounts her exploration of the channels and islands between Vancouver Island and the mainland in a small boat with her children, over a series of summers in the 1920s and 1930s. Marketed on British Columbia ferries as well as by local booksellers throughout coastal BC, it is now a central place-making narrative of the region.[1] According to Maleea Acker, Blanchet's book stands out from other BC coastal narratives of the same period not only because of the originality and beauty of its writing, but also because it treats "landscape as kin" rather than background. Given its importance as a regional text that brims with affection for the landscape and is invested in settler-colonial habitation of this place, we might expect *The Curve of Time* to foster the kind of attachment that Wylie refers to as ontopology, with its claims to belonging. As Wylie explains in his essay "A Landscape Cannot be a Homeland," ontopology "asserts an original and indefinitely sustained link between, and perhaps even a fusion of, a site and its inhabitants"—or what he characterizes as "homeland thinking" ("Homeland" 409). Although this approach to the world (and, in particular for Wylie, to landscape as a conceptual frame for relating to the world) can be mobilized in "progressive" as well as "reactionary registers" (410), homeland thinking carries problematic associations with possessive, static, and exclusionary senses of place. At worst, it carves the world into territories, separating inhabitants into "us" and "them," or those who belong and those who do not. At best, it points to an elusive, yearned-for home that can never actually be reached (413).

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We have much to gain from "[u]nsettling homeland thinking," yet Wylie never quite specifies *how* to free landscape from the affective clutches of homeland. As he observes, "it is difficult to disentangle phenomenological approaches ... from this inheritance" ("Homeland" 414).[2] Environmental writers and ecocritics have also seized on the affective potential of place-attachment and the dangers of placelessness in order to promote ecological consciousness and deeper respect for the earth and its multiple co-habitants.[3] According to Wylie, "'homeland thinking' [...] infiltrates landscape discourse," and he is critical of environmental writing that "involves the language of 'connection' and 're-connection' with landscape, environment, and the 'natural world'" as well as "'deepened' human relationships with non-human worlds" (4). He seeks instead a "phenomenology of landscape ... more decisively marked by a recognition of unhomeliness and distancing as both a critical and affective condition. In other words," he writes, "I would look to the phenomena of a dislocated world, of nothing that can in fact be called 'a' world, and to a fragmented subject not-coincident with itself." He goes on to clarify that "this is *not* a gloss laid over a more homely or traditional phenomenology. In many ways ... the unhomely and the estranged are built into some of the founding arguments of phenomenology" ("Landscape" 190; emphasis in original).

The Curve of Time is a case in point and illustrates, moreover, that such dislocation need not entail placelessness. As Blanchet shows us through the figure of drifting, place and dwelling can be fluid concepts, conceived in terms of movement rather than rootedness. Yet *The Curve of Time* goes beyond simply celebrating the freedom of travel and mobility that she enjoys in the region. Fragmenting and dislocating a sense of place, even as its subjects make their way affectionately through the world, the memoir invites us to imagine an alternative to homeland thinking. One might ask how it could be otherwise: as a settler born in Montreal, Blanchet cannot assert an "original" relation to this place. Yet, while many settler writers were eager to mark the land and thus to root themselves in it (see Krotz), Blanchet offers a compelling ecological alternative to the Cartesian logic of place as property. Avoiding both the "language of cultural heritage" that is a hallmark of ontopology (Wylie, "Homeland" 410), and the possessive tropes of depth and connection with which many environmental writers promote the "communion of self and landscape" (412), Blanchet explores the ecological relationships that develop across slippery surfaces. In doing so, she not only replaces roots with routes, but also embodies instability, alighting on *worlds* rather than dwelling in *the world*.[4]

This alternative spatiality does not resolve the problematic relationship that Blanchet has with Indigenous places in the book, particularly

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when she universalizes drift in ways that risk undermining Indigenous claims to the land, much of which was (and remains) unceded territory. At the same time, her ecological sensibility resonates with both Euro-Western and Indigenous spatial theories that prompt us to ask, as Wylie does, "what claims can people lay upon a landscape—in what sense can it be called 'theirs'?" (411). Blanchet's depictions of land-and-oceanscape present this question in myriad ways that, despite the apparent limitations of her own colonial imaginary, remain productive for thinking beyond colonial logics of ownership and control.

Indeed, while it renders the geography of this region in striking descriptive clarity, Blanchet's "account" (1) is also disorienting in many ways. Her episodic chapters fragment her linear journeys: neither chronology nor itineraries dictate the organization of the book, which moves in time and place with her non-linear memories.[5] The phenomenological poetics of her text are driven by perceptual experiences of both space and time as she recounts her family's movements through the Gulf Islands in their boat:

> As far as the eye could see, islands, big and little, crowded all round us . . . . And north, south, east, west, among the maze of islands, winding channels lured and beckoned. That was what we had been doing all day – just letting our little boat carry us where she pleased. . . .
>
> Then the channels began to have some definite direction, and the islands sorted themselves out—the right ones standing forward bold and green; the others retiring, dim and unwanted . . . .
>
> Farther and farther into that Past we slipped. Down winding tortuous byways—strewn with reefs, fringed with kelp. (73–75)

Blanchet pilots her own boat, armed with nautical charts, but is also swept along by tides and weather. This passage registers the limited perceptual horizon within which features of the islandscape threaten to overwhelm the observer. The difficulties of navigating this place register the forces of water, wind, and land. Indeed, active verbs of movement are assigned to the landscape rather than to those who move through it, suggesting that, far from an inert backdrop, "[s]pace is . . . alive" (Riquet 238). The physical motions in and of the watery world ("winding channels," "carry us") converge with the visual appearance of movement (with the islands "crowd[ing]," "retiring," and eventually "sort[ing] themselves out"). The travellers' emplacement is determined by these shifting and emerging frames of perception, which are in turn shaped by the landscape, which "lured and beckoned." In such

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moments, Blanchet describes a maritime experience that finds parallels in Indigenous Pacific practices of wayfinding by observing islands and stars, "where navigators estimate their position by picturing themselves in a stationary canoe, surrounded by moving islands" (Feinberg, Pyrek, and Mawyer 3; see also Howe 2006). Space in *The Curve of Time* is alive because it is mobile, from the ocean tides beneath the boat to the "constellations . . . slowly wheeling round the pole star" overhead (237). Round and deep, space is an agent that directs them. Like drift, the verb "slipped" designates an involuntary movement: although you only "slip" when you are already actively moving, to "slip" is to succumb to an unpredictable spatial accident. To move in these ways means to be without stable anchorage. The archipelagic geography of the Pacific Northwest thereby affords poetic possibilities of imagining a dynamic and shifting sense of place, in line with recent theorizations of the archipelago as a space of non-linear and tidalectic movements and circulations (DeLoughrey), an anti-continentalist and non-hierarchical assemblage (Stratford et al.), a relational figure that encourages fluid ontologies (Pugh), or a "mesh of relationships that resist atomisation and evolve towards complexity" (Carter 24). In its poetic exploration of a coastal and archipelagic world, *The Curve of Time* is drawn away from land-based cartographies towards the fractal and unpredictable entanglements of water and land.

The drifting movements of the *Caprice* (whose very name suggests the capriciousness of the travelers' position in and relationship to space)[6] invite readers to imagine space itself as indeterminate. In *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Bertrand Westphal proposes that "so-called real space" is (among other qualities) "navicular"—boat-like, characterized by motion (113). For Westphal, this boat-like quality is metaphorical: it is, in particular, "*human* spaces" that possess a "navicular essence" (145; emphasis added). Reading Blanchet, we can begin to imagine how one might physically experience a "navicular" sense of place—a place created by drifting through objects that move in and out of focus, the multiplicity of perspectives felt in the constant readjustment of perception.

As this passage makes clear, Blanchet sees herself as "slipp[ing]" through time as well as space, an experience that the nonchronological and associative structure of the narrative recreates. The reader also experiences the same disorienting slippage; we often do not quite know where and when we are. Blanchet's preoccupation with the way that her own memories elude linearity is influenced by modernist aesthetics and phenomenologies, particularly those that register the "keenly felt sense of disorientation" characterizing what Andrew Thacker terms "geographies of modernism" (1, 7). Indeed, the title of

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her book, *The Curve of Time*, alludes to the Belgian modernist writer Maurice Maeterlinck, whose 1928 book *The Life of Space* (*La vie de l'espace*) Blanchet and her children read on the boat one summer. In this book, Maeterlinck discusses the theory that time is the fourth dimension of space.[7] Standing on the curve of time, he suggests, we experience the present, past, and future in the same moment. Maeterlinck's philosophical reflections on space and time, influenced by modern physics, thus go hand in hand with the modernist aesthetics of Blanchet's text:[8] just as place becomes coastal, archipelagic, and mobile—a drifting, unattached location rather than a fixed and stable one—so too does time become fluid in Blanchet's narrative, spilling beyond the familiar linear chronology as dreams, premonitions, past, and future converge.[9] This rejection of Newtonian space-time links phenomenology and modernism; in fact, Blanchet's imagined alternative confirms that "phenomenology [is] a thoroughly *modernist outlook*" (Moran 3; emphasis in original).

Through its unmooring of both time and space in a coastal world, *The Curve of Time* repeatedly reminds readers that the land- and seascapes it explores are neither stable nor fully knowable, and that the beings in it, including humans, find only a precarious place. The very first scene foregrounds the difficulties of finding anchorage:

> Towards the end of June, or it might have been July, we headed up Jervis Inlet . . . . All the soundings on the charts are marked one hundred fathoms with the no-bottom mark . . . right up to the cliffs. Stunted pines struggle up some of the ravines, but their hold on life is short . . . .
>
> For some reason that I have forgotten, probably the hope of trout for supper, we decided to anchor in Vancouver Bay for lunch. Vancouver Bay . . . only makes a very temporary anchorage good for a couple of hours on a perfectly calm day . . . . You can drop your hook on a narrow mud bank, but under your stern it falls away to nothing. (8–9)

This memory conveys uncertainty on many levels. The difficulty of securing their boat on a "narrow mud bank" that quickly "falls away to nothing" parallels the uncertainty about time (was it June or July?) and causality (why did they go there?). Even the land provides little sense of stability or permanence: the pines "struggle up," and have a short "hold on life." Their insecurity is made all the more palpable by the verticality of space, experienced in liminal zones where land and water interact. Floating along the mountainous coastline, they hover over a

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deep unfathomable sea, overshadowed by the steep cliffs looming high above them.

Throughout the book, Blanchet gives us many images not of comfortable dwelling, but of a tenuous hold on place. When the family climbs up a waterfall, for example, the risk of falling "over the edge" of the land becomes more dramatic:

> Later in the day we climbed up beside the falls. . . . Suddenly I was sure I felt the sheet of moss under my feet slip – as moss will on granite . . . .
>
> The youngsters were all safely anchored to a tree and I to a bush – and we sat there watching in horror as the big sheet of moss, to which I had just given the final push, gathered momentum and slid down and over the edge. (25–26)

Such moments expose the limits of belonging by showing the frailty of the climbers' grip as the ground quite literally slips out from under them. Blanchet's repeated preoccupation with "slipping" through time and space emphasizes their precarious position on land as much as on the sea. This instability might well be a defining feature of a "navicular" sense of place. Indeed, the metaphor of "anchorage" creates an association between spatial experiences of land and water, the one proving not to be much more solid than the other.

The oscillation between orientation and disorientation in the coastal islandscape is thus figuratively extended to explore the uncertainties of spatial experience more generally. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty also uses maritime language to describe the primary disorientations of the body in space as "floating experiences" that later become "anchored" (287).[10] Maeterlinck's and Blanchet's phenomenological conceptions of space anticipate not only Westphal's suggestive metaphor, but also other recent theorizations of space as alive, dynamic, and relational. For the geographer Doreen Massey, Western philosophy has been taking "the life out of space" by treating it as static and abstract, like a road map, rather than as dynamic and relational: "On the road map you won't drive off the edge of your known world. In space as I want to imagine it, you just might. For such a space entails the unexpected" (111). Blanchet's phenomenological descriptions of moving through a space that surprises both horizontally and vertically prefigures such relational models, as well as the deconstructive ecophenomenology of Timothy Morton, who stresses the importance of acknowledging the opacities in the human experience of the environment—what he calls "the irreducible hidden dimension of things"—that prevent our full mastery of any space (292).

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Finally, Blanchet's emphasis on slipping resonates with John Wylie's thoughts on the impossible "good step" (an image he takes from the Irish writer Tim Robinson) that troubles the desire to insert oneself fully in the landscape. Wylie develops this into a phenomenology of distance and absence, an awareness of always missing something (rather than fully merging with and thereby appropriating a place). Thus, "the movement of 'the good step' is very much a critical displacement of what are seen by Robinson as problematic notions of rootedness and embeddedness in landscape—notions that haunt any thought of dwelling, howsoever mobile or dynamic it might be" (Wylie, "Dwelling and Displacement" 376). In *The Curve of Time*, as the human subjects drift, slip, and slide, their exploration of the landscape becomes characterized by a sense of unease as well as curiosity and discovery.

Spatial surprises and opacities mark not only the instability of the world as Blanchet experiences it and the limitations of cartographic knowledge in an unstable environment with "no bottom," but also the limits of perception, knowledge, and dwelling that her text repeatedly foregrounds. These limits register through a sense of bodily discomfort as they move on land, for example when Blanchet explores the area around Vancouver Bay:

> After lunch I left the youngsters playing on the beach . . . . Then undergrowth was heavy and most uncomfortable on bare legs, and I had to make wider detours to avoid the devil's club. Then I had to force my way across the stream, as my trail had been one of least resistance . . . .
>
> But suddenly I was seized with a kind of panic . . . I simply had to get back to my children. I shouldn't be able to hear them from where I was, if they called. I listened desperately . . . .
>
> I finally scrambled through to the beach – blood streaming down my legs, face scratched, hands torn – blood everywhere. (9)

Here as in those places when Blanchet almost loses her footing, the landscape resists easy mobility and appropriation. She has to "force [her] way" through, make "detours" and "scrambl[e]"; coupled with the prepositions "across" and "through," these verbs imply a struggle caused by a place that is not readily navigable. Like the sea that carries them, the land, too, has agency: it restricts her movements, the vegetation even leaving marks on the body. When she makes it through this landscape, moreover, there is no moment of triumph or mastery—only sudden fear about her children, whom she has left far behind. The

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panic that seizes her is a premonition of imminent danger, which is soon confirmed when she returns to her children, who are not alone:

> "There's a man along at the other end of the beach," volunteered Peter. "He's been watching us."
>
> "All day!" broke in John. "And he's all dressed in black." I glanced up – a tall figure was standing there, against the trees, up behind the drift-logs at the top of the beach. . . .
>
> "Mummy!" shrieked Jan. It didn't take us two minutes to drag the dinghy into the water, pile in and push off. The man was coming – but he was coming on all fours. (10)

No less than the rugged topography through which Blanchet has just scrambled, the beach is a place where the force of the land and its other inhabitants emerges in the disquieting image of a "man" who shape-shifts into a bear. The flawed perception that Blanchet and her children experience is enacted by her narrative, which also tricks the reader before the sudden transition from "he" to "on all fours" dissolves the illusion. This perceptual transformation materializes the idea that this place has an unsettling life of its own that works at the edges of human understanding. The almost supernatural premonition Blanchet reports thereby becomes a trope for thinking about the unpredictability of space as well as the vulnerability of humans (and indeed all beings) in it.

In addition to emphasizing that the land is not a haven of security, Blanchet's recollections of this episode also playfully reimagine the curve of time as an ecological phenomenon: "Maeterlinck may have some kind of plausible Time theory, but the children are not sure how he manages about the bears. If they are going to climb onto both ends of the Curve it will be a little too much" (24). The speculation that bears will also climb onto the curve of time decentres the human, accentuating other beings that move in both time and space. Indeed, Maeterlinck's conception of the "fourth dimension" prompts us to imagine beyond the bounds of human experience in deeply unsettling ways: "We want a space which we should have to try to conceive outside our thoughts; . . . things happen in this space which are as majestic, as astonishing and as incontestable as those which take place in our accustomed, everyday space" (22–23). Maeterlinck explores the limits of human perception and contemplates the possibility of a post-human existence: "il est à présumer que pour un être qui nous serait supérieur . . . , ou pour nous-mêmes quand nous serons suffisamment

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outrepassés, il y en aura nécessairement plus de trois [dimensions]" (*La vie de l'espace* 141).

Maeterlinck's preoccupation with "the life of space," in fact, was part of a series of more explicitly ecological philosophical inquiries into non-human experience, which included texts such as *The Life of Termites* and *The Life of Plants*. For Maeterlinck, space itself is a dynamic living organism, like the entities existing within it. His attentiveness to various forms of life prefigures the relationship between the spatial and the ecological that marks *The Curve of Time*. In Blanchet's memoir, the life of space emerges through the perceptual experiences of different ecologically enmeshed entities that the family encounters: mountains and birds above, sea creatures and the intricate topographies of the sea floor below, woods and underbrush and land animals. There are layers of habitation all around them. In the passage with which we opened this paper, as they "drift silently over the sandy bottom and the surprised boulders," they encounter and speculate about the countless lives below:

> Bands of silvery minnows darted in unison – first here, then there. Some unknown mass signal seemed to control them – like sand-pipers flying low over the edge of a beach – the fluid concerted movement, concave edge changing to convex, and then vice versa . . . Or crows at some unknown signal dropping helter-skelter, head over heels, down through the air towards earth and destruction . . . then as suddenly resuming their flight on normal wings like perfectly sane crows. With the minnows we could see that it was probably a preservation idea – they and their shadows escaping bigger shadows and threatening dangers. But who gives the signal and how is it made? (41; ellipses in original)

To drift and pause in this place is to encounter a kaleidoscopic world where horizontal and vertical dimensions come together, as they do in the simile comparing the movements of fish to those of birds. The humans float between them, mediating with language and thought the connections between the watery world and the air. The passage creates an ecological vision that at once blends perspectives and emphasizes their distinctness. The repeated ellipses and dashes suggest the forming and reforming that continually changes the configuration of beings, whether fish or bird, in this place. But the mobile and fluid syntax conveys a richness of life that they grasp only imperfectly. Drawing attention to what cannot be known, Blanchet's quizzical observations return us again to the "irreducible hidden dimension of things,"

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creating a phenomenology of uncertainty that echoes forward to Morton's deconstructive ecological outlook. This becomes especially pronounced when Blanchet reports the appearance of a strange fish, "ragged" like the "Ragged Islands" they later anchor on:

> It was about two feet long, shaped rather like a salmon, but there the resemblance ended. The fish was a pale cream colour, laced over with half-inch bands of old gold in a large diamond pattern. Its eyes were dark, large and oval. Dark folds or eyelids opened and shut, opened and shut . . . It lay there chewing, or was it the gills like a jaw-line that gave it the ruminating appearance? (42; ellipsis in original)

As attentive as she is to the details of the fish's appearance, Blanchet is no naturalist; taxonomy and morphology elude her, and her inability to classify the fish and interpret its behaviour parallels their separation in space, "we suspended in our dinghy, it suspended in the safety of our shadow" (42).

The collision of these different perspectives makes space come alive further. Yet these layers also decentre and sometimes destabilize the humans who coexist with them, emphasizing their tenuous hold on place, and the agency of the other life forms in it. Right after they admire the fish, for instance, we read: "Then a seal broke water and the glassy surface was in a turmoil. When it had quietened, our cream-and-gold fish had gone" (42). The seal both breaks their momentary perception and interrupts the possessive impulse that briefly emerges in the text: while Blanchet speaks of "our" fish, she must also accept that it vanishes as suddenly as it appeared.

Colonial Ecologies

These differences of perspective and perception that texture the narrative occur not just between human and nonhuman beings; the ecology of these places includes the convergence of human communities in the colonial contexts through which Blanchet moves. As she does with the minnows and their unknown signals, Blanchet shows the limits of knowledge in her encounters with Indigenous winter villages. As she describes their location, her spatial uncertainties parallel the epistemological uncertainties that run through the chapter: they find themselves "far north of our usual cruising ground," baffled by the "narrow confusing passages" through which they drift "in the waters of the Kwakiutl Indians, one of the West Coast tribes of Canada" whose villages lie along "the edge of Queen Charlotte Sound" (74).[11] Her desire

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to visit these places bespeaks a desire to understand the Indigenous people whose land she shares. She recalls: "trips to the museum, and books from the library, and a whole winter's reading, had made us familiar with the history and habits of these Indians." This research inspires them "to spend part of the summer among the old villages with the big community houses, and try to recapture something of a Past that will soon be gone forever" (74). Here, Blanchet's colonial lens becomes amply apparent: she "recycles the myth of the vanishing Native" (Pagh 113; see also Acker) and is influenced by the salvage ethnography that accompanied cultural genocide as colonization transformed the West Coast. Her nostalgic tone anticipates the literal act of salvaging that follows:

> It was low tide, and suddenly beside my bare foot, which I was placing carefully to avoid the barnacles, I saw an old Indian bracelet of twisted copper. The children were soon making little darting noises, and in a short time we had found a dozen of them, caught among the seaweed or lying in crevices at the edge of the cliff.
>
> . . . I lay awake, lost somewhere down the centuries. Things that I did not understand were abroad in the night . . . .
>
> Perhaps they couldn't believe that we had taken the bracelets – none of their own people would have touched the things-of-the-dead . . . .
>
> Impossible to explain to them that I was trying to save their Past for them – a reproving chorus of "Tch . . . tch . . . tch!" started up immediately. (84–85)

In keeping with a colonial collecting impulse, she takes possession of the things the dead have left behind. On some level, however, she recognizes this acquisition as an act of trespass, misappropriation, and limited understanding. No sooner does she justify the appropriation as "trying to save their Past for them" than the voices introduce an ambivalence into the text, capturing her uneasiness at this act and the assumptions behind it. The reproving voices interrupt her disturbance of this sacred space, condemning her disregard for the place's Indigenous meaning. As she admits, "none of their own people would have touched the things-of-the-dead" (85).

In addition to highlighting her own ambivalence about taking the bracelets, the voices also convey the space's aliveness and ongoing human significance. The Indigenous inhabitants are absent not because they have disappeared but because they are "in their dugouts all summer" (56)—they, too, are moving in and along these places,

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enmeshed with the world just as their bracelets are entangled with intertidal organisms. At the burial site, their voices remain, signalling the cyclical, ongoing presence of these lives that she is so keen to link with the "Past." Blanchet's interest in the Indigenous village connects with modernist primitivism and its fascination with 'pre-modern' cultures. This fascination clearly inflects her description of an Indigenous fisherman in a dugout canoe: "Cliff, dugout, primitive man; all were mirrored in the still water beneath them . . . . When was it that we had watched them? Yesterday? a hundred years ago? or just somewhere on that Curve of Time?" (75). As critics have already pointed out, this vision of timelessness nourishes ongoing colonial erasure. For Carl Watts, "*The Curve of Time* misappropriates First Nations histories and cultures in order to present a romanticized version of British Columbia's coastal wilderness in which Euro-Canadian subjects perform a single moment of expedition and discovery in perpetuity" (50; see also Rayner 253). Watts rightly warns of the colonial erasures that can accompany celebrations of the memoir as a regional myth-making narrative.

Even more problematic than the relegation of Indigenous people to the past, Blanchet's phenomenology of drift naturalizes her own presence in this place and obscures the history of Indigenous dispossession in which homeland and heritage are salient—indeed critical—features of anti-colonial resistance (Roth 144–47). Disregarding "heavily barred doors" and notices telling people to keep out of community buildings (101), Blanchet repeats the encroachments of her colonial forebears, who had relegated Indigenous nations to an area of "slightly more than a third of 1 percent of the land of the province" (Harris). *The Curve of Time* thus exposes the risks of Wylie's theory of landscape-without-belonging in colonized space. However, by drawing attention to those moments in the text that resist or complicate tropes of discovery and conquest central to settler mythologies, we also wish to register the possibilities her narrative offers for rethinking space in an ecological context of deterritorialized habitation.

Blanchet repeatedly registers the entanglement of past and present in the landscape. Although the fisherman is certainly romanticized, he represents more than an anti-modern throwback: he stands outside linear, Euclidean conceptions of time and space altogether. A similar entanglement of past and present characterizes her description of the "ancient" shell middens on which each of the winter villages is built:

> For hundreds of years [the people] have eaten the clams and tossed the shells over their shoulders. The result is that the old villages, which are believed to be the third

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> successive ones to be built on the same sites, are all perched high up on ancient middens . . . . The beach is the threshold of an Indian village – the place of greeting and parting. (77)

This description creates a spatial image of the layers of Indigenous habitation through time. In a later chapter, she notes that recent archaeological digs had "found proof . . . that Indians lived on this coast eight thousand years ago" (188). With the present tense in the above passage, Blanchet invites us to imagine such historical sites not simply as relics of the past, but as places of living and ongoing significance built on a long history of habitation.

Blanchet's ecological imagination expands in these spaces, which "seem" to her to "belong to the Past," yet are vibrantly alive (75). As they "slip" "into that Past," time and space collapse into one another, the vividness of her descriptions making it impossible to relegate these perceptual experiences to one or the other:

> we poled our way through the cool, green shallows – slipping over the pointed groups of great starfish, all purple and red and blue; turning aside the rock cod swimming with their lazy tails; making the minnows wheel and dart in among the sea grapes. In other stretches herons disputed our right-of-way with raucous cries, and bald-headed eagles stared silently from their dead tree perches. Once a mink shrieked and dropped his fish to flee, but turned to scream and defy us. (75)

Time becomes space in this passage, its beings all emphatically present. Moreover, as they are surveilled and rebuked by birds and mink, it becomes clear to Blanchet that the land and water belong to everyone except them.

Whether they are sites of commemoration of the dead or "of greeting and parting," these places raise the spectre of homeland again, though not necessarily in the problematic terms of mastery and control or of static proprietary identity with which we began. As Blanchet reflects after trespassing on yet another burial ground, "we were only intruders" (115). While such scenes draw attention to Blanchet's non-belonging, they do not prevent her from speculating about a deeper connection to the people who have been there for millennia: "Perhaps in some former life we had belonged to one of these tribes. But which one? We had forgotten" (76). The binaries that beleaguer her sense of place begin to blur: distance does not preclude intimacy, non-

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belonging is refigured as "belonging to"; the navicular subject drifts between these modes of relation.

Seashell Dwelling

Although there are degrees of intrusion and spatial occupation in *The Curve of Time*, the mode of dwelling the memoir ultimately privileges is one of ephemeral, organic, and borrowed habitation. One figure who exemplifies this kind of dwelling is their long-time friend Mike, a Quixotic logger from Michigan who, escaping a precarious and violent situation in the USA, "had built himself a cabin, hand-logged and sold his timber—and thought about life" (66). Although Blanchet tells us that "[h]e had been living there for over thirty years when we first blew into the cove" (66), she also reveals that his occupation of the place is as ephemeral as their passage through it over the eight years that they know him, and after his death.

The unobtrusiveness of Mike's "little cabin," which is "almost out of sight up the bank" (64), embodies the idea of emplacement without attachment that Wylie describes. Mike's differences from the rich "Man from California"—whom Blanchet refers to as "the intruder," although they eventually befriend him—are illuminating (19). Blanchet is noticeably critical of the Californian's "large log-cabin," a display of wealth and ownership with enough command of the bay that he impedes their own "freedom" in Princess Louisa Inlet (18). Conversely, Mike's modest cabin, whether "bought" or "pre-empted" (66), blends with the landscape rather than dominating it. Blanchet emphasizes the convergence and gentle friction of lives that share this space, observing, for instance, that the apple tree he planted next to his door has ended up "almost crowding [him] out" (67). Moreover, unlike the Man from California, Mike has landed here not from a place of privilege but as a sort of refugee seeking an alternative to his past life. Living "day by day" with "nature as his partner," he resides at least partly outside the logic of capitalist materialism, relying on a modest economy of exchange and subsistence from the land (68). His and Blanchet's mutual distaste for the spiritualist book by an "East Indian mystic," which they agree is "much too materialistic" (as Mike puts it, "'All words—not how to think or how to live, but how to get things with no effort'"), attests to their shared desire to live differently, finding meaning and dwelling beyond capitalist norms.

Also, like Blanchet's own drifting, the form of dwelling that Mike stands for has both spatial and temporal dimensions. Thus, we learn that the "old-fashioned" flowers near his house "must have reached back into some past of long ago" (64–65). Different spatio-

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temporalities come ambiguously together, underscoring both the colonial dimensions (these are not native flowers) and the instability of Mike's dwelling on the land. The objects that move into and out of Mike's house parallel the fleeting and provisional character of his habitation: books, for example, move back and forth between Mike and his nearest neighbours as well as Blanchet, drifting between places and people. Ironically, after he dies, these books end up in the house of "Old Phil," an illiterate Frenchman living further along the coast, who observes: "'All dem words, and 'e 'ad to die like all de rest of us!" Phil's astute observation points to the impermanence of all dwelling. Mike passes from his place like an animal from his burrow, leaving very little behind—when Blanchet revisits Mike's cabin after his death, all that remains is "a rusty stove and a litter of letters and cards on the floor." Mike's absence is nonetheless perceptible and ecologically figured: a raven announces his death "excitedly croaking 'Mike's dead!'" while "[a]ll the cliffs repeated it, and bandied it about." His departure shows his entanglement with the place, yet also that he is not permanently rooted in it. In Blanchet's account, his dwelling is not a landmark but a temporary shelter; there is no belonging, only passing through. A simile that evokes the ephemerality of beach ecosystems underscores this: without Mike, we read, "the cove rang like an empty seashell" (69).

Blanchet's text is full of such ephemeral, seashell-like dwellings. Her chapter on Mike follows a description of another inconspicuous "brown house, lying quiet among the trees" upon which they stumble while looking for anchorage one night. The house, which can hardly be seen from the shore, seems at once empty and occupied: there is no glass in the windows and the door is open, the lawns and gardens are overgrown, but "[o]n the table" they find "a plate with a knife and a piece of bread. Had someone taken to the woods when they heard our boat?" (60). As is so often the case, they feel free to enter the house, where they find "some pages from a diary" that seems to belong to a man obsessed with conjuring the spirits of the dead: "It fooled me at first—it was rather beautiful, rather like James Joyce in parts. Then suddenly, some sentence made me realize that the mind of the writer was on a very, very strange plane" (61). Her initial appreciation for the diary's Joycean qualities shows Blanchet's predilection for modernist writing and connects the man's ramblings with the non-linear poetics of her own memoir. Their writings also become linked in the entanglement between past and present—the conjuring of the dead is a darker version of Blanchet's interest in theories of the fourth dimension and the co-presence of different temporalities. Through recurring images of dwelling, haunting, and writing, the accounts of Mike and the eccentric man in the brown house become mirror images for Blanchet's own

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dwelling, and show the thin line between different realizations of navicular place.

The empty seashell simile especially calls to mind the layers of shells on which Indigenous villages are built as an organic accumulation of human dwellings upon animal dwellings, all subject to the constant drift of tides. Like the voices Blanchet hears at night, these layers conjure the past in the present, marking the human occupant as one shifting figure among countless others. Their lives are transient and yet leave enduring traces. As such temporary dwellings, the real and figurative shells in Blanchet's text complicate ideas of attachment to home.

Home without Attachment, Attachment without Home

The simile comparing a dwelling place to an empty shell also anticipates Blanchet's complex relationship to her own home at the end of the book. As enamoured as she is of life on the *Caprice*, this life is only seasonal. Toward the end of the book we find the family "straining for [their] known end"—the home that must provide another kind of anchorage come winter. Driven by an instinct that Blanchet describes as a "rush to the settling down" (211), their return to the place they affectionately know as "Little House" is warm with attachments. And yet, the home to which they return is in some ways as ephemeral and complexly enmeshed as the drifting worlds she explores in the rest of the book. Little House, which was the family's home for 24 years, is nevertheless figured as a temporary dwelling of which they seem more like caretakers than owners. Blanchet's dynamic phenomenology of drift on the sea thereby extends to the land, and her preoccupation with shells, crabs, and other coastal creatures on the one hand and empty houses on the other connects images of the shifting intertidal world with an interest in the ephemerality of home.

The story of "Little House" explains how they adopted it, much as a hermit crab adopts the shell of another animal as its home: "I remember when we first found Little House, lying all by itself in the middle of the forest" (249). The verb "found" recalls the drifting, accidental movements and serendipitous encounters in the book. Although they find the house uninhabited by humans, it is not without other claims; she recalls the roses growing "everywhere. They formed a cordon round the house—we couldn't get near it. They caught at our legs and tugged at our clothes. 'It's ours, it's ours!' they cried, and did their best to keep us out" (249). Rather than a dry transfer of property, however, their acquisition of Little House creates an ecological image of a family simply finding shelter. In her account, which echoes a familiar fairy tale, they "called out, 'Little House, Little House, who lives in Little

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House?' and nobody answered. . . . 'Well then,' we said, 'we'll live there ourselves,' and we crept in through the window and settled ourselves in Little House" (249).

While they "settle . . . in" and set about fixing up the house, Blanchet ultimately resists the language of ownership. The land around Little House remains "its own land" (252), not theirs. This image works on several levels. While they were the beneficiaries of settler colonialism, the Blanchets were far from wealthy landowners. Driven west from Toronto because of financial difficulties exacerbated by her husband Geoffrey's chronic illness and weak heart (Converse 38-9), the family was not materially secure. Their money troubles continued after they moved to BC, adding stress to their marriage and driving Geoffrey to the prairies to labor as a harvester, a job that took an additional toll on his health (54–55). After he died in 1926, Blanchet rented out Little House during the summers for extra income while living with her children on the *Caprice*. Her property, then, may well have seemed fluid and impermanent: something found that might just as easily be lost again.

Moreover, she repeatedly emphasizes that the house is a confluence of many kinds of inhabitants, not just human: like every place in this book, it teems with intersecting lives, all of which have a claim to it. The "memories" that take hold of them as they head homewards are of the other creatures with whom they share the environment: "The hummingbird that built her nest in the rosebush . . . . The quail whose mate had been snatched up by a hawk . . . . The frogs in the pond that stop singing the moment they hear a footstep" (244). The chapter describing their return continues to enumerate a kaleidoscope of species: from Douglas fir and salal to the deer, coon, lizard, hawk, sparrow, muskrat, "skating bugs" and "scuttler beetles," bullrushes, wild cherry, cedar, balsam, arbutus, cormorants, seagulls, and seals (257–64), their community at home on land is as diverse and multi-dimensional as the one out on the water. The animacy of her descriptions underscores that she regards these other beings as sentient individuals. A quail, chased by a hawk "against the kitchen window," cries out in indignation: "I went over to look at her but she yelled at me and said she had had all she could stand at the moment and flew off, shrieking" (260). Similarly, she asks not what, but "*who* told our seafaring muskrat about the new pond in the middle of the forest?" (261; emphasis added). Such pronouns matter: they impart a sense of individual agency, even personhood, on non-human lives (see Kimmerer 56–57). None stakes a more powerful claim over "Seven Acres" than another in their mutual jostling for shelter and food. In the background of all these cohabitating

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beings are the waves, the wind, and the tides shaping and reshaping both the sea and the land.

The ecological and spatial implications of the mobile dwelling mapped in *The Curve of Time* come together in Blanchet's embodied, cartographic image of the land around Little House: "If you hold your right arm and hand, palm up and slightly cupping the hand, thumb close in—you have a relief map of seven acres" (252). The "map" she gives us is not just three-dimensional, but living and breathing, the hand intimating another "life of space" as the land itself is animated by this image. Her cartography is not a fixing of space, then, but a performance in which body and land come together. Likened to a cupped palm, the land is a warm, cradling shelter—a home that quite literally holds them. But this home also has an impermanence to it: the hand will hold them, but then let them go, as it did its previous inhabitants.

The description of the land's own movements a few pages later echoes this living cartography:

> The coast of British Columbia is what is called a sinking coast. At some time, long past, there had been a great upheaval, and then subsidence. Seven Acres did not escape. Some awful force picked it up, held it up at arm's length, and then let it drop sideways in an untidy muddle. Some of it held together, and the rest of it lay here and there. (263)

The movements of the earth, through the lens of deep time, become as turbulent as the ocean. Blanchet's spatial vocabulary ("sideways," "untidy," "here and there") conveys the chaotic and unpredictable forces and incoherent patterns only partially "held together." This shifting coastal geology is frequently described in memoirs from the Pacific Northwest, to the point that one can speak of a "regional geomythology" (Riquet 220). Conjuring the actions of the land rising up out of the ocean and sinking slowly back into it, Blanchet joins a rich literary tradition preoccupied with the fluidity of the boundary between land and sea.[12] The resulting landforms are both unstable and irregular. As she takes pains to emphasize, you cannot walk anywhere directly:

> You would never go out for a straight stroll – you were always climbing up something, or clambering down something, making a detour. When you wanted to get to the top of the cliff it took you ages to get there . . . a half dozen rough stone steps . . . led up and round a great block of stone onto a straight path. But just as you

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> thought this might be leading somewhere, you found yourself in a long winding serpent of stepping-stones that writhes in and out, and up and down – but always higher and higher until finally you sank down breathlessly on the very tip-top of the big cliff.
>
> If you peered cautiously over . . . you could see great blocks of rock that had broken off the cliff at some past time. You would step back from the edge and look anxiously round for signs of more cracks. (263–64)

The topography forces them to follow meandering paths along the terrain rather than straight routes across it, engendering a sense of place that mimics, on land, the drift and detours of their passage through the sea. Could this be what Westphal is talking about when he describes place as "navicular," or boatlike, and what Massey has in mind when she speaks of the "unexpected" and "accidental" (111), those spatial surprises that defy our desire for navigational control? As Blanchet "look[s] anxiously round for signs of more cracks," she reminds us that the land itself is unstable, as everyone knows in the Pacific Northwest, where cataclysmic and unpredictable geological events loom large.

With these spiralling and winding movements that take us back to earlier images of slipping and drifting, Blanchet also anticipates the kind of place-making through wayfinding that Tim Ingold theorizes in his study of lines. In the chapter "Up, Across, and Along," Ingold distinguishes between "two modalities of travel, namely wayfaring and transport":

> [T]he path of the wayfarer wends hither and thither, and may even pause here and there before moving on. But it has no beginning or end . . . . The inhabited world is a reticulate meshwork of such trails, which is continually being woven as life goes on along them. Transport, by contrast, is tied to specific locations. Every move . . . is oriented to a specific destination. (81–84)

In Blanchet's account, the repetition of the word "straight" in connection with "stroll" and "path" registers the desire for a destination, but the land keeps interfering with their linear progression, time and again breaking their expectation that "this might be leading somewhere." Instead of an inert route cut through the land, their path becomes a "long winding serpent of stepping-stones that writhes in and out, and up and down," an animate force of unpredictable rhythms.

Viewed as a metapoetic allegory of writing, the metaphoric description of the path also echoes the errant movements of Blanchet's

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narrative. In fact, the mutual implication of the spatial and the textual exceeds mere self-reflexive play and grants authorship to the landscape itself. Once we read the scene in this way, the word "writhing" also evokes "writing," and indeed the land (and, elsewhere, the sea) is the author of their movements. The effect, however, is reorienting rather than disorienting: in Blanchet's text, reading, like walking and seafaring, nurtures the "intimate bond that ... couples locomotion and perception" in Ingold's conception of wayfaring (78). Rather than confusing our senses, this perceptual experience sharpens them through surprise and serendipity. At the same time, the writhing path retains the feelings of unease that we observe elsewhere in the book, in line with Wylie's reflections on the impossibility of the "good step" that merges self and landscape. The wayfarer on Blanchet's serpentine path responds to the land but cannot be fully rooted in it as any sense of final arrival is continually deferred. In her conceptualizations of "Little House" and the land around it, Blanchet resists the desires for "rootedness and embeddedness in landscape" that, according to Wylie, "haunt any thought of dwelling, howsoever mobile or dynamic." Her figuration of the path, like that of drift on the sea, is key to this resistance. As Ingold underscores, to the wayfarer, a place is not in fact a singular destination or end-point; rather, it is a tangle or "knot" of intersecting pathways (100). This conceptualization seems to fit not only Blanchet's representation of their home-place, but also her writing about, and inhabitation of, the Pacific Northwest Coast more broadly. Like slipping and drifting elsewhere in her memoir, the mobility of the path is an unsettling one. Forged through lines rather than static points of rootedness, her sense of place abandons fantasies of belonging and attachment in favour of a much more slippery reality.

Conclusion: A Navicular Sense of Place

Blanchet's vision of dwelling without belonging expands place into multiple planes, opening up, in particular, its ecological dimensions. When the "land" remains "its own," human possession gives way to a form of inhabiting that brings to mind Massey's "arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other that is the result of there being a multiplicity of trajectories" (111). The self in relation to the land is not an independent entity, but in continual interaction with other beings. In Blanchet's description of Little House, this relational arrangement includes not only the many beings that continue to live in and around the house, but also traces of prior Indigenous habitation. As she notes earlier in the narrative: "We had found an old stone hammer on our own land the winter before" (74). With this, Blanchet marks her most permanent dwelling

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with its Indigenous human history. At the same time, insofar as the land remains "its own," none of these intersecting trajectories exerts any exclusive claim on it. Like Ingold's knot of pathways, beings past and present entangle in this place in a mobile and dynamic way.

In this sense, Blanchet anticipates an idea of landscape that "presumes no essential link between a land and its inhabitants" (Wylie, "Homeland" 413). The implication of this idea, as Wylie conceives of it, is that "there are no original inhabitants. No earthly landscape is autochthonously inhabited or inscribed" ("Landscape" 177). As is the case in her descriptions of burial grounds and unoccupied longhouses, Blanchet embraces the confluence of colonial and Indigenous in ways that uncomfortably elide the legacies of unceded territories, decolonizing struggles, and unresolved land claims in British Columbia. As Wylie acknowledges, "claiming that there are no original inhabitants" might well "risk complicity with colonial desires to picture the landscape as empty, uninhabited, un-storied" ("Homeland" 414). In Blanchet's text, however, the land is anything but empty and un-storied, and her conception of place arguably respects Indigenous sovereignty even as it sidesteps the issue of Indigenous territory.

As ambivalent as Blanchet's treatment of Indigenous land is in the context of colonial BC, it resonates with conceptions of space and place outlined by Indigenous thinkers from beyond BC who remind us that the idea of ownership and control that lies behind what Wylie refers to as "homeland thinking" is a Euro-Western construct. Rachel A. Qitsualik, for example, writes that "Inuit are able to feel inextricably linked to the Nuna," or the land, "even while exercising a particular sense of sovereignty free from the possessiveness and minacious defensiveness traditionally characterizing the term in international relations" ("Inummarik" 24). This lack of possessiveness is linked to an incomplete knowing; for Qitsualik, the *Nuna* is *nalunaktuq*: "The root word of nalunaktuq is nalu, or 'not knowing.' In Inuktitut (the Inuit language), nalunaktuq loosely means 'difficult to comprehend' or 'unpredictable'" (Qitsualik, "Nalunaktuq" 15). The experience of not knowing comes not from ignorance but from long and careful observation: "Inuit had lived long enough with the *Nuna* to know that, for everything they had learned about it, there was much more that could turn around and surprise them" ("Inummarik" 27). In this vision of Inuit sovereignty, dwelling is undergirded not by ownership but by a recognition of the land's agency.

The spatial and ecological surprises that Blanchet emphasizes throughout her memoir speak to a similar acknowledgment of unknowability and agency that helps us imagine alternatives to the

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Euclidean and Cartesian conceptions of space prominent in the Western canon. Instead of passive and empty space that can be delineated with borders and claimed as homeland, Blanchet's phenomenology of drift, which affects her dwelling both on the sea and on land, conceives of space and place through paradigms that also resonate with the more mobile and active "tidalectics" that, according to Elizabeth DeLoughrey in her work on Caribbean and Pacific island literatures, "require an active and participatory engagement" (3). Blanchet's poetic and narrative figuration of the coastal and archipelagic space within which she moves gives rise to dynamic, fluid, and precarious understandings of space, environment, and dwelling that run counter to common Western understandings of life forms as discrete entities. In this, Blanchet is in line not only with phenomenology's desire to challenge the abstract models of Western science,[13] but also with Indigenous thinking about how, in the words of Carol Edelman Warrior, things "take new forms and become other things" (371). Warrior, herself of Alutiiq, Dena'ina Athabascan, and A'aniiih descent, follows Indigenous philosophers who "suggest that all 'things' are not things so much as *process* or movement" (368; emphasis in original). While certainly implicated in settler colonial structures and forms of existence, *The Curve of Time* nonetheless significantly departs from the ontologies implicit in these structures.

The most interesting aspects of Blanchet's text might therefore lie in the possibilities it affords for reflecting critically on the role of place and dwelling in ecological thought. The ecocritical movement was initially driven by a strong belief in literature's ability to create a sense of place and forge connections with the environment—in Jonathan Bate's words, "the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth which is our home" (ix). This "nostalgic relation to place" in "early and contemporary ecocriticism" (Fiskio 301) has recently been challenged by a range of critics with different theoretical interests. Thus, Ursula K. Heise has argued that "what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is arguably not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet." While Heise is primarily interested in the "deterritorialization of local knowledge" (55), others have problematised the very notion of comprehending place through experience and writing. It is here that Wylie's work on landscape resonates with recent debates within ecocriticism that are, in the words of Timothy Clark, "sensitive to the opacity and otherness of things and does not excessively posit nature as continuous, homogeneous, predictable and assimilable" (284). The most prominent voice within these debates is Morton, whose critique of the concept of nature (*Ecology without Nature*) and advocacy of a 'dark' ecological awareness (*Dark Ecology*) have complicated assumptions about

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literature as a form of dwelling in place that renders a given environment familiar. Instead, Morton explores how literature can *complicate* ideas of place attachment and render the environment uncanny. While writing from very different positions, both Wylie and Morton turn to a phenomenology of uncertainty in their critique of place.

Reading *The Curve of Time* alongside these theories can gesture towards what a spatial and ecological aesthetics of uncertainty might look like: its poetic and narrative strategies both expand place beyond its human dimensions *and* undermine any stable sense of local belonging, transferring this dis/locating experience to the reader. By exploring the centrifugal poetic potential of coastal and archipelagic geographies, Blanchet's memoir can become the subject of what Pippa Marland has recently referred to as "archipelagic ecocriticism," which she defines as a form of "ecocritical inquiry that engages specifically with the literature of islands, coastlines, and seas and investigates the particular insights that arise from an encounter with such topographies" (237). At the same time, engaging with the contradictions of Blanchet's emphasis on drifting and dislocation allows us to confront the limitations of universalizing assertions of not-belonging in a colonial setting, where histories of dispossession have shaped both human and nonhuman geographies and ecologies.

Ultimately, then, our aim is neither to celebrate nor to denounce *The Curve of Time*'s relationship to place. Rather, we wish to draw attention to its complex, multifaceted, and ambivalent phenomenologies of home without attachment and attachment without home. In Blanchet's world of drift, animals and plants will make a home wherever they find a habitat. Home, then, is a continual process of making and unmaking; experienced but not fully owned or comprehended by various inhabitants, and always potentially unsettled:

> Four summers ago we had a hole bulldozed out for a large reservoir. When the fall rains came it turned into a pond. Late that fall a muskrat appeared and spent the winter holed up somewhere in the banks of our virgin pool. There are no lakes or streams within five miles of us so he must have come by sea. But who told our seafaring muskrat about the new pond in the middle of the forest? (261)

Who told this "seafaring muskrat" indeed? The confluence not only of different species but also of sea and land in this image emphasizes again the mutability of space and the flexibility of the navicular dwellers within it. *The Curve of Time* is full of such poetic images—glimpses of a myriad of spatial experiences and intersecting lives. These images

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join recurrent spatial and ecological figures, which become metaphors for human relationships with space that resist stable expressions of belonging: the drift, the slip, the unfathomable, the surprise, the writhing path. Together, they articulate complex ecological reflections about the life *of* space as much as life *in* space, about the forces that connect the drift of the sea to the movements of the land, and about the ephemeral possibilities of intertidal dwelling.

NOTES

1. The website Travel-Vancouver-Island.com includes Cathy Converse's 2008 book *Following the Curve of Time: The Legendary M. Wylie Blanchet* in a series of posts that provide information about the region and activities that tourists can engage in: "Cruise the magnificent BC Coastline in the wake of a legendary female figure—M. Wylie Blanchet." The metaphorical wake here refers both to Converse's book and the tourists' actual travels; indeed, reading the book itself (or both books) becomes a form of exploring the region. <http://www.travel-vancouver-island.com>

2. One might think of Gaston Bachelard's emphasis on the home as the central figure of intimate spatial experience, or Edward S. Casey's discussion of embodied connection with the world through representations (in his terms, *re-presentations*) of place.

3. See, for instance, Neil Evernden's, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy" and Michael J. McDowell's "The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight."

4. Reading the memoir in this way complicates Anne Patricia Rayner's claim that *The Curve of Time* expresses a desire for "becom[ing] local" (249).

5. Acker proposes that the book vacillates between timeless lyric experience and the domestic time of everyday life: "the sense is of entering a different dimension, one made of mutable, tangled reveries, of bendable time; where the multiplicity of memory renders each scene that follows with a sense of otherworldliness and beguiling beauty."

6. As Acker notes: "More than once, Blanchet's children waken, unperturbed, to a different cove than the one they anchored in the previous night."

7. Variants of this theory had been fashionable since the late nineteenth century in both scientific and literary writings (which often overlapped). A rather eccentric version was the Irish engineer and philosopher John W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927), which Maeterlinck discusses in "The Fourth Dimension," the first essay of *La vie de l'espace*.

8. For a concise discussion of the intersection of modern post-Newtonian physics and modernist aesthetics, see Childs (74–80).

9. In fact, Merleau-Ponty was interested in the logic of dreams as spatial experiences in which ordered space breaks down and we "revert to the subjective sources of [our] existence"; he argues that "[t]he phantasms of dreams

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reveal [. . .] that general spatiality within which clear space and observable objects are embedded" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 331).

10. Elsewhere in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes that "the body is our anchorage in a world" (167).

11. In *Following the Curve of Time*, Converse clarifies that they travelled through the Broughton Archipelago, visiting Gwa'yasdams, Kalugwis, and T'sadzis'nukwaame' (66).

12. See, for instance, the beginnings of June Burn's *100 Days in the San Juans* (1946), David Richardson's *Magic Islands: A Treasure-Trove of San Juan Island Lore* (1973), and Lucile S. McDonald's *Making History: The People Who Shaped the San Juan Islands* (1990).

13. See, among others, Merleau-Ponty (*The World of Perception* 37–45).

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