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Caroline Durand-Rous

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Réenchanter le sauvage urbain

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I. Le réenchantement du sauvage urbain : quand l'écopoétique opère des réajustements ontologiques

A Saber-tooth in my Backyard: Return of the Ancient Wild in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*

CAROLINE DURAND-ROUS

Résumés

English Français

Ojibway author Louise Erdrich's latest novel, *Future Home of the Living God*, constructs a set of connections and intersections between Prehistoric times and our contemporaneity. While disrupting the notion of human progress, the novel's dystopian narrative circles back in time and confronts pre-Anthropocenic wildness with a technological civilization clearly running out of resources. Meanwhile, it draws upon animalistic beliefs to portray nature as being enlivened by potent forces and a will of its own, thus envisioning a dark and yet mesmerizing re-enchantment of the urban environment. Indeed, Louise Erdrich instills dissonance within the established situation of the so-called civilized, Western world by inferring a potential biological apocalypse of uncontrollable regressive evolution, thus re-fusing productive chaos into barren order. Her novel stages the violent revolt of the wild against the domestication of nature in human settlements resulting in the return of the feral in the midst of the city.

In this article, I first intend to show how the novel re-enchants the margins of the city (suburbs, Indian reservations, and prisons) through a dark recombination of times and epochs. I will then study how a sensuous and carnal understanding of this wild re-enchantment results in the corporeal empowerment of the protagonist. Finally, I will explore how postcolonial hybridity pervades the novel and to what extent this hybridity concurs to establish *Future Home of the Living God* as a thought-provoking "sustainable text," to borrow Hubert Zapf's expression.

Le dernier roman de l'auteure ojibway Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*, postule un réseau de connections et d'intersections entre la Préhistoire et notre monde contemporain. Tout en démontant la notion d'un progrès humain linéaire, ce récit dystopique remonte le temps et oppose une sauvagerie pré-Anthropocénique à une civilisation technologique clairement arrivée au bout de ses ressources. *Future Home of the Living God* se fonde, par ailleurs, sur une ontologie animiste pour représenter une nature animée par des forces puissantes et une volonté propre. Ce faisant, le roman conçoit un ré-enchantement du sauvage urbain à la fois particulièrement sombre et envoûtant. Ainsi, Louise Erdrich injecte une certaine dissonance subversive au sein d'un monde occidental soi-disant civilisé en imaginant une apocalypse biologique qui se traduit par une incontrôlable régression de l'évolution. De ce fait, elle ré-insuffle un chaos salvateur dans un monde qui menace de devenir stérile. Son roman met en scène la révolte du sauvage contre la domestication de la nature sur les lieux d'occupation humaine, révolte qui se traduit par la violente recolonisation de l'urbain par le sauvage.

Dans cet article, je souhaite montrer comment le roman ré-enchant les marges de la ville (banlieues, réserves indiennes et prisons) par le biais d'un ré-agencement sombre des temps et des époques. J'étudierai comment l'appréhension sensorielle et charnelle de ce ré-enchantement du sauvage urbain autorise la protagoniste à opérer une reconquête de soi. Enfin, j'explorerai à quel point l'hybridité postcoloniale habite le roman et comment elle participe à faire de *Future Home of the Living God* un texte tout autant inspirant que « durable » pour emprunter l'expression d'Hubert Zapf.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : littérature amérindienne, Erdrich (Louise), sauvage urbain, espace, postcolonial, réalisme magique

Keywords : Native American literature, Erdrich (Louise), urban wildness, space, postcolonial, magical realism

Texte intégral

- 1 The preternatural closeness to Nature¹ of Indigenous peoples stands as an enduring stereotype in Western literature, going back to James Fenimore Cooper's and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Indian characters portrayed as fierce warriors lurking in the dark, ominous forests and as wise chiefs invoking Mother Earth. Rather significantly, Ojibway² scholar Gerald Vizenor has recently labeled these clichéd images as "*indians*" with a lower case I and italics. In her article "I Got this A.B. Original Soul / I Got this A.B. Original Flow": Wahn, the Postmasculindian, and Hip Hop," Sarah Kent takes a closer look at the sense contained in the odd spelling and defines Vizenor's theoretical development:

Using Indigeneity as his ideological framework, Vizenor reshapes Jean Baudrillard's theoretical considerations of simulacrum to engage with the settler-colonial production of the *indian*. As Vizenor suggests, the *indian* mistakes and substitutes itself for the real, erasing the presence of Indigeneity, evolving into hyperreality, and concealing its own production: "*indian*, misgiven here in italics, insinuates the obvious simulation and ruse of colonial dominance. Manifestly, the *indian* is an occidental misnomer, an overseas enactment that has no referent to real native³ cultures and communities" (vii). The *indian* obscures its own genesis by entangling the real and the imaginary in an unparseable knot, yet as Vizenor asserts, there is only an absence behind the sign of the *indian*. The *indian* is thus the presence of an

absence. (2018: 122)

- 2 Representations of First Nations people rely on a hollow rendering of otherness. They fail to convey the reality of the Indigenous experience. Likewise, the simplistic simulations of Nature-lover Indians do not do justice to the complex network of entangled relationships lying at the core of Native cosmogonies. Laguna Pueblo⁴ literary critic Paula Gunn Allen gives insight into this convoluted reciprocal belief system when she writes:

Christians believe that God is separate from humanity and does as he wishes without the creative assistance of any of his creatures, while a non-Christian tribal person assumes a place in creation that is dynamic, creative, and responsive. Further, tribal people allow all animals, vegetables, and minerals (the entire biota, in short) the same or even greater privileges than humans. The Indian participates in destiny on all levels, including that of creation. (1992: 56-57)

- 3 In mainstream representations, these complex aspects of Native cosmogonies⁵ are often missed. Likewise, in mainstream literature, Native American protagonists are often expected to long for a return to a romanticized wilderness, the pristine landscapes of a pre-conquest territory. In contrast, they supposedly feel lost and irrelevant in contemporary urban spaces, as these dry territories are allegedly deprived of the characteristic magic of animist spirituality.

- 4 The 2017 publication of Ojibway novelist and poet Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God* challenges such pitiful, standardized characterizations of American Indians. This dystopian novel explores the apocalyptic aftermath of a civilization having gone past the tipping point of what nature can take. As the story begins, the human species' survival is at stake, the climate has changed dramatically, and evolution has started going backward: prehistoric animals reappear, and human fetuses grow overdeveloped reptilian brains. Meanwhile, a patriarchal totalitarian state lays claim to the female body. The protagonist, Cedar Songmaker, a young Native woman raised by adoptive parents in white Minneapolis, refuses to comply with the newly instituted rules and chooses to become a mother on her own terms. Meanwhile, she bears witness to the return of the feral in the quiet suburbs and engages in the process of adapting and adjusting to this renewed wildness. Through Cedar's eyes, we are invited to experiment with the frightful and yet mesmerizing re-enchantment of a city's margins where time and evolution go suddenly backward, confronting Prehistoric times with the Anthropocene. Magical realism pervades the postcolonial narrative, interweaving the dominant discourse with the testimony of individual resistance. While doing so, the novel forcefully undermines the Western binary vision of nature versus nurture.

- 5 In *Future Home of the Living God*, as very often in Native American fictions, the natural world does not stop at the doors of the city, neither literally nor metaphorically,⁶ as upsetting off-shoots of wildness⁷ find their way through the interstices and gaps of concrete walls. The narrative draws the contours of an urban ecology by encapsulating the impact of material processes over the human mind and, conversely, the consequences of mental anticipation and communal involvement in the transformation of the community's environment. Through this set of reciprocal energies, Erdrich's novel develops as a "sustainable text," to borrow Hubert Zapf's terms, a cultural narrative that challenges our expectations and practices of the urban space, a text standing "as a cultural form in which this living interrelationship is explored in specifically productive ways, providing a site of critical self-reflection of modern civilization as well as a source of creative cultural self-renewal" (2016: loc.128). In Cedar's narrative, the margins of the city, namely the suburbs as well as the reservations, stand as a territory of specific and sometimes contradictory social representations, thus giving way to unending reinterpretation.

- 6 In this article, I first intend to show how the novel re-enchants the margins of the city (suburbs, Indian reservations, and prisons) through a dark recombination of times and epochs. I will then investigate how a sensuous and carnal understanding of this wild re-enchantment results in the corporeal empowerment of the protagonist. Finally, I will argue that postcolonial hybridity pervades the novel and demonstrate to what extent it works to establish *Future Home of the Living God* as a thought-provoking "sustainable text," to borrow Hubert Zapf's expression.

1. Re-enchanting the margins of the city

- 7 Erdrich's novel engages a work of re-enchantment of overlooked spaces as it unveils the dark, wild forces lurking under the pretense of a refined and well-ordered world. While introducing dissonance into an established situation via the uncontrollable return of the feral in the midst of industrialized civilization, *Future Home of the Living God* abolishes the notion of linear human progress to forcefully re-institute cyclical times. In so doing, the novel questions the notion of a Pre-Anthropocene epoch as opposed to the current Anthropocene time period. In *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts*, Hubert Zapf prepares the ground for thinking about this undetermined "Before" when he writes:

Indeed, on a planetary scale, [...] the very concepts of climate change or the Anthropocene presupposes the assumption of some kind of balance, however fragile and unstable it may be, of a prior, non-anthropogenic state of nature as the logical basis for the diagnosis of an environmental crisis in the first place, which makes sense if it is conceived as the result of an increasingly uncontrollable interference of human agency in a fundamentally self-regulating global ecosystem. (2016: loc.2474)

- 8 In order to elaborate on a post-industrialized "denatured" environment, it is necessary to name a specific anterior ideal condition of the world, counterpoints only operating insofar as they possess a point of comparison from which to judge an evolution. Instead of conveniently choosing a state of nature immediately prior to the European colonization of America to figure as a counterforce to the Anthropocene, Louise Erdrich finds inspiration in ancient Prehistoric times, in other words, a non-anthropogenic state of nature for the mere reason that human presence was absent, whether Native or white. Very astutely, she thus undermines the expected simulacrum of the 'indian,' as defined by Gerald Vizenor. The main protagonist stands not so much as an Indigenous essentially linked to the wild resurgence at work, but, rather, acts as any other privileged human spectator of the awkward situation. A recluse in her own house, pregnant Cedar spends hours observing nature through the window overlooking her backyard. From this vantage point, she witnesses the first blatant encroachment of the feral upon civilized suburbs:

Today I see something I have never seen before. A bird about the size of a hawk swoops off the oak, down into the mulberry branches, and then hops among the leaves. Its tail is very long, and it seems to clutch at the bark and twigs with claws poking from the hinge of its wings, like a large bat. I glimpse its head—beakless, featherless, lizardlike, rosy red. The feathers are a slate blue with black tips. The bird, or whatever it is, seems to be eating both fruit and the insects that would be hovering around the tree and crawling on its bark. A graceful thing with fluid, darting movements, it behaves exactly like a lizard-bird. It is captivating. (2017: loc.1595)

- 9 The wondrous creature defies clear definition and can only be described as a composite being assembling contradictory traits in one body: bird feathers and a lizard head, bird wings, and bat claws. Later on, through another window overlooking the street, she witnesses the presence of a saber-tooth cat lurking in the oak tree:

The animal bounds through the air toward a shocked-looking chocolate Lab, which disappears in its embrace. The thing—some kind of great cat, all muscle and powerful guile—tears long front fangs into and chokes down the bleeding haunches

of the dog right there, and then drags the dog's head and torso up into the big oak tree. (2017: loc.1810)

10 The world seems suddenly out of balance as ferocious cats attack defenseless dogs. Furthermore, peacefulness of the streets is a lure, a mask of civility failing to contain a roaring wildness crouching in urban interstices.⁸ In the novel, the recourse to prehistoric creatures is particularly telling, for it demonstrates that humans cannot compete with these resurgent monsters. Indeed, the latter stand as untamable pests reclaiming a long-lost territory. Their sudden return triggers a dark and chaotic re-enchantment of the cityscape.

11 By addressing the perilous cohabitation between humans and pests, Louise Erdrich's narrative offers a mirror image of Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*. In this prophetic environmental science book, Rachel Carson underlines the negative impact of human activities over the biosphere, and alerts about the subsequent impact on humans themselves. Carson's narrative envisions the loss of a former natural balance because of the disruptive influence of a technological civilization. Contrastingly, Louise Erdrich's novel chronicles the loss of a precarious civilizational balance caused by the disrupting influence of wild nature. Indeed, taking place in an indeterminate future (we can guess a few months from now), *Future Home of the Living God* indulges in a speculative exercise and flirts with "uchronie,"⁹ or alternate history, as it posits the tipping point of the survival of humanity and the bifurcation point between our possible futures during our present days.

12 Paradoxically, Erdrich's depiction of resurgent chaos does not lack poetry despite the cruelty of some scenes. This aspect is epitomized by the episode of the perplexing encounter with a Meganeura¹⁰ inside the walls of the prison where Cedar is detained by the end of the novel: "Once, as I'm walking by the window, a vibrating shadow stops me. Behind the shatterproof glass a dragonfly hovers just at eye level. Not a normal dragonfly. This one is giant—a three-foot wingspan, golden green eyes the size of softballs" (2017: loc.4368). Echoing the previous encounters with the Archaeopteryx¹¹ and the saber-tooth cat,¹² Cedar's narrative expresses no fear. Quite to the contrary, the precision of her descriptions bespeaks her curiosity as well as her sense of wonder. Likewise, within the premises of the prison, the female inmates "have tried to make beauty" (2017: loc.4363) as a counterpoint to their desperate situation, planting in pots any seed they could get hold of and recreating a semblance of nature in defiance of the surrounding concrete walls. Wildness takes advantage of this unexpected nudge, working its way through every crack: "I see that other accidental plants are pushing into the prison as well. Mold against the reinforced window glass, tiny vines creeping from the cracks in the stairs. Motelike insects sometimes spring from the leaves I brush. They are only visible as motion" (2017: loc.4368). Soon, a primary equatorial forest recolonizes the Minnesotan buildings:

Inside, the plants are spreading from the pots of soil. Some vines are thin as threads, others are green ropes that loop against the windows and up the stairways, always toward the light. The leaves proliferate and already in some places here you can walk in the shade of the understory. A fern tree has shot up, giant leaves curling out like feathers. And segmented bamboolike poles of purple and green are rising out of the stairwells. Every day there is an ever thicker green profusion. When I walk around the yard, I see that even in December vines burst from the stomped ground and catch hold of the slightest ridge or frame to travel, almost visibly upward, thrusting skeins of waving leaves across the fences, across the razor wire, even along the glass towers of the guards, rearing into the ferocious sunlight. (2017: loc.4374)

13 In this passage, the exuberance of life going upward toward "the ferocious sunlight" carries the unheard, primal cry of the condemned women. A vibrant, green verticality then overcomes the dire straits of the situation. The profusion of vegetal life grows out of the edges of the prison wall, thus symbolizing the destruction of all oppressive forces.

14 Throughout the novel, the lexical field of enchantment abounds as adjectives such as "mesmerized" and "bewildered" repeatedly appear in Cedar's accounts. Interestingly enough, while implying a state of mystification, the latter term evokes a combination of "be" and "wilder," suggesting the action of being led into the wilderness. To experience bewilderment may cause one to lose track of social reference points as well as of the landmarks of civilization. Roderick Frazier Nash gives a precise analysis of the etymological implications of the term in *Wilderness and the American Mind* and argues that:

Wilderness, of course, also had significance in human terms. The idea of a habitat of wild beasts [from the association of two Old English words: "wild" and "dēor" (animal)]¹³ implied the absence of men, and the wilderness was conceived as a region where a person was likely to get into a disordered, confused, or "wild" condition. In fact, "bewilder" comes from "be" attached to "wildern." The image is that of a man in an alien environment where the civilization that normally orders and controls his life is absent. (2014: 2)

15 Accordingly, as a matter of survival, Cedar must experience the puzzlement of stepping into the wild to rediscover the forces that animate nature and fully get attuned to this "supernal, lovely" world (2017: loc.2690). Tapping into her people's animistic beliefs, she starts to recognize the pre-existence of a distinct spiritual essence inside every creation. Meanwhile, she tries to apprehend the scheme of the powerful energies that animate and organize her material world. Indeed, Cedar gets "a sense of existence" (2017: loc.3560) as she calls it, alongside the acknowledgment of the *Anima Mundi* at work: "So the more I consider all of this, the more it seems that our predicament would be best addressed by an acknowledgment of the Anima Mundi, the Souls of the World" (2017: loc.1099). Cedar frequently refers to the unknown forces that enliven nature and contribute to the continuing repurposing of organic and mineral material. A mystic reconnection to the operation of nature's dynamics, which science fails to grasp, initiates a (r)evolution:

Evolution starts: a miracle. Evolution stops: a miracle. Life follows the patterns of the vastness all around us. The universe is expanding and contracting in a timeless time. The earth 4,5 billion years old, the sun due to supernova and swallow us. And then contract again. Well, that's what I think, and I am obviously only a lay observer of the great mystery, the simple why, which no scientists can answer better than me. (2017: loc.2701)

16 In most desperate times, Cedar is soothed by the respiration of the universe contracting and expanding. She is able to perceive this cyclical alternating movement of breathing in and breathing out beyond the stillness of the concrete walls surrounding her. Moreover, she clearly links our ability to survive such an environmental crisis to our innate capacity to appreciate the world's beauty even in dreadful circumstances: "We have survived because we love beauty and we find each other beautiful. I think it may be our strongest quality" (2017: loc.3319). While getting attuned to the awe-inspiring beauty of her eerie environment, the protagonist is eventually granted the capacity to "[look] into the soul of the world" (2017: loc.4480). As she reconnects with the diverse primordial energies enlivening objects, elements, and creatures, Cedar gets a sense of the ecology of relationships that links the humans to the non-humans. Meanwhile, she acknowledges the disenchantment that modernity had brought upon urban settlements by overlooking this network of reciprocity within the living realm.

17 In addition to such recovery of beauty in the uncanny, by describing the world in terms of continual ebbs and flows, Louise Erdrich's novel dreams up a poetics of pollution early in the narrative:

Many tiny pieces of paper, blown from bags, fluttering off the giant pile, lie in drifts here and there in the Merf. I smooth them out and add them to the envelopes of scraps that I taped to the inner cover of your book. They have made their way here from all corners of the earth. Lemon candy wrappers from Spain and many tags—marked Made in China, Taiwan, USA, Sri Lanka, Berlin. There are cards printed in Korea and little decorative bits of gilt and lavender wrappers from France, Australia, Indonesia. Torn and smudged photos. Wine labels from New Zealand. Erection instructions to some

lost tent manufactured in Taiwan. There are scraps of iconic American soup, mac & cheese, scouring pad, and laundry soap packaging. Envelopes with beautifully printed stamps juxtaposed for merely utilitarian purposes—yet bearing some mysterious effect. (2017: loc.2915)

18 As Cedar scrapbooks the debris of a doomed globalized civilization, she gives beauty and meaning to discarded garbage. The enumeration, operated mostly through the juxtaposition of noun phrases and simple descriptive clauses employing “there,” offers a vibrant heterogeneity that transcends the simple materiality and purpose of the tags and wrappers. Instead of merely rejecting the scraps, Cedar gives them deeper meaning as every creation, even proceeding from profit-oriented practices, can be “recycled,” or reinjected into the cycle of a greater mystery. When she repurposes the many fragments, she contributes to the system of reciprocity and compensation that secures the safe balance of the universe. She adds her will and energy to the natural forces at work.

19 Furthermore, in Cedar’s long narrative, the reader is offered distinctive elements contextualizing humanity’s downturn. Despising natural laws, humans have been overexploiting the land: “The water from the vast and beautiful aquifer below us, the gigantic underground source of purity, which we’re all sucking dry” (2017: loc.588). A vast species extinction is taking place. Cedar’s boyfriend, Phil, who studied biology, explains to her:

He told me that in his early twenties at the University of Minnesota, he majored in wildlife biology and thought he might become an ornithologist, but he had realized that in a few years there would be few birds for him to study. He would be studying the history of birds on this earth. (2017: 1447)

20 In reaction, in the matter of a few months, nature goes mad as biology kicks back to annihilate humans as if they were pests needing to be gotten rid of. The helpless and highly vulnerable humans fail at grasping the range of this natural revolution. Glen, Cedar’s white father, ventures an explanation: “This could be a new kind of virus. Maybe bacteria. From the permafrost” (2017: loc.158). The reference to the melting permafrost liberating ancient miasmas alludes to a direct human responsibility through global warming. The diffuse biological threat then takes many forms, including the disappearance of winter, an increasing rate of sterility and birth mortality striking both children and mothers, and genetic abnormalities turning familiar animals and plants into monsters. This redeeming chaos, reinvesting the fallow fields left vacant by a self-centered civilization, induces a negentropic¹⁴ reaction and reveals the interconnectedness of all things. As Cedar concludes: “Everything is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness” (2017: loc.4357). Strikingly, the narrator first receives knowledge of this essential truth with the searing mental image of the developments occurring inside her body as she finds herself pregnant: “I think of the neurons in your brain connecting, branching, forming the capacity I hope you will have for wonder. They are connecting like galaxies. Perhaps we function as neurons ourselves, interconnecting thoughts in the giant mud of God” (2017: loc.1830). In the epiphany of pregnancy, the macrocosm intertwines with the microcosm, and the inner world parallels the outer world, as both are triggered by the same feral energy of continuous renewal.

2. Corporeal empowerment

21 Erdrich’s novel heavily relies on a sensuous and carnal understanding of the outside world. Untamed beasts assert their being-to-the-world through the intensity of their physical presence. In this regard, urban wildness is manifold. It involves grotesque creatures from the Carboniferous, the Jurassic, and the Eocene, but also swarms of rats, and monstrous creatures from the Anthropocene which devour corpses:

But then, very slowly I understand what I am seeing—an undulating brown fur mat or rug is actually rats carefully rooting out and removing what is in the white bag through a precisely chewed hole. And more rats are piled on something placed upon the little table. They have shredded its covering. They are moving in a bizarre way, on the table, back and forth, swarming, swimming, over one another, diving into a pile of themselves and diving out again. (2017: loc.3157)

22 The disruptive multitude creeps from every tiny crack in the walls and disappears as suddenly. Cedar is fascinated by the sway of this predatory wave that claims human waste of all kinds and reprocesses it. Additionally, urban wildness is also depicted by vivid images of riots, arsons, disturbing cries, shouts, and gunfire on the streets: “Tonight, a house spouts huge orange flames. The cries and shouts are too small and far away to hear. Even the crackle of gunfire, far off, inconsequential as a string of firecrackers” (2017: loc.1827). To cope and to adjust to the unnerving situation, pregnant Cedar hides in her house and turns into a nocturnal animal reaching out to the wildness inside herself: “I gulp the darkness in, the rich turmoil of earth” (2017: loc.1633). While her body becomes a threshold of experience, she invests a sensory apprehension of her environment. Subsequently, she relies heavily on her sense of smell to assess people: “You can smell fear, vanity, secret meanness, a lonely heart, envy, and cruel thinking. Likewise, easy confidence. Even goodness. You can smell if a man likes you” (2017: loc.1430). Cedar endows them with animalistic characteristics, as she retrieves the wildness lurking within each of them. For instance, the unknown driver who comes to rescue her is “a heron man with a big pale beak” (2017: loc.2825). Later on, when Tia, her companion in misfortune, gives birth, she turns into a cougar: “And she greets each oncoming contraction with a powerful sound, a growl that starts low in her ribs and rises in pitch until, at the ceiling of her contraction, it is a cougar scream. I heard that sound twice, once in my backyard and once out camping with my parents in Glacier Park” (2017: loc.3115). In addition, her Native half-sister’s disturbing smile reveals her resurgent wolf nature, a trait confirmed by Cedar’s Native Grandmother:

“Grandma has hinted that we have ‘supernatural’ blood.”
 “What does that even mean?”
 “Maybe we’re, like, Rugaroo people. The ones who change to wolves?”
 I can believe it of Little Mary with her fangy smile and blazing witch eyes. (2017: loc.3618)

23 In *Future Home of the Living God*, as in many of her novels, Louise Erdrich alludes to shapeshifting, a prominent motif in Native American legends. Throughout the narratives, inner transformations operate by means of partial and momentary physical metamorphosis witnessed, then told and retold by other characters. Academic Joni Adamson refers to these shapeshifting protagonists as “transformational beings.” In *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*, she analyzes a scene from Erdrich’s earlier novel, *Tracks*, in which Fleur, the powerful female character, regularly shows signs of transforming into a bear.

[It] implies that stories about transformational beings—and the novel *Tracks* itself—open the oral tradition to the possibility of resignification and recontextualization, but only for the purpose of answering urgent questions that face the community. (Adamson 103)

24 Likewise, in *Future Home of the Living God*, metamorphosis offers the possibility of responding to the imminent danger that faces the human community. For Cedar, personal survival becomes a matter of literally incorporating this wild nature

at work and of experiencing a form of becoming-animal.¹⁵ Despite the many walls meant to contain her and to confine the scope of her vision and understanding—the seclusion of her suburban home and the fortress perimeter of the prison-hospital—Cedar is soothed by nature (“If I could not look out on the trees I am sure I would succumb to the fear that’s dogging me” 2017: loc.1913) and experiences the call of the wild:

He doesn’t see me all day, how hardworking and down-to-earth I’ve been all day. And it isn’t easy with the wind high, with the trees crashing their limbs together out there, with the dry leaves changing color and the sky that hot autumn blue. It is very hard. I want to get out. (2017: loc.1944)

25 Moreover, toward the end of the novel, to escape assailants, Cedar turns into a burrowing creature, a sort of decomposer, delving deep into the pile of waste crowding her sister’s bedroom’s floor, and she hides still under layers and layers of repulsively dirty clothes that she has renamed “dead clothes”: “Under the spaghetti of stockings, scarves, shirts, jackets, leggings, my eyes are shaded. I peer out from under the wreckage” (2017: loc.4047).

26 The protagonist delves deeper into her immediate urban environment to be reborn as a new being to the world. Cedar’s narrative thus operates a “bio-thanatic inscription,” as Edgar Morin formulates it, for it engages what Sacha Kagan defines as “the mutual nourishment of individual existence and the eco-organizational cycles of life and death” (2011: 191). This is a crucial principle deeply embedded in the mythic narratives of Indigenous peoples of North America as recalled in *Art and Sustainability: Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity*.¹⁶ Although appearing at first to be a curse given the political contingencies, Cedar’s pregnancy proves to be the key to adaptation for, as she astutely puts it: “Pregnancy is a wildness of being” (2017: loc.1188). She thus experiences in her flesh the uncontrollable energy of re-creation. She incorporates in her womb the necessary and complementary forces of order and chaos, those same necessary and complementary forces that animate nature. According to Hubert Zapf,

[...] there is no easy way out of this double condition between order and chaos, balance, and turbulence in nature. They seem to represent necessary, complementary, and mutually conditioning polarities of both ecology and aesthetics, and to think them together is one of the inescapable quandaries with which contemporary ecological thought—and contemporary ecocritical literary theory—has to cope. (2016: loc.2497)

27 Cedar refutes determinism and oppression by fully reinvesting her body’s territory: an expanding, shapeshifting female body defying patriarchy, male dominance, and modern domestication. In the midst of well-ordered streets and planned ahead geography, she reinjects carnal chaos. Hence, her rebellion is an explicit echo of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, where the city space is suddenly cut into a binary pattern opposing male activities to female chores on the pretense of ensuring survival. Consequently, the dry categorization ensued by the new social organization concurs with the disenchantment of the urban landscape. In the Canadian novel, the fertility rate has drastically dropped due to diseases and pollution, and a moralist authoritarian state, Gilead, implements a strict social classification between the labor force and members of the leading class. Likewise, fertile women are enslaved to bear children to the ruling elite. Being denied humanity, they are treated as mere commodities. In “The Gender-space Paradigm,”¹⁷ Ana Ruano Tirado explores the offshoots of the subservience of women in *The Handmaid’s Tale*: “Handmaids also lose control of their bodies, which become state goods that serve as reproductive tools at the service of empowered men. The female body as a dispossessed property and procreation as an obligation for women are pivotal topics in feminist studies” (2017: 8). Later on, she quotes Arthur Brittan to add: “There is nothing about reproduction which necessitates the appropriation of children and women’s bodies by men. Such an appropriation is a political act—it represents a means of redressing the perceived biological power of women to produce children” (2017: 9).

28 Accordingly, in Louise Erdrich’s novel, pregnant women are immediately reported to the central authority to be interned in highly secured maternity wards, thus being denied the right to freely experience a connection to their city environment during the shaping of new lives. Drugged, monitored continuously, and forced to undergo c-sections from which they rarely survive, these mothers are reduced to the role of useful matrices:

Early on, we heard about Womb Volunteers, but maybe they were not enough of them and so there is talk of a female draft now. I’ve overheard snippets of conversation. Women are being forced to try and carry to term a frozen embryo from the old in-vitro clinics. That or be inseminated with sperm from the old sperm banks. (2017: loc.2697)

29 Central authority justifies these abuses by invoking the sudden biological evolution resulting in fetuses born with overdeveloped reptilian brains: martial law should prevail as the human species’ survival is at stake. The perverted discourse instills people’s minds as Cedar’s boyfriend sheepishly repeats: “After all, it’s a global crisis, it’s the future of humanity, so you can see why they need to keep an eye on women. Every living thing is changing, Cedar, it’s biological chaos, things going backward at an awkward rate” (2017: loc.4159). In *Future Home of the Living God*, as well as in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the violent domestication of women by men results from the failure of the latter to domesticate nature.¹⁸ Strikingly, in both novels, the pragmatic exploitation of resources, whether natural resources or women’s wombs, is a doomed process. In both novels, patriarchal civilizations turn a blind eye to the obvious consequences of their acts. Both narratives serve as admonitions. However, their treatment of the network of relationships linking humans with non-humans within the urban limits differs.

30 When Louise Erdrich steps in Margaret Atwood’s shoes and offers a reboot of the original novel, she chooses to create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, and yet she regularly instills a sense of magic through the disruptive resurgence of wildness within the city’s civilized world. Wendy B. Faris addresses this writing technique associated with magical realism in *Ordinary Enchantments, Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*:

In magical realism, reality’s outrageousness is often underscored because ordinary people react to magical events in recognizable and sometimes also in disturbing ways, a circumstance that normalizes the magical event but also defamiliarizes, underlines, or critiques extraordinary aspects of the real. (2004: 13)

31 Indeed, as Cedar notices, the world has gone backward; however, people seem intent on continuing to live as if nothing has changed: “This is how the world ends, I think, everything crazy yet people doing normal things” (2017: loc.466). Despite the extraordinary re-emergence of ancient creatures, people tend to mundane concerns and attempt to elaborate on possible responses within the limited framework of rationality. Thus, the narrative normalizes the profusion of supernatural occurrences while it highlights the absurdity of the management of the crisis. The ongoing defamiliarization compels readers to assess their reality with a critical eye and reconsider current political decisions while stepping aside from mainstream opinions. In the novel, the re-enchantment of urban wildness both triggers and sustains a necessary introspective inquiry about one’s stance in the entanglement of reciprocal exchanges binding all living beings, whether human or more-than-human. Beyond the fictional universe it creates, the narrative directly questions our immediate reality. The lurking feral forces that creep in the gaps of the city reveal the propensity for mayhem hardly repressed by society.

32 Louise Erdrich initially wrote the first draft of her novel in 2002 during the Bush administration in reaction to the post

9/11 implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act.¹⁹ She then abandoned the project. In 2016, she felt the urge to complete it in the wake of the Presidential election that brought President Donald Trump to power. In *Future Home of the Living God*, the USA PATRIOT Act is revived and amplified: “There were articles I, II, III, IV, and now we are up to V, section 215 of which still allows our government to seize entire library and medical databases in order to protect national security” (2017: loc.1268). Nevertheless, Erdrich’s novel remains essentially a novel of hope and “survival” to draw upon Gerald Vizenor’s concept: “Survival is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories; not a mere reaction, or a survival name. Native survival stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry” (1993: vii). As Cedar realizes, the key to overcoming the end of the world resides in adaptability, a quality that has enabled humans to thrive in hostile environments: “we’ve got some built-in flexibility” (2017: loc.1840). When individuals can no longer rely on the reassuring context of a well-civilized urban surrounding, they regain agency in engaging transactions between outer and inner wildness. To fit and settle in an unstable space, beings must make constant use of their negotiation skills, a well-known situation to Native people on the American continent. In the novel, Cedar’s Native stepfather responds to her concerns about the end of the world in such words:

“Indians have been adapting since before 1492, so I guess we’ll keep adapting.”
 “But the world is going to pieces.”
 “It is always going to pieces.”
 “This is different.”
 “It is always different. We’ll adapt.” (2017: loc.515)

- 33 He thereby acknowledges the necessity to adjust individual behaviors and expectations to the sudden wild re-enchantment of the urban territory. In the novel, the adjustment presents a formidable opportunity to renew human bonds to their surroundings while regenerating the bonds linking the members within the community. Intertextuality informs the narrative for, contrary to Atwood’s post-apocalyptic barren state of nature where everything that does not qualify as urban or human-made is ruined, Erdrich’s writing contrives an unbridled luxurious wilderness defying Cartesian rationalization. Even the dreadful genetic turmoil taking place in the women’s wombs proves to be a mere matter of adaptation to the new environment: “The ones born alive so far are more physically adept. They grab things earlier, walk sooner. They are bigger. Nobody knows about speech. Not that many have, you know, spoken so far” (2017: loc.2753). Re-enchanting the urban setting can only be fully achieved through the carnal absorption and transformation of this exuberant wildness. *Future Home of the Living God* does not serve as a tale of the end of the world but, rather, offers a narrative of the world’s cyclical renewal. The return of the feral then stands as a shaping force, structural violence aiming at restoring the cosmos through the intermingling of different paradigms.

3. Postcolonial hybridity and literary sustainability

- 34 In *Future Home of the Living God*, corporeal empowerment can only prevail by addressing the entanglement of the protagonist’s inner paradigms. Indeed, the novel openly posits living beings as intersections between realms and trusts hybridity to be the key to overcome the ordeals induced by this nature gone mad where new species “both familiar and alien” (2017: loc.1642) sprout. The main character willingly acknowledges her being at a cultural crossroads: “I am a walking contradiction, maybe two species in one body” (2017: loc.1171). Not only does she acknowledge the cultural discrepancies lying at the core of her mixed-blood experience, but she also integrates the multiple versions of self that coexist inside her: “A woman, a dweeb, a geek, a pregnant dilettante straddling not just millennia but epochs. I am also an insecure Ojibwe, a fledging Catholic, an overstriving brain cooking up conflicting dramas” (2017: loc.1171). In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha thoroughly analyzes the ex-centric stance of postcolonial communities and the renewed glance they cast upon their familiar environment when he writes:

Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate,’ and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity. (2004: 9)

- 35 *Future Home of the Living God* definitely endorses hybridity as a potent force to compare and contrast times and places. To that end, Cedar’s narrative regularly weighs the immensity of geological times against the conciseness of human time: “We are so brief. A one-day dandelion. A seedpod skittering across the ice. We are a feather falling from the wing of a bird. I don’t know why it is given to us to be so mortal and to feel so much. It is a cruel trick, and glorious” (2017: loc.1713). In the meantime, she mindfully inscribes her baby’s early development into the bigger story of the evolution of species:

You are between months 4 and 5. You passed through the age of miracles. Gone from tadpole to vaguely humanoid and lost your embryonic tail. Absorbed the webs between your toes and fingers and developed eyelids, ears, a tiny skeleton. Grown a 250,000-neuron-per-minute brain. You can already squint, frown, smile, hiccup. (2017: loc.857)

- 36 The distortion of perceived time emphasizes the random movements of these “historic times!” (2017: loc.65) when the “world is running backward. Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped” (2017: loc.61). Because it stands poised between divergent times and between contrasting cultures, Cedar Songmaker’s poetic testimonial revisits past and present into a “past-present” as Homi Bhabha explains:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (2004: 10)

- 37 The novel portrays Cedar as a liminal being who can fully engage the in-between shapeshifting space at the edge of the urban realm. Rebellious Cedar physically assimilates the darkness and the violence caused by the eerie re-enchantment of her immediate surrounding. She bodily experiences a return to the wild on the very grounds of contested habitats, namely the suburbs outskirting the city, the prison, and the Indian reservation. Meanwhile, standing “at the center of some sort of vortex” (2017: loc.690), she also points out the corporeal memory of centuries of transformation, our DNA keeping track of every step of our evolution: “We carry the history of our genetic mishaps;” “Our bodies have always remembered who we were” (2017: loc.1846). Thus, the palimpsestic body superimposes the layers of previous states of being:

But there it is, I think now, the evidence coded and encrypted within each drop of blood, each hair and fingernail pairing. For every intelligent piece of design, for every perfection, ghosts of failures exist, too. Mistakes. Whales have vestigial leg bones, pelvises, from their land origins. We survive with certain of those imperfect flaws in our design, the most immediate for me being that the size of the human upright and walking female pelvis is often incompatible with the size of a human baby’s head. (2017: loc.1856)

38 In the meantime, the palimpsestic territory of the city margins and overlooked urban spaces superimposes the layers of Pre-Anthropocene states of nature and modern constructions. Porosity and instability bind former existences together, allowing biology to loop back to prior conditions according to a complex, both random and cyclical, pattern. Empowered with this awareness, Cedar envisions a set of connections between her body and the rest of the living world to stay attuned to her ever-shifting environment, thus giving illustration of Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality: "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always inter-meshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (2010: 2). Because the novel conceives Cedar's urban surroundings as a circulating system in which she is a significant actant, New Materialism offers meaningful insight regarding the issues at stake. Serenella Iovino clarifies the framework of material ecocriticism when she writes:

Material ecocriticism heeds materiality as the constitutive element of ecological relationships, exploring the entanglements between material configurations and the emergence of meanings. As an interpretive practice, it concentrates on the links between matter and text, and in so doing, it shifts its focus from nature to matter [...] In this vision, the notion of 'environment' (a surrounding materiality in which individual beings arise) is displaced by the interplay of material subjects. For material ecocriticism, 'nature' is rather equated with substance, the nature of things, and a continuing process of dynamic materialization and differentiation over time and space. (2012: 56)

39 Louise Erdrich's choice of setting her novel at the margins of the city, a dynamic space determined by "the fleeting, mutating bodies and material substances that move through it," to borrow Christopher Schliephake's words, is not insignificant. The transformation of the margins (suburbs, prison, reservations) herein depicted restores the reciprocal interplay of transitory forces in a space where human and nonhuman worlds overlap. Indeed, the metamorphoses triggered by this fertile ground convey continuity, meanwhile jamming and entangling references such as diverse prehistoric states of nature and contemporary urban modernity, thus creating composite objects. The liminal space of these urban margins acts as a territory of transgression as well as places of mediation between order and chaos. In the suburbs, the testimonial of a "bewildered" Cedar can contrive hybrid combinations of the unthinkable: gigantic life forms that eerily resemble the often unnoticed natural phenomena animating the cityscape. Likewise, other border spaces, usually operating as cover-ups for what modern civilization refuses to see, prisons and reservations, reveal their potential to rejuvenate the links interconnecting society and nature. What was initially conceived as containment areas for inconvenient presences proves to be a zone of fluidity between realms where continuous interchanges of substance defy the notions of enclosure and finiteness. Christopher Schliephake analyzes the importance of the flows of substance in the shaping of a hybrid urban environment when he writes:

By underlining the material flows, circulations, and exchanges within an urban environment, it thus becomes possible to perceive the city as a hybrid collective in its own right, a complex and dense network of actants which, in the end, show that "our 'social' worlds are always already 'more-than-human'" (Braun 2008, 199). Thereby, it becomes possible to carefully examine the interwoven urban networks of human interactions with materials and objects to interrogate the environmental consequences of these interrelations. (2014: loc 517)

40 Cedar's inner hybridity allows her to get more attuned to the inherent hybrid context of the city margins. Conversely, the re-enchantment of urban wildness finds a direct echo in the wildness that her pregnant body experiences. The exuberance of forms of the outside world engages in a conversation with the intimate profusion of cells prompted by the shaping of a new being.

41 When confronting the environmental crisis and biological chaos, Erdrich's characters seek transitional stances made of entangled agencies, thus writing a new chapter in the Indigenous presence in the natural world and, more specifically, in urban spaces. In that regard, *Future Home of the Living God* truly performs cultural ecology for it "looks at the interaction and living interrelationship between culture and nature, without reducing one to the other," (2016: loc.128) to quote Hubert Zapf's definition of the concept. In *Urban Ecologies*, Christopher Schliephake asserts that "the materiality of our urban worlds, like space, becomes a text that can be read, interpreted, and negotiated." Conversely, as Hubert Zapf notes in *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts*:

In the imaginative space of cultural creativity provided by art and literature, processes of radical deconventionalization, defamiliarization, and defiguration but also of creative recombination and reconfiguration are employed to continually renew ossified forms of thought, perception, communication, and imagination. (2014: loc.2747)

42 To that extent, Louise Erdrich's novel proves to be an essential "sustainable text," for it stands as a manifold first-person narrative directly challenging the reader's assumption of his or her stance and agency in the complex energetic network of the living world. It appeals to our capacities of resilience as it projects an apocalyptic future while firmly refuting predetermination. Being confronted with the specific resurgent urban wildness imagined by Louise Erdrich enhances Cedar's sense of agency. It hereupon materializes through the first person narrative testimonial she feels compelled to write to her unborn child. Not only does she willfully bear witness to what once was and to the abrupt disordering of the urban settlements, but she also puts into words her prospective hopes for what could emerge from the turmoil and lets her mind wander from philosophical considerations to poetic evocations regarding the reshaping of the cityscape. The amount and braiding of these accounts give meaning and direction to the apparent chaos and position her as a direct agent in rethinking and amending the interpenetration of wildness and civilization.

43 In parallel, the reader is invited to pay attention to the story-weaving at work: Cedar's origins are revealed to her through different, even contradictory stories only she can make sense of. The novel depicts her newly discovered Native grandmother as being a talented weaver of both yarn and stories. Grandma Virginia's sash and storytelling mirror the constant reweaving of DNA that reinjects mesmerizing wildness in the streets and the buildings as well as in the wombs of pregnant women:

Exactly right—folded quietly and knitted in right along with the working DNA there is a shadow self. This won't surprise the poets. We carry our own genetic doubles, at least in part. What if some of those silenced genes were activated? I don't know how, but what if they were? And they decided to restore us to some former physical equilibrium? (2017: loc.1847)

44 These many references to a woven or knitted yarn draw the contours of a literary conceit, an extended metaphor of the first weaver in many Native mythologies: Spiderwoman.²⁰ In the novel, this legendary figure seems to have taken flesh briefly as Tia, or "Spider Nun," when she carefully unweaves her blanket to make a ball of yarn then used to weave an escape rope ladder: "As Spider Nun and I work together, one of us weaves or unravels, just beneath our bed sheets and blankets" (2017: loc.2391); "Over and over, as I pick apart and wind, unknot, unravel, wind, by the inch, by the hour, by the piece, by the skein, my freedom and your life, I repeat these lines [St John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*] that seem so perfect to me" (2017: loc.2434).

45 Mimicking the re-enchantment of urban wildness, the women unravel the threads of the existing situation to weave them into a new pattern, thus conceiving an escape from impending danger.

46 In *Future Home of the Living God*, the Ojibway novelist and poet also mimicks, deconstructs, and reweaves narratives to conceive a third way to construe reality. By drawing upon many time periods and epochs, but also incorporating different time lapses (Prehistoric times, Anthropocene, human time and evolution time), she recombines the patterns of diversely perceived or experienced materialities on the specific territory of the city. Furthermore, banking on intertextuality (the 80's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and traditional Native American legends), she explores current topical concerns of social and environmental justice through the dialogue of different ontological frameworks. As she postulates a dark, and yet eerily mesmerizing, speculative future, Louise Erdrich questions and re-enchants our relationship to urban settlements. Meanwhile, she draws our attention to the often-overlooked manifestations of wildlife within the limits of a not-so-civilized perimeter. Through Cedar's vibrant narrative, we, as readers, are compelled to engage in affirmative action. Indeed, as *Future Home of the Living God* delves into the entanglements between human and nonhuman realms, it highlights some of the irresponsible and short-sighted political stances of a not-so-unfamiliar present. Consequently, it challenges our possible indifference to those issues, for it offers a powerful depiction of what could stem from our failure to make the right decisions. Early on in the novel, the protagonist remarks: "All the way back along the calm, empty South Minneapolis streets, I feel that, instead of the past, it is the future that haunts us now" (2017: loc.1110). Likewise, our Western civilization seems to have entered a phase where the future is haunting us. Yet, as the novel suggests, the future remains to be reimagined, recombined, and renewed.

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Notes

¹ I deliberately refer to a capitalized « Nature » to allude to a Euro-centered conception of what is neither human nor human-altered. Consequently, this estranged environment is wrongfully envisioned as a wild, pristine and empty space waiting to be organized first by the human mind, then by human activities. This generally accepted, unifying idea of Nature refutes the intricate plurality contained in natural environments where biology dwells on the balance of a set of relations between the many nonhuman organisms, as well as between nonhuman organisms and humans.

² The Ojibways (also spelled Ojibwas or Ojibwes) are a North American First Nation living in Canada and the United States in the Great Lakes area. Their language, known as Anishinaabemowin or Ojibwemowin, is a branch of the Algonquian language family. Traditionally, the Ojibways lived in bands and were hunters, trappers, and traders. They were known for their birch bark canoes as well as their cultivation of wild rice.

³ The word "native" is written in small case in the original text.

⁴ The Pueblos (thus named by Spanish conquerors referring to their sedentary settlements built in adobe mud) live mainly in Arizona and New Mexico. This linguistic entity comprises many tribes (among which the Lagunas) who are the descendants of early inhabitants such as the Anasazis and the Mogollons. The Pueblo peoples share common agricultural practices. They are tight-knit communities revolving around family clans.

5 The term first appeared in its Spanish form, *cosmovision*, to properly word the Mesoamericans' concept of a universe where time and place are ritualized, and where reciprocity between living beings maintain the world's balance. In order to sustain this fragile equilibrium, hubris, excess, and selfishness are prohibited. Moreover, as worthy guardians of the universe's proper functioning, the human community members regularly take upon themselves to rekindle relationships and relaunch cycles through gift-giving ceremonies. Joni Adamson summarizes the term as encompassing "the conceptions of entangled human relations with more-than-human worlds" (145)

6 As Lawrence Buell aptly remarks in *Writing for an Endangered World*, cities have long been opposed to the countryside in a nonsensical binary and exclusive comparison. A study of urban spaces under the lens of urban ecology soon refutes such antagonism and reveals the complex interconnectedness between the "green" landscapes of exurbia and the "brown" landscapes of industrialized territories in terms of flows of material substances (2001: 7) but also in terms of the collective imagination. He states the necessity to pay close attention to "the interdependence between urban and outback landscape, and the traditions of imagining them" (2001: 8) in order to study "the indispensableness of physical environment as a shaping force in human art and experience and how such an aesthetic works" (2001: 9).

7 The notion of wildness is here understood as "a quality of interactive processing between an organism and its surroundings in which the realities of base nature are met, allowing the construction of durable systems." For deeper insight, see Lawrence J Cookson's article "A Definition for Wildness."

8 To that respect, I would like to refer to Anne Simon's work on the "marvelous monsters' habitats bordering on ours or even blending with them." She has thoroughly studied how the "squirming, repulsive, crawling, repulsive, invasive, elusive, resistant or infected [creatures] that inhabit the interstices of our cities have fueled many literary dystopias." She has also underlined the "strangeness of the beauty" erupting from the unwanted encounters confronting the human realm with this utter otherness (see "The Vermin Living in the Nooks and Crannies in our Cities: Zoopoetics of Urban Interstices," keynote address of the June 2019 *Urban Wildness: To Perceive, Think and Live with Nature in Cities* International Conference, and « La Vermine dans les plis de nos villes » in *Une bête entre les ligne : essai de zoopoétique*, p 313-335.)

9 Charles Renouvier first coined this French term in 1857. The neologism was meant to mirror the word "utopia" created by Thomas Moore in 1516 as it associates a privative suffix (the letter "u") with the Greek term for time ("chronos"). According to etymology, "uchronie" then means "no-time," in other words, a time period out of existence and reality. Charles Renouvier envisioned authors of "uchronie" as writing history not as it was, but as it might have been. To do so, the narrative must unfold in a world closely similar to ours up to a "point of divergence," a major event from which the course of history is altered.

10 Meganaræ were giant insects from the Carboniferous period (approximately 300 million years ago) resembling present-day dragonflies. According to current scientific knowledge, Meganaræ must have been the largest flying insect species having inhabited our planet, with a wingspan ranging from 65 cm to 70 cm.

11 Archaeopteryces lived in the Late Jurassic around 150 million years ago. Transitional creatures between non-avian feathered dinosaurs and modern birds, they are referenced as the oldest known bird. Rather small compared to other prehistoric flying animals, their size was similar to the size of a raven.

12 Saber-toothed cats were predatory mammals living on earth from the Eocene epoch to the Pleistocene epoch (from 42 million years ago to 11,000 years ago). Regarding the different species gathered under this generic name, scientists talk of convergent evolution of members of the Feliformia lineage (cat-like carnivorans) and members of the Metatherian mammals (closely related to marsupials). Both lineages converged as they developed elongated canines, a wide gape, and bulky forelimbs.

13 "Wildēor contracted to 'wilder,' gave rise to 'wilder' and finally 'wilderness.' Etymologically, the term means 'wild-dēor-ness,' the place of wild beasts." (Nash 2)

14 Negentropy is an organizational force that opposes the natural tendency to disorganization, or entropy. Confronted with chaos and its consequential dispersion of energies, a culture will aim at rearranging and reordering systems while taking into account the new given contingencies. The cyclical return of chaos and reactive negentropy ensures the renewal of civilization as Gilbert Durand analyzes: "Si ce problème se pose déjà pour le biologiste et même pour le physicien, il se pose à fortiori à l'anthropologue, puisque tout phénomène de culture est, pour ainsi dire, doublement négentropique: à la fois en se répétant, il 'cultive' plus, à la fois il enrichit la mémoire du groupe et facilite sa répétition" ("If this problem arises in biology and physics, it accordingly arises in anthropology for every cultural phenomenon stands as dually negentropic: while repeating itself it 'cultivates' more, by enriching the group's memory it facilitates its own repetition" my translation, 1996: 119).

15 I refer here to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*, where the philosophers question the frontier line separating humans and animals by postulating a possible contagion of essences: "Nous ne devenons pas animal sans une fascination pour la meute, pour la multiplicité. Fascination du dehors ? Ou bien la multiplicité qui nous fascine est-elle déjà en rapport avec la multiplicité qui nous habite au-dedans ?" ("We don't become animals without being fascinated by the pack, by the multiplicity. External fascination? Or does this fascinating multiplicity relate to our inner multiplicity?" my translation, 1980: 293). Plasticity of forms and shapeshifting play a significant part in Native American cosmologies. Likewise, contemporary Native artists recurrently choose to depict characters on the verge of transformation, if not in the middle of the process.

16 Sacha Kagan notably quotes the Pueblos who believe that death is a necessity for it feeds life, both metaphorically and materially: "any life is embedded in biocenosis on the basis of its existential need for other lives" (2011: 191)

17 In Margaret Atwood's novel, specific spaces are assigned according to gender in terms of imaginary borderlands, centers, and margins. In her Master's dissertation, Ana Ruano Tirado notes that gender relations obey strict rules delimiting public and private spheres in the city. The dichotomy geographically legitimizes male authority and superiority. Indeed, public spaces represent the domain of rationality and citizenship, a male-dominated environment where women's mobility is restricted. Conversely, the private sphere is reserved to femininity on the pretense of providing women a secure locale where motherhood can thrive: "[...] however, ironically their real threat is within the household, since it is the place where they are sexually raped" (2017: 12).

18 Interestingly, in both novels, the patriarchal center of power designates instrumentalized matronly figures to guard and discipline the fertile women. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, they are called "Aunts," while in *Future Home of the Living God*, the archetype is epitomized by the enigmatic "Mother." In one case as in the other, the intrinsic violence is disguised under the fake sweetness of maternal discourses of guidance: male domination is dressed up as a women's matter.

19 The USA PATRIOT Act is an acronym that stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism. Passed 45 days after 9/11 in the name of national security, the USA PATRIOT Act drastically expanded the US government's authority to monitor phone and email communications, collect bank and credit reporting records, and track any activity on the internet. This Act implemented the governmental spying over American citizens and was immediately perceived by many as a clear attack on American civil liberties.

20 According to Native mythologies, this Earth goddess offers guidance to humans through the teaching of weaving, transmission of stories, and traditional medicine knowledge. This shapeshifting benevolent spirit helps humanity to make sense of the world they live in and find congruence. In *Grandmothers of the Light*, Paula Gunn Allen thus sums up the importance of the interwoven traditional stories: "Stories connect us to the universe of medicine—of paranormal or sacred power. The universe of power referred to by the old people of some of the tribes as the Great Mystery is the universe that medicine people inhabit" (1992b: 3). The regeneration of traditional stories by means of a constant and evolving retelling of the tales is part of the ceremonial process that contributes to restoring natural balance.

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Auteur

Caroline Durand-Rous

Professeure Agrégée, Docteure en littérature américaine, CRESEM, Université de Perpignan Via Domitia, 52 Avenue Paul Alduy, 66100

Perpignan

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