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Lumbering Woman:
Madge Macbeth's *The Patterson Limit*

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Abstract

Through the lens of Madge Macbeth's *The Patterson Limit* (1923), this article examines women's entry into the forestry industry. Exploring the feminist, eco-feminine, and ecofeminist positions articulated or anticipated by Macbeth's fiction, this article will explore feminism and ecology in conversation with *The Patterson Limit*. Further, this article will show a number of points of intersection between the ecofeminist representations anticipated by Macbeth and the feminist theories articulated in the 1920s, before women's enfranchisement, by writers such as Nellie McClung. The article will conclude by looking at how women, forestry, and forestry-related industries are figured in the 21st-century works of non-fiction by Elizabeth May and Charlotte Gill, thus demonstrating the ways in which Madge Macbeth's work anticipates the later evolution of women writers' understanding of their connection to nature.

Keywords: ecofeminist, eco-feminine, feminist, ecocriticism, lumber, forest

Madge Macbeth's fictional portrayal in *The Patterson Limit* (1923)¹ of early twentieth-century forestry practices, demonstrates women's evolution from eco-feminine leanings to an anticipation of ecofeminist self-awareness. This is realized through fictionally

imagining and inserting women into a male-dominated and controlled industry, highlighting the potential key role women could and should play in forestry conservation. In this way, Macbeth's fiction participates in articulating early eco-feminine ideologies, and predicts the later challenge ecofeminists will make to the anthropocentric destruction of nature in capitalist and consumer cultures. It is thus possible to position Macbeth's work in the trajectory of the early-twentieth century evolution of ecofeminism.

Thus, by exploring Madge Macbeth's fictional portrayal of women's early attempts to enter the forestry industry, this article will set the groundwork for a more critical understanding of women's limited historical role in the lumber industry. This article will then, more briefly, explore the politics of environmental praxis and literary expression through women's non-fiction writing about the forestry industry and its more widespread environmental impact in the Anthropocene. This will be executed through readings of Elizabeth May's non-fiction work on forestry, *At the Cutting Edge: The Crisis in Canada's Forests* (2005), and Charlotte Gill's discussion of environmental destruction and possible repair in *Eating Dirt: Deep Forests, Big Timber, and Life with the Tree-Planting Tribe* (2011). In examining how "[women] speak for the trees"² I will look at how these self-supporting women writers and politicians create a space for women's voices in cultural discourse surrounding the lumber industry, laying the groundwork for their right to involvement in typically masculine, forest-related professions in the public sphere. Together, the examination of these political and politicized female literary figures reveals the involvement of women in writing about forestry-related industries in Canada and the co-evolution of women's right to work in the field.

It is important at the outset to clarify the terminology and distinctions between eco-feminine and ecofeminism, as a clear premise of this article is that Madge Macbeth's work is eco-feminine and anticipates, but does not arrive at an articulation of ecofeminism. Thus, it becomes necessary to define the terms and

employ the theoretical work of ecofeminists to show the ways in which ecofeminism has evolved out of its precursor in early twentieth-century eco-feminist philosophy.

Victoria Davion writes in “Is Ecofeminism Feminist?” (1994) that a number of eco-feminine – as opposed to ecofeminist – positions suggest “that a more ‘feminine’ perspective on the environment will help solve the ecological crisis” (*Ecological Feminism* 17). Ariel Kay Salleh’s further argues in “Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Ecofeminist Connection” that the “traditional feminine role runs counter to the exploitative technical rationality which is currently the requisite masculine norm” (*Environmental Ethics* 342). In other words, women do not need abstract theoretical constructs to solve the environmental crisis, as women already possess the lived experience of connection to nature. The problem is not the “traditional feminine role” but that this role has been undervalued in a patriarchal society (342). Macbeth’s writing could be said to anticipate this type of eco-feminine thinking. In “Development as a New Project of Western Patriarchy” (1990), Vandana Shiva takes a more intersectional approach to explore a feminine principle that can be connected to both conservation and nurturing. Again, the suggestion is that the gender roles are not the problem, but that the devaluing of the feminine principle is at fault (193). While undermining the patriarchal position of devaluing the feminine, this position continues to uphold a patriarchal logic that subscribes to the masculine and the feminine. Macbeth thus anticipates what is considered a type of ecofeminism. However, by upholding the logic of the “feminine” as superior, Macbeth reinscribes patriarchal values onto the feminine. Macbeth, thus, demonstrates eco-feminine and not ecofeminist thinking.

Thus, engaging with the work of ecofeminist philosophers such as Karen J. Warren, among a number of others briefly introduced above, will allow for a fuller understanding of the feminist and ecofeminist positions that Madge Macbeth, Elizabeth May, and Charlotte Gill anticipate, but fall short of fully articulating, in their understanding of the co-domination of women and nature and in their detailing of a vision for the liberation of

both. According to Victoria Davion, “Although there are a variety of different ecofeminist positions, ecofeminists agree that there is an important link between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (*Ecological Feminism* 8). Ecofeminists generally agree that the worldview that produces the domination of women is the same worldview that precipitates the domination of nature; this worldview is patriarchal and hierarchical in nature. Ynestra King states the ecofeminist position even more forcefully from an intersectional perspective when she writes “The ecological crisis is related to systems of hatred of all that is natural and female by the White, male, Western formulators of philosophy, technology, and death inventions” (*Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* 106). To this summation of the worldview that produces a patriarchy that dominates women and nature, I would add that this is inherited, in part, from the Western and Christian tradition most often wed to a neoliberal economic model that promotes profit at all costs. These costs include the subservience of women and the destruction of the natural world.

Through Madge Macbeth’s 1923 novel *The Patterson Limit*, I will chart early twentieth-century views on forestry conservation through the lenses of Macbeth’s representation of women’s right to work and prosper in the forestry industry. Moreover, *The Patterson Limit* reveals and complicates women’s entry into forestry work and conservation by showing that women in this field face threats of male violence and general lack of safety when they claim the right to work in a vocation historically dominated by men. Macbeth’s *The Patterson Limit* has not been reprinted and has been critically neglected in spite of the reprint and scholarly attention for her work *Shackles* (1926). This seems surprising, particularly given that *The Patterson Limit* espouses a message of care and respect for nature – one counter to and ahead of the official policies of the time, and very much in line with what would now be considered an eco-feminine, if not ecofeminist, approach. *The Patterson Limit*, at its most basic, is the story of the trials and tribulations of a woman who sets out to protect a forest range in Quebec: the Patterson Limit. The struggles she faces are particularly related to her

insistence on her ability to live in the woods and work in an industry not yet open to women. *The Patterson Limit* fights for the rights of the trees and the natural world as well as the rights of women. In fact, these messages are clearly entangled and, as such, related in espousing an ecofeminist message.

When the story opens, Ray Lane is an orphan being raised and taught by her older brother, Jim Lane. Jim's decision to bring Ray with him into the forests where he works is harshly judged by the Puritan inhabitants of the small New England town they call home. The town predicts that Jim will "make a heathen of her, and she'll die in outer darkness" (23) and opines that "it isn't seemly for a little girl – a lady – to be brought up in the woods with men" (24). Ray's mother is held up as an example of a "sainted" (33) woman who "walked in the narrow path of righteousness, with fear of the Lord – and your father – to guide her. There wasn't a day for twenty years that she wasn't racked with suffering" (33). The tribute continues "I can't ever remember hearing *her* laugh out loud" (33). Other tributes to her memory include that "she never stopped cleaning" (33–34). The town's inhabitants conclude the lesson in what a woman should be and what Ray's mother was by saying that "if she hadn't been killed in that buggy accident, she would have worn herself into an early grave just doing her Christian duty" (34). When Ray reflects on these accounts of her mother, they bring tears to her eyes, and she always thinks about how "she must have been very unhappy" (35). This example of a "godly" woman, held up as a good example to Ray by the women of the New England town, has a different effect on Ray than intended. Far from reminding her of her Christian duty, the town's people inspire in her a yearning for and need to escape to the woods and away from the narrow definitions of womanhood offered by the stodgy and traditional elderly of the town.

Rather than following the advice of the town or the example of her sad mother, Ray is trained by, and finds her calling through, her education in nature with her brother. According to Macbeth, "Jim Lane was a pioneer forestry expert. Long before the country at large had awakened to the necessity for studying and

preserving its timber, he had foreseen the need for a national Conservation policy” (22). Because Jim was engaged in an unconventional and as yet unheard-of career, the members of the traditional New England town “disapproved of it. It was something new, unconventional and therefore suspicious. Life in the woods was uncivilized, pagan – suitable for Indians and wild animals, but not for a New England gentleman” (22). Just as the town disapproved of Ray’s upbringing, so too did they disapprove of Jim’s work. In both cases, their resentment was rooted in an exploitative tradition that lacked a vision for the necessary changes in the roles of women and in the necessity of guarding the forests.

It should be noted that the town’s prejudice in relation to women’s roles and its suspicions regarding the work of forestry are paired with a prejudiced view of nature as being “uncivilized” and lesser than the civilized white-settler culture of the town; further, this view associates the uncivilized as suitable only for Indigenous people, wild animals, and pagan religions. Thus, the townspeople expose the breadth of their prejudices against the occupations and positions suitable for women, employ racist language for Indigenous people, and reveal a generally negative view towards nature. Further, the town did not see that “forestry would ever become a factor in national economics” (22) and, regardless,

they would have closed their eyes to the benefits resulting from a greater intimacy with the aristocrats of the forest, guarding them against fire, insect pests, premature cutting and the like, just as they closed their eyes to the Spirit of the Bible. To them, a tree was merely a tree. (23)

The narrative – approaching the level of a diatribe – continues, observing that “thousands of feet of timber were destroyed each year, not by the design of God, but by the ignorance, the carelessness of man” (23). Macbeth’s discussion speaks out against people who view “a tree [as] merely a tree” (23) and therefore suggests a position that views nature, and trees in particular, as more than merely objects for the financial benefit of humans. Further, Macbeth makes clear that protecting and

conserving the forest, far from being a financial strain on the nation, is a necessary and beneficial economic measure for the future.

In *Gaia Connections: An Introduction to Ecology, Ecoethics, and Economics* (1991), Alan S. Miller enlarges this idea beyond the anthropocentric and utilitarian benefits to champion an “economics that extends beyond the requirements of our species – as an integral part of the Gaian value system” (91). While Miller suggests that this is a new position, this idea is, in fact, articulated by Macbeth in relation to the forestry industry. Macbeth suggests the benefit of “a greater intimacy with the aristocrats of the forest” (23) to show how the forest can benefit from the human rather than how the human can benefit from this closeness with the forest. While this metaphor, based in human hierarchies, could seem to reinscribe the patriarchal values that rely on inherited systems of wealth and privilege, the description of the trees as “aristocrats of the forest” could also be viewed as placing the trees metaphorically at the top of the patriarchal human hierarchy. Thus, while employing anthropocentric scales of measurement, the trees are endowed with esteem, value, and – at least metaphorically – noble lineage and inherited wealth. Further, the suggestion of the benefit of greater intimacy, while again exhibiting anthropocentric thinking, is also encouraging a greater communion and closeness between human nature and arboreal nature – again not just to the benefit of the human, but for the health of the trees. This intimation of the necessity of greater intimacy is later exemplified by Ray’s relationship to the more-than-human.

Following the death of her brother, and fleeing the New England town in dread of an unwanted marriage to an old man, Ray sets out on a bold plan to enter the profession of fire ranging. Ray first conceives of this plan not as a way to save herself from an unwanted marriage or escape the town that is stifling her, but as a response to the desperate plea of a woman for herself and her ten children. Madame Janisse’s husband’s legs were crushed by a falling tree, rendering him unable to perform his duties in the forest that summer. The only applicant to fill the position was “a miserable fellow named Auguste Therien, who had threatened that

once installed, he would lose no time in kicking the family Janisse bodily out of their cabin, which automatically became the residence of the existent ranger" (48–49).

Deborah Slicer in "Wrongs of Passage: Three Challenges to the Maturing of Ecofeminism" (1990) identifies one of the "challenges to the maturing of ecofeminism" (29) as the position that "women recognize and empathize with the exploitation of nature because that exploitation so resembles our own" (33). Macbeth narratively exemplifies both parts of this claim. Certainly, Macbeth suggests women's vulnerability and even pain result from relying on men for protection and livelihood. This vulnerability is underlined when Auguste Therien makes it clear that he will allow the family to stay if Madame Janisse will succumb to his sexual advances and keep house for him. The laws and practices in place do not favour the protection of women and children, but rather place them at the whim of men who can threaten their home and freedom.

Women writers of the same period, such as Nellie McClung, likewise write about the way Canadian law does not protect women or children from the cruelty of men.³ In *Purple Springs* (1921) McClung gives two particularly poignant examples of women who are threatened with losing their children and their homes as a result of the cruelty of husbands and fathers. Mrs. Paine is threatened with the sale of her home and the farm she has made successful and with the loss of custody of her children to their father if she will not work in a business she views as unsuitable to the raising of children – in this case, a liquor-selling hotel her husband wants to open. Similarly, Mrs. Grey risks losing her son if she admits that she had her child in wedlock (at the time of publication, a married woman did not have rights to her children under Canadian law). The heroine of the novel, Pearl, through her quick-thinking and debating skills is able to convince people to change their thinking and, thus, rescues these women from continued humiliation and loss of home and children. It is important to note, however, that it is a woman who helps the other women who are in dire need.

The same is true in the case of *The Patterson Limit*. The heroine, Ray, intervenes in this situation to protect the mother and her children. According to Macbeth, “An idea sprang full-born into Ray’s head, an idea so thrilling, so full of joyous possibility, that she could not sit still to think about it. She jumped to her feet and tramped excitedly about the room” (49). As Susan Griffin suggests in *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), it seems that Ray is portrayed as being in tune with the cries of women and the “cries of infants” (1), at least as transported by the supplication of a woman in a letter describing the hardships she and her ten children endure at the hands of an unfeeling man. That this man will abuse women and children also anticipates that he will misuse nature and the forest. The reason for Ray taking action in this situation is, therefore, not simply a self-serving move to escape an unwanted marriage or the role the town would expect of a woman, but rather a bold move made out of her compassionate feminine nature for another woman. Like the heroine of McClung’s trilogy, and particularly *Purple Springs*, when Ray is put in an unwanted and seemingly hopeless situation, her response is not one of despondency but rather one of action. The answer to Madame Janisse’s problem and Ray’s own problem “sprang” into Ray’s mind and her body likewise responds with immediate and forceful action. Ray “jumped to her feet and tramped excitedly about the room” (49). Ray thus begins on a path that leads into a career not yet open to women; she does so not only in response to an inner love and connection with nature, but also out of what is clearly an eco-feminine position, whereby feminine nature predisposes women to be able to feel more compassion and sympathy for the potential suffering of a woman and her children because she herself is oppressed. She concludes that the obstacle of women not being allowed into the profession “made it all the more interesting. A woman would one day blaze the trail, and who was more fitted for the pioneer work than herself?” (49). Ray goes on to view this as both an opportunity and as “something almost fatalistic” (49). She does not have any doubts that she can do the work; her one concern is the difficulty in convincing the manager “that a woman ranger

should be no less capable than a man" (50). Again, this view of problems and the solutions as "fatalistic" or fated is reminiscent of other Canadian literary and feminist heroines of the 1920s. Pearl of *Purple Springs*, when faced with obstacles to her desires – in this case marriage to the man she loves – likewise feels a calling and almost benediction to action, the moment described as one of anointment.

Ray first argues for her abilities and experience in the forest. However, the man responsible for hiring a fire ranger suffers from the "conviction that in allowing this lovely young creature to subject herself to the discomforts and hardships, the danger from man and beast" (61) of working in the forest would be "false to the chivalry that was in him" (61). Mr. Cox has a "shivering dread of the forest" (61) and has never spent a night in the woods. He does not believe that a woman could survive let alone work capably in a profession for which he himself, as a man, is unsuited. However, Mr. Cox is forced to compare the able-bodied Ray to the competition, Therien, in a variety of ways. Macbeth describes Ray as a "tall, slender figure clad in a khaki camping costume" (59) and compares her good looks to the "wretched little specimen of a man called Therien" (58). It is not surprising that Macbeth goes to great lengths in describing the charms of her heroine and the appropriateness and comeliness of Ray's features and dress. This is a strategy used by other feminist writers, such as McClung, as part of the arsenal of persuasion. Further, that Ray's physical body should be more appropriately proportioned for physical labour than the "wretched little specimen of a man" that is her competition likewise works in her favour. Ray is also described as having "fearless eyes" and "eyes that possessed a strange and compelling power" (59). Mr. Cox further notices that "she seemed astonishingly strong" (63). These factors together overcome the obstacles and give her an opportunity to prove herself in the forest.

Macbeth suggests, by way of comparison, that the feminine sensibility is more in tune with nature, thus demonstrating the limits of the eco-feminine position, whereby women can be more appreciative of the beauty of the natural world than men's

understanding of nature. Mr. Cox and Therien's lack of feeling for the forest is compared with Ray's love of and understanding of the forest. When Ray is faced with using a "dilapidated shack" (90) as her home for the summer, she responds with joy to the beauty of the surroundings. In response to a giant pine nearby

the Ranger gave a cry of delight. "You blessing!" she cried. "You splendid old friend! I'm overjoyed to find you, here! To think that you will bid me farewell when I set forth each morning, and that you will welcome me when I return at evening! To know that you are watching over me gives me a sense of great security. I shall never be lonely or afraid!" She ran forward and clasped her arms about the tree, receiving from the contact an inexplicable joy. (91)

Macbeth further describes the pine as "more than a symbol. It was an inspiration" (92). Ray drew her inspiration from the tree in part because it had endured many struggles, yet in spite of them, it stood "straight and tall" (92). The pine was "wind-swept, storm-tossed, rain-beaten; scorched by the sun, wrapped in ice" and yet "it had endured" (92). Ray goes so far as to declare love for and to the pine (93). Here again, the kinship that Ray feels with and for the pine and what it has endured is in part because she, as a woman, has likewise struggled and faced obstacles, but shown strength. As early ecofeminists, such as Griffin, would argue in relation to women and their special feelings of sympathy towards nature, Ray, as a woman who has suffered hardship, feels a special closeness or bond with nature because of a shared experience of oppression. Ray is thus shown to have a natural and feminine connection to the pine and the forest. Macbeth extends the feeling of connection and sympathy even further when she writes that Ray "invested all forms of Nature with consciousness" (91). Macbeth shows Ray to have a sense of connection to nature – one that endows nature with consciousness and the possibility of personality, thus attempting to overcome anthropocentrism. However, this position clearly falls short of acknowledging the agency of nature, rather imbuing nature

with human traits through anthropomorphism, as a way to allow for human connection and understanding of nature.

Nonetheless, *Macbeth*, at least according to the ecofeminist philosophy of Karen J. Warren, falls somewhat short of overcoming the patriarchal and therefore hierarchical way of thinking that, while privileging the feminine with a special ability to understand and communicate with nature, actually undermines feminist ecological perspectives in that it does not seek to dismantle or contest the underlying logic that sets up the binaries of masculine and feminine. Thus, *Macbeth*, like Griffin, in subscribing to a feminist logic that celebrates a feminine privileged connection with nature, is agreeing to uphold the values of patriarchy that prescribe the roles associated with feminine and masculine characteristics. *Macbeth's* solution to forest conservation and the necessary ethics to protect the natural world are shown to already be possessed by women and practiced by women. However, these practices have not been realized as women have been excluded from working in a field dominated by men.

At the same time, *Macbeth* falls prey to another problematic position in relation to feminist ideology. *Macbeth* promotes a view most commonly seen in feminist travel writing criticism about nineteenth-century women travellers. In these studies, the uniqueness of the woman and even her 'masculine' qualities, such as strength and intelligence, are in part what allows her to venture into the dangerous world of travel in the first place. However, the uniqueness of the woman, while allowing her to enter the endeavour in the first place, is then overlaid with a celebration of "feminine" attributes and vision of the writing. These qualities, in the case of the woman traveller, are shown to allow her to see and write about travelling in a way that is different from her male counterparts. A similar type of opposition is set up within the world of forest conservation in *Macbeth's* writing. The woman who enters this field of work has masculine qualities and a masculine name, but then it is her feminine sensibility, which is here celebrated, that in fact allows her a special connection and insight into the life of the forest.

In observing Ray's relationship to the forest and hearing her thinking about nature, her friend Dickie observes that Ray is "a sort of pagan" (92). In this way, Macbeth makes the connection between Ray's love of nature and early pagan nature rituals or goddess worship. However, while Macbeth stops short of the full lengths of this early pagan connection between women and nature, and does not describe explicitly pagan rituals or goddess worship, the relationship to nature described celebrates the values upheld by societies that worshipped the goddess – values Riane Eisler identifies in "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Eco-Feminist Manifesto" as "caring, compassion, and non-violence" (23). Eisler goes so far as to suggest that ecological restoration could take place through privileging the values represented by the feminine and the societies that "worshipped the Goddess of nature and spirituality" (23). Macbeth likewise celebrates and privileges feminine values such as those identified by Eisler as beneficial in the work of forestry.

Ray describes her aim in relation to the forests and nature as one of "justice to those who will come after us, and to Nature, herself" (119). Advocating for the conservation of "the resources we have left," Ray states, "Trying to repair the waste of former years, is, I think, something like making an effort to do Nature justice" (119). The danger that humans pose to the natural world and the position that "Nature isn't ours" (119) anticipates mid-to-late twentieth-century environmental positions long before the term *environmentalist* was born. In the 1890s, Gifford Pinchot "led the movement for forest conservation" (qtd. in May 10). Other activists like John Muir and Aldo Leopold argue more boldly for the entire ecosystem that is compromised when a forest is cut. They break away from the conservation movement to advocate for the total protection of the wilderness. Though Macbeth is speaking about conservation in the forestry industry, conservation here is very clearly the precursor of environmentalism and more nature-centred philosophies.

Brian Swimme argues that women have an inherent knowledge of how to live more closely with nature because women have the experience of giving birth:

Women are beings who know from the inside out what it is like to weave the Earth into a new human being. Given that experience and the congruent sensitivities seething within the body and mind, it would be utterly shocking if ecofeminists *did not* bring forth meanings to the scientific data that were hidden from the scientists themselves. (21)

Historically, theories such as Northrop Frye's (1965/71 2004) "garrison mentality" (14) attempt to explain Canadians' relationship to nature as one of enmity and fear, resulting in the building of "garrisons" to protect the settlers from nature and marauding Indigenous peoples; Macbeth's portrait of a woman in nature is in direct opposition to this portrait of early Canadians barricading themselves against nature. Rather, Macbeth shows a woman who loves nature and immerses herself fully in nature. Ray lives in harmony and peace with the forest and creatures of the forest. The threat that Ray feels and the threat to nature are both embodied by a vicious man who preys on women sexually and eventually starts a fire that threatens the life of humans and the forest.⁴ As the story progresses, the connection between violence against women and nature becomes abundantly clear.

Further, Ray's relationship to nature is threatened even by men who are kind to her and attempt to win her love. Such is the case with Dickie, a clerk in the Patterson Pulp and Paper Company. Ray, in one of Dickie's many visits to the forest, is only "warned of an alien presence, an intrusion, by the flight of the terrified birds" (146–147). The alien presence is a man, and while he does not wish to harm Ray, his very presence terrifies the birds that had previously been excited by Ray's attention and song. Ray's interaction with Dickie is decidedly cold by comparison to her harmony with the birds. Macbeth writes: "the Ranger turned and faced him squarely. There was a firmness in her manner that gave Dickie a decided shock; he felt, suddenly, her power, and his own

impotence" (147). Ray's strength and power shock Dickie and make him aware of his own impotence in relation to both Ray and nature (147). However, after this encounter, he will claim that it is his Christian duty to protect her and therefore report that a woman is working as a fire ranger because of his own fear for her safety. The threat posed by Dickie is one that, while caused by his love for Ray, clearly tries to reinstate traditional gender roles in which he is the protector and the woman is in need of protection. The type of "protection" that Dickie would like to offer involves marriage and would rob Ray of her vocation.

The greater threat is the man passed over for the job of fire ranger. His many attempts on Ray's life fill her with fear, but in part because this would "fulfil Mr. Cox's prophecy that fire-ranging was no job for a woman" (239). In spite of the danger, Ray decides to stay. While she rightly claims that "under ordinary circumstances any woman could hold the position with credit" (239), the threats by men, whether to protect her or harm her, make it difficult for her to perform her duties. Likewise, in Ray's secluded position, even the presence of a man is a threat to her reputation in the town.

Again, similar to McClung, Macbeth has the skeleton of a love plot in place throughout the novel. Like *Purple Springs*, there is the rival, Dickie, the separation between Ray and her true love, Archer Patterson, and the eventual promise of marriage in the final pages. Here, as in *Shackles*, Macbeth seems incapable of preventing her characters from eventually succumbing to the marriage bond. However, the question certainly remains whether this is simply a reflection of the culture, or whether Macbeth shares the position of other maternal feminists in believing that women are the nation builders through their maternal roles. Ray's love interest, Archer Patterson, transforms himself and becomes a better person in order to make himself worthy of Ray. This would support a reading of Macbeth as espousing a maternal feminist message along with the environmental ethos. Certainly, Ray is portrayed as self sacrificing in the cause of relieving the suffering of women and children and protecting nature, but her strength and self-reliance are sustained through most of the text until the final pages when she is quickly

and happily reunited with her formerly spurned lover and marriage is promised. While the final word of the novel is “Love,” the discussion leading up to this conclusion is not concerned with the human pairing but rather expresses the autonomy and power of nature (320). Auguste Therien is pinned under a burning maple and meets “a horrible death” (320). Macbeth describes nature as “magnificently relentless in her vengeance” (320). Further, the forest is saved not by the actions of the humans in fighting the fire but by the natural occurrence of rain.

Macbeth articulates the position of a woman entering into the “Man’s work” (148) of the forest industry as the action of “cross[ing] the boundary” (148). However, crossing over into “Man’s work” in itself is not sufficient. Ray – and by extension any woman in a field dominated by men – is “expected to do twice as much as he does and to do it twice as well, otherwise, she proves herself incompetent” (148). Macbeth likewise shows that, while Ray is thoroughly competent to do the work, she faces dangers created by men in the industry to threaten and thwart her entry into the profession. Women and nature thus share a similar position, threatened by the whims of a patriarchal society that equates women with nature and devalues both.

Where Macbeth anticipates ecofeminist awareness, Elizabeth May builds on this legacy according to Farley Mowat in his foreword to the 2005 edition of *At the Cutting Edge* where he states that “what Elizabeth May has done in this book is to shine a new and powerful light on what modern industrial forestry is really all about” (7). Rather than suggesting that Elizabeth May’s feminine nature is predisposed to connect with and understand nature, Mowat shows that May’s activism demonstrates strength and clarity on its own terms. However, he goes on to draw problematic connections between what is being done to the forest and violence against women, when he writes that Elizabeth May “shows us that the long-term costs of allowing the rape to continue are so horrendous as to be almost inconceivable, not just for us, but for all life on earth” (7). Carol J. Adams theorizes at length about the connection between the violence enacted upon women and

nature, while Arisika Razak writes in a chapter of *Ecological Feminism* (1994) that “For all too long, we have allowed rape to exist as a dominant social and cultural metaphor for behavior” (165). Razak also claims that “the physical rape of women by men in this culture is easily paralleled by our rapacious attitudes toward the Earth itself. She, too, is female” (165). Mowat, while quite possibly employing the word *rape* metaphorically, and thus problematically, nonetheless uses rape to describe the destruction of Canada’s forests. This makes a strong statement about the connection between abuse of women and abuse of nature. That Mowat employs the most violent word possible for a man’s unsanctioned taking of a woman, links his discussion of May’s work, at least conceptually, to the eco-feminine thinking employed by Macbeth. Razak, among others, in using the birth metaphor as an alternative to the patriarchal models of “rape culture” perhaps suggests a new way of thinking about May’s work.⁵

May enters into and attempts to reframe the political debate. She moves beyond the typical political discussions of preservation of jobs and the economy, while at the same time acknowledging the centrality of the forest industry to the Canadian economy and the “thousands of Canadians who make their living in the forests or in forest products” (12). May thus writes about the realization of what Macbeth had predicted with regards to the economic centrality of the forestry industry. May shows, however, in a comparison with the east coast cod fishery, that “without a healthy environment, there are simply no jobs at all” (12). May also questions the very idea that forests are “renewable,” in part, by raising questions about “the full range of species they support” (12), thus at least acknowledging the more-than-human system that exists in the forest and is threatened by contemporary forestry practices. While May begins with the historical debate over “whether forests should be managed for timber production or set aside as wilderness” (10), her central question in *At the Cutting Edge* is rather “Are we capable of sustaining our renewable resources?” (10). Put another way, have we killed the forests, or can the forests continue to grow and nurture life? While May discusses the politics of the forestry

debate in relation to a variety of national issues, it appears that she also subtly promotes a womanist vision of birthing a silviculture that nurtures all life. Whether this work is considered a “eulogy” or a “call to action” (back cover), *At the Cutting Edge* engages with the provincial and national policies and politics that govern the forestry industry. May is not without hope, however, as she cites instances of positive change and suggests changes in policy that could preserve jobs and industry in the future. May, like Macbeth, promotes the health of the forests as being in human beings’ best economic interests. May also advocates for the protection of the forests for concerns beyond those of the human – that is, for the forests and the more-than-human that relies on the forest ecosystem. Further, that May is a woman interrogating the still-male-dominated Canadian national forestry industry practices shows at the very least that women have gained a voice and audience in the twenty-first century.

Like Macbeth, Charlotte Gill expresses a deep love and sense of connection to nature. Unlike May’s horrific discussions of the ugliness and destruction of clear cuts (perhaps why Mowat uses the rape metaphor), Gill describes the beauty and life that persists and thrives in these places and takes a less dire approach in her discussion of the role of silviculture in the rebuilding of forests. She does not attempt to show that this sense of connection with nature is one that results from intuitive feminine knowledge or to anthropomorphize nature in her attempts to find a language to express her experience of nature. May likewise eschews these practices, in part, because she is reporting scientific data and utilizing political rhetoric to speak for nature. However, Gill, like May – by virtue of entering a field dominated by men and writing about the experience of women and nature in relation to the male dominated forestry industry – is commenting on the place of women in the industry and the place of humans in the destruction and possible restoration of forests. Far from linking the destruction of nature with the subservience of women, Gill sees the work of tree planting as gender equalizing or neutral.

Gill argues of the tree planters that “we’re unisex guys, the men of mandays. The work wears us down and lifts us up, everyone together, equally” (4–5). Later Gill will state that “the women’s washroom was also the men’s” (62) and that “men and women cleansed themselves side by side, coeducationally” (62). The equality that Gill argues exists is, however, undercut by her lengthy discussions of the history of the industry, the players in the industry, and the treatment of and roles of women in the forest. The majority of the long-term planters are men and – besides Gill herself, who plants with her male partner – there are only a couple of other women. Gill acknowledges that when tree planting started, it was by “men put to work by the government in Depression-era relief programs” (28).

Gill notes, however, the presence of a woman, Janice, on the administrative side; while Janice has never planted trees, Gill nonetheless refers to her as “the company’s silvicultural administrator” and describes her position as a “quality control officer, our supraboss” (122). On a ride back in a boat during a storm, Gill says, “I feel bad for her, as if her presence among us says something about her place in the division-office pecking order. It can’t be easy to be a small woman in a workplace like hers. A woman, period. For the first time it occurs to me that she’s probably a lot tougher than she looks” (136). At first, the planters look down on this woman who has never planted a tree, but later Gill realizes that “tomorrow, back at the office, she’ll have her own brand of surviving to do” (141). What goes unsaid in this statement is that the type of surviving that Janice will have to do is working in a male-dominated field where she must be “tougher than she looks” (136). While it appears that there are tough women in positions in the industry, it seems they remain, at best, token and rare – rare enough to get mentioned by name and remarked on every time there is a woman working in the trade among the numerous men who work in the industry. When the tree planters arrive at the logging camps to plant after the cutting, Gill takes note that it was men who work these rotations (187) and “if women worked here, they were cooks and custodial staff. The odd forestry professional

or summer student” (188). At the logging camps, the women do have a small bathroom of their own. There is a sign posted beneath the mirror that says, “*This place is our oasis. Please keep it clean!!!*” (188). Here, where women rarely come to work, the bathroom is not unisex, and the women make it clear that this is their small and “only place in the entire camp that smelled remotely feminine” (188). The shelves held “half-full bottles of fruity shampoo and pink cans of shaving cream, left behind by the females who’d come and gone” (188). The feminine qualities that Gill invokes in this case have to do with cleanliness, smell, and “pink cans of shaving cream” (188). This seems to be the extent of the bow to the feminine and possibly the only difference that Gill mentions in relation to women tree planters’ work conditions or ethic. While women are few and far between in the camps and the industry, and the ones who do work in the industry are marked as a different breed of woman (like the intrepid and unique female traveller in the nineteenth century); the feminine products and a single, small clean bathroom seem to be the only distinguishing characteristics. In the discussion that follows directly on the small bow to the “feminine,” Gill writes “we ate like men, like princely carnivores” (188).

Gill was among the first group of tree planters the loggers met, and she reports on a conversation she had with a logger about women working in the field. “An old-timer once told me he thought it was good that girls worked in the woods now, alongside men, even though some of his co-workers weren’t so keen. They like it simple, he said. Just men, the wives and kids stowed safely at home” (191). The tension between the history of the industry – as one run by men and worked in by men – and the present – when women are making forays into the industry – is never more evident than in these brushes between the loggers and the occasional tree planting woman in a camp. While Gill discusses the tree planting tribe as one that does not distinguish between genders and has moved beyond the masculine and feminine labels socialized by a long history of patriarchy, Gill does continue to valorize the women in their various roles in the industry as being exceptional women

who come from alternative upbringings or circumstances. While it is important to acknowledge the intrepid first women who fight for equality in industries dominated by men, it seems likewise necessary to be cautious of painting these women as somehow different or unique from other women who could potentially work in the field regardless of background or disposition. However, the tension between celebrating the women who do work in the industry and making it clear that the industry should not continue to be dominated by men is one that is difficult to artfully navigate.

Madge Macbeth's *The Patterson Limit* fictionally explores the entry of women into the forestry industry. At the same time, her position and philosophy is somewhat limited by the suggestion that women have a special feminine appreciation and understanding for nature. This eco-feminine understanding of the connection between women and nature thus re-inscribes the patriarchal values of masculine and feminine, creating the very binary that limits full connection with nature and the breakdown of the hierarchies that claim human superiority and thus control of nature. However, by the twenty-first century, the intersectional approach of ecofeminists and women working in and writing in the forestry industry, while still vastly outnumbered by men, and perhaps still viewed as exceptional, have clearly moved some distance from the position of equating or comparing women and nature. In fact, both May and Gill attempt to move beyond anthropocentric ways of speaking for and about nature and are rather concerned with the devastating human impacts on all forms of nature – whether human or tree. Macbeth anticipates ecofeminist philosophical perspectives; however, she is still employing patriarchal dualisms that mark her writing as more closely aligned to an eco-feminine understanding of nature. Thus, in privileging women's feminine nature as being more closely aligned to the natural world, Macbeth does not move beyond an eco-feminine connection to the natural world and still privileges humans and women, in particular, over a non-binary human-nature understanding. As the discourse of ecofeminism comes into maturity and is being re-evaluated for its relevance and inclusiveness, the future challenge is to continue to democratize the

language of forestry and to challenge the human consumption patterns that thwart the preservation of forests.

Notes:

¹ Madge Macbeth's *The Patterson Limit* has not been reprinted in spite of the scholarly attention for her work *Shackles* (1926). Moreover, given the clear anticipation of ecofeminism, in her eco-feminine articulations of connection with the forest, this is a significant work to discussions of women's evolving role in forestry, conservation, and more philosophically oriented discourse.

² This quote is taken from Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (1971), an illustrated eco-children's book that discusses the decimation of nature by cutting down truffula trees to make thneeds. The Lorax speaks on behalf of the trees, but no one listens. It seems necessary in an essay dedicated to the ecological perspective on logging to make mention of this early work critiquing the cutting down of trees for capitalist reasons: greed and financial gain.

³ For further discussions of women's writing of the period, see Misao Dean's *Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction* (1988), Carol Lee Bacchi's *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877–1918* (1983), and Shoshannah Ganz's *Eastern Encounters: Canadian Women Writing About the East, 1867–1929* (2017).

⁴ Writers such as Marjorie Spiegel, Susan Griffin, and particularly Carol J. Adams explore the intertwined and reinforcing nature of violence used against women and nature.

⁵ Brian Swimme argues that women have an inherent knowledge of how to live more closely with nature because women have the experience of giving birth: "Women are beings who know from the inside out what it is like to weave the Earth into a new human being. Given that experience and the congruent sensitivities seething within the body and mind, it would be utterly shocking if ecofeminists *did not* bring forth meanings to the scientific data that were hidden from the scientists themselves" (21). Arisika Razak likewise argues that women are stronger than men because of their ability for and experience of giving birth (169). However, while this position celebrates the strength of the feminine it also emphasizes the dualistic thinking of masculine and feminine that underlies patriarchal oppression of women and nature. There are also other inherent problems

with this theory, including that not all women give birth, and that scientific knowledge still offers useful and important lessons apart from women's intuition, to cite yet another feminine attribute inscribed by this way of thinking. The problems of this approach aside, the celebration of feminine attributes and knowledge as important to ecological thinking was an important contribution to discussions of ecology.

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