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'Violence against the Earth is Violence against Women': The Rape Theme in Women's Eco-Narratives

Abstract I: In letteratura la connessione metaforica tra donna e terra viene spesso esemplificata attraverso il topos dell'abuso sessuale. Spesso infatti l'atto dello stupro viene equiparato allo sfruttamento coloniale della terra. Oggi molte attiviste si impegnano a sovvertire i comportamenti colonialisti e capitalisti che sottendono la preoccupante normalizzazione della violenza contro le donne e contro la terra. In quest'articolo ci si propone di analizzare il tema dello stupro nelle opere di Lee Maracle, , Dionne Brand e Margaret Atwood, tre scrittrici canadesi che promuovono un senso di giustizia ambientale attraverso il recupero di un ethos di rispetto per la connessione tra la terra e le donne.

Abstract II: The metaphorical connection between women and the Earth is a recurring literary trope which is often articulated through the theme of rape. In many narratives the sexual abuse of women is, for instance, equated with the colonial penetration and conquering of the land. Today many women writers have undertaken a plight to subvert destructive colonialist and capitalistic attitudes that have normalized violence against women's bodies and against the Earth. This essay analyses the theme of rape in the works of three Canadian novelists (Maracle, Brand and Atwood) whose eco-narratives summon environmental justice by retrieving an ethos of respect for the woman-land connection.

Women and the Earth have always shared a special connection. In earth-centered mythologies the bond between the female body and the land is considered sacred and vital for the well-being of all living beings. The Indigenous Peoples of North America, for instance, believe that "women are earth" since "from the bodies of women flow the relationships of generations both to society and the natural world" (Cook 2003)¹. It is, however, impossible to ignore, as Native writer Lee Maracle states, that there is also "a direct connection between Violence against the Earth and Violence against Women"². This dangerous intersec-

¹ Mohawk midwife Katsi Cook explains that women are connected to Mother Earth through the waters of the female womb which is "the first environment [...] the doorway to life" and that "at the breasts of women, the generations are nourished and sustained" (Cook 2003).

² See the lecture "Connection between Violence against the Earth and Violence against Women" delivered to the First Voices! First Women Speak! Gathering in Ottawa on August 24, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdxJYhbTvYw>.

tion is particularly apparent in today's scenario of unmatched environmental degradation in which we are also witnessing a worrying increase of various forms of violence against women, which include, but are not limited to, the violation of women's bodies through sexual assault. Since the 1990s rape victims worldwide have, in fact, increased by 240 percent – an escalation which ecofeminists connect to globalized capitalistic economic policies that unjustly violate the Earth (Mies & Shiva 2014: xiv).

Rape as a physical and symbolic form of violence has a mythical status³ and is ubiquitously present in literature and popular culture⁴, permeating narratives of dominance and mastery over women, nature and the feminine. The rape trope has, for instance, upheld the colonial mindset through narratives in which the metaphorical envisioning of conquering a virgin land as an act of sexual penetration is used to justify colonial expansion and the exploitation of the land⁵. In practice, the legacy of such culturally engrained colonialist views has often resulted in the raping of women in contexts of war and, today, in male workers' camps set up on oil extraction sites near Native reserves⁶. Undeniably, therefore, as ecofeminists claim, "rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked both metaphorically in shaping worldviews and materially in shaping women's everyday lives" (Mies & Shiva 2014: xvi).

In an attempt to culturally transform the destructive attitudes which have normalized violence against women's bodies and against the land, thus leading to the current epochal environmental crisis, many activist women writers are spinning eco-narratives that subvert the dominant predator-prey relationship which, according to Vandana Shiva, has transformed "nature from *terra mater* into a machine and a source of raw material" and excluded women "from participation *as partners* in both science and development" (Shiva 1988: xiv-xv). Working within an ecofeminist critical framework⁷, this essay analyses how the rape theme is culturally reclaimed and employed by three well-known Canadian women writers – Lee

³ In westernized societies 'rape culture' stretches back to ancient Greek mythology where abuse of the female goddesses by the Olympic gods is common. In these narratives rape serves a key role because it facilitates the creation of a new hero, divinity or institution. By associating rape with the gods, these myths normalized the coercive act making it seem tolerable, if not even admirable and contributed to establish the dominance of male-centered religions and values. See Deacy & Pierce 1997.

⁴ See Projansky 2001.

⁵ The metaphor of rape is widely present in colonial discourse where "the forced penetration of the virgin land" is seen as a positive and rewarding phenomenon (Sharkey 1994: 18). Postcolonial feminist criticism has amply highlighted the insidiousness of the woman=land equation since it results in a dispossession of women's bodies and a silencing of their voices in colonized and post-colonial nations. See, for example, Godard 1988; Irvine 1986.

⁶ In the tar sands of Alberta, Canada, for example, the rate of Indigenous women who have been reported victims of sexual violence or who have gone missing over the past two decades is the highest in the country and about 3.5 to 7 times higher than that of non-indigenous victims. See the report issued by Statistics Canada (2011), *Violent Victimization of Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Provinces*.

⁷ Since the 1970s ecofeminism has explored the intersections between ecology and feminism in order to reveal and debase the oppressiveness of the woman/nature analogy and to put forward emancipatory strategies which may alter the historical, empirical, conceptual and symbolic equitation between the domination of women and the domination of nature. See, for example, Mies & Shiva 2014; Vakoč 2012; Shiva 1998; MacKinnon & McIntyre 1995.

Maracle, Dionne Brand and Margaret Atwood – to jointly focus on gender and environmental issues and to summon a call to action against abusive relationships between the sexes and with the land. It will be argued that by overtly denouncing and naming rape as such, their narratives constitute an important tool for undoing violent attitudes and spurring the retrieval of an alternative paradigm based on caring which can promote more equitable relationships and environmental justice for the health and survival of all humans on this planet.

In spite of their commitment to different political agendas, all three writers subversively incorporate the rape theme into their narratives with the shared goal of debasing the patriarchal ideologies that uphold patterns of domination and victimization. The first, Lee Maracle, from the Stó:lō Nation in western Canada, re-appropriates the rape trope in *Daughters Are Forever* and *Celia's Song* to denounce the devastating physical, emotional, psychological, socio-economic and cultural effects of colonialization on Indigenous communities, as well as its catastrophic impact on the land and our relationship with Mother Earth and the feminine. An activist for the rights of the Indigenous Peoples and an environmentalist, Maracle debunks the rape rhetoric of colonialism to show how, far from being just a metaphor for colonization, rape is integral to the patriarchal capitalist system which perpetrates violence on Native women and lands. In her 1996 novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, the second writer, Caribbean-Canadian Dionne Brand, draws attention to the double legacy of sexual abuse that women of colour often experience vis-à-vis both the Black and white communities and the various forms of environmental racism this entails. As she investigates the intersections between sexual violence and racism, Brand re-inscribes the woman/nature analogy from a lesbian perspective which undercuts female victimization motivated by both race and sexual orientation. The third writer, ecofeminist and human rights activist Margaret Atwood, shows us what environmental destruction can lead to if we are not careful, as well as the dire effects that failing to recognize the connection between women and the land can have. In her well-known novel *The Handmaid's Tale*⁸, she depicts a dystopian scenario in which rape becomes an institutionalized practice in a white, upper-class totalitarian regime that forces women into the role of surrogate mothers in order to save humanity from extinction. All three writers, as we will see, address the urgency of undermining the socio-political, economic and cultural environments in which victimization paradigms that uphold rape are rooted.

In colonial rhetoric rape has a longstanding history of being used as a celebratory metaphor to exalt man's conquering of and domination over new territories and their 'uncivilized' inhabitants. From an Indigenous perspective, however, rape has much more than a mere metaphorical relevance⁹. It is an embodied sexualisation of violence and power which

⁸ A TV series based on the novel and starring Elizabeth Moss was recently created by Bruce Miller and broadcast in the US in April and May 2017. The great reception and commentary it has encountered so far (it won the 2017 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series) bears witness to how relevant Atwood's novel still is today. Although this article was written before the release of the series, it echoes many of the views on women's abuse shared by spectators and reviewers of the TV drama.

⁹ Sarah Deer, for instance, states that "Rape is more than a metaphor for colonization – it is part and parcel of colonization [...] Sexual assault mimics the worst traits of colonization in its attack on the body, invasion of physical boundaries and disregard for humanity" (2009: 150).

is played out on both women and the Earth to disrupt the fundamental land/body connection, which today seems more in jeopardy than ever with the intensification of extractive activities on and near Native lands and the correlated increase of sexual assault against Native women¹⁰. For Maracle rape has, thus, both a historical and contemporary pertinence and is indissolubly identified as the physical abuse of women's bodies, the desecration and pillaging of the land and cultural genocide. Historically, as she shows us in *Daughters Are Forever* (2002), rape is the material – not just metaphorical – tool of colonialization, which she sees as the root cause for the demise of Aboriginal tribal nations and cultures¹¹. In the novel's prologue, the poignant description of the collective rape and massacre of the Native women upon arrival of the brutish white colonizers subverts any mythical status of rape as a facilitator of new creation. Instead, the Indigenous perspective through which it is told re-inscribes the coercive act as the barbarous and much uncivilized aggression that brought about the destruction of the Native way of life, matriarchal societies and harmony with the Earth:

The songs in the women's throats halted as hairy faces filled with lice, skin oozing with sores, and bodies caked with ship's filth came into view [...]. Ashore, the strangers' swords flashed. Their bodies swung hatred. Woman after woman, confused, fell under the lash of decadent rage carried by these men [...].

From between the legs of the skirtless bronze bodies shame rose, musty, dank and foul-smelling. The watching woman saw her body misused. In perfect stillness she saw the lout who had taken her, leave her for dead [...]. The next man arrived. He paused, slapped her lifeless body, helped himself to her sex and moved on (Maracle 2002: 17, 19).

The demystification of westernized male-centered rape myths, symbolically inscribed by the image of "the strangers' swords"¹², is skillfully achieved not only by admitting the woman's point of view, but also by contrastively framing the horrific gang rape within the beautiful Aboriginal creation myth about Star Woman and Westwind, from whose tender liason the people of Turtle Island derive. While providing an alternative to violence, the creation myth emphasizes – through its personification of the natural elements – how the violation of the female body and the violation of the land are inexorably intertwined. Seeing the Native women being misused by man after man, Earth too weeps and grieves, knowing that this violence is the beginning of doom for all her creatures: "Westwind screamed

¹⁰ The dangerous intersection between the extractive industries' exploitation of Native lands, their inconsiderate release of harmful environmental toxins that threaten human health, and violence against Indigenous women, girls and future generations has been recently termed "environmental violence". See Women's Earth Alliance 2016.

¹¹ In *I Am Woman*, Maracle writes: "the aims of the colonizer are to break up communities and families, and to destroy the sense of nationhood and the spirit of co-operation among the colonized" (Maracle 1996: 91).

¹² As Bourke (2007) points out, the sword as a symbol for the male penis that is sheathed into the vibrating vaginal scabbard has recurred in rape myths at least since the 1800s not only to inscribe the female as a passive receptacle but also to legitimize the perpetrator's act as something not completely unwanted by the woman.

in desperation [...]. The birds stopped singing and the very air above the women began to die. Sweetgrass was still [...]. The earth did not move" (Maracle 2002: 12). The stillness and silence that overcome both Woman and Earth mark the beginning of their dispossession and victimization, which generates a never-ending spiral of pain, commodification and destruction. The women, once the pillars of their communities, lose their spiritual connection with nature and become deaf to its teachings. Grief-ridden, they plunge into an apathetic paralysis which is passed down to future generations and tragically hinders their ability to "listen to the optimistic potential of love" (Maracle 2002: 24). At the same time, the inability to retrieve that loving and sacred connection with the land results in a failure to protect Mother Earth from relentless imperialistic and industrial exploitation and ravaging.

Addressing both the individual and collective dimension of rape, Maracle also draws attention to the devastating long-term socio-cultural effects that it has on the entire Indigenous community. Somewhat like the biblical fall from Eden which casts mankind into a world of sin, the colonizers' abuse disrupts the unison between the human, spiritual and natural worlds. It thereby marks the shift from the harmonious, rape-free¹³ matriarchal societies based on mutual respect among all living beings to a warrior society in which the loss of respect for the feminine brings on intraracial rape. Burdened with guilt and shame for not having been able to save their women from the slaughter, the men too are, in fact, so devastated and passionless that they "float from one woman to another, leaking manhood into their wombs", often without bothering "to seek the women's consent" (Maracle 2002: 25). Perpetuated violence fuels a proneness to self-destruction through alcohol and substance abuse which further contributes to the decline of Indigenous family structures. The children, often neglected, grow up feeling "love as the absence of chronic spiritual hunger" (Maracle 2002, 27) and, what is worse, as Maracle denounces in *Celia's Song* (2014), they can also become victims of horrific physical and sexual abuses by members of their own community:

There are two men with the child. Each holds a bottle [...]. They take turns torturing the child. They poke her with a rod [...]. Her body goes limp. Jacob can see that they have shoved the poker up between her legs [...]. Someone is passed out on the floor. It looks like a woman [...]. Her soiled dress is up over her hips; she has no underwear on. After the child faints or dies [...]. both men help themselves first to the child's vagina and then they help themselves to the woman's (Maracle 2014: 115).

However abhorrent pedophilia may be, Maracle's narrative does not simply condemn Amos, the child rapist, for his despicable act, but ambivalently presents him as a victim-turned-victimizer, since, like many Indigenous children, he too was physically, psychologically and culturally abused of by the whites in Canada's residential schools. While not attempting to provide any sort of justification for male violence against women and

¹³ Various scholars suggest that in pre-colonial times sexual violence was extremely rare in Indigenous communities where women were respected and influential spiritual and political members of the community and enjoyed sexual autonomy and control over their bodies since they were not considered the property of men (see Deer 2004: 129-130).

girls, Maracle acknowledges, nonetheless, that abusive and violent behaviours within the community stem from the historical legacy of colonialism, which, in the case of the Indigenous Peoples, has involved a loss of lands, culture, health and nationhood. As part of her decolonizing strategy, she thus embraces an Indigenous theory of rape which, as Sarah Deer states, conceives “of rape as an unlawful ‘invasion’ of the body, mind and spirit [...] as a violation of a person’s humanity” (Deer 2004: 137).

The response to rape that Maracle puts forward in her narratives equally draws on the cultural beliefs of her People who confide in the importance of ceremony and healing to overturn historical trauma and its present-day effects on Indigenous communities, lands and bodies. Healing involves, on one hand, finding redemption for one’s broken spirit by coming to terms with pain and the self-harming and lateral violence that spring from it. Both the rape victim and the rapist thus need to be healed before the community as a whole can recover and have a possibility of survival. On the other hand, it entails restoring the land-body-spirit connection by recognizing our mutual interdependence with the land. Since our health depends on the health of the land, as humans we need to embrace an ethos of caring and respect, or, in other words, what eco-social scientist Riane Eisler calls a feminine “ethos of partnership” (1987: xvii).

Colonial dynamics and the intersection between sexism and racism which uphold interracial and intraracial violence against women of colour are similarly debunked in Brand’s novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, where Elizete, the young Caribbean protagonist, is raped both by her Black husband Isaiah and by her white employer in Toronto. In both cases sexual abuse is denounced as a weapon of subjugation used to enforce power inequalities and establish male dominance and possession over women’s bodies and desire, thereby challenging traditional assumptions that sex between intimate partners or between master and slave cannot be considered rape. In the abusive marital relationship between Elizete and Isaiah, the Black female body is, for instance, repeatedly violated and desecrated through rape disguised as sexual intercourse and other forms of domestic violence which include battering, whipping and psychological pressuring, so as to perpetuate a master/slave-like relationship. Having been given to Isaiah by the woman who raised her, Elizete is, in fact, considered simply as a property to exploit for pleasure and labour. Dehumanized and reduced to the status of an animal, she has no choice but to succumb to lying beneath this older Black man, whom she envisions as a malevolent demon: “Isaiah ride me every night. I was a horse for his jumbie”¹⁴ (Brand 1996: 10). Although compliant with the intercourse, like rape victims, however, Elizete estranges herself from her body and imagines taking refuge in the soothing depths of the Earth: “in the dust tunnels of wood lice” she covers herself in “their fine, fine sand” and slides down to the place “where they live” (Brand 1996: 10).

When Elizete is sexually assaulted by a white man in Canada, the trauma of gender-based violence is heightened by the historical weight of white/black power dynamics. As Brand’s powerfully iconic language suggests, the aggression racializes the Black female body and occasions an even greater erasure of identity:

¹⁴ In Caribbean English the word “jumbie” indicates an evil spirit (Allsopp 1996: 317).

A man you don't know bends you against a wall, a wall in your room. He says this is the procedure. He says you have no rights here. His dick searches your womb. He says you girls are all the same, whores, sluts, you'll do anything. His dick is a machete, a knife, all the sharp things found on a kitchen table, all the killing things found in a tool shed [...] He shakes the blood off his knife and leaves. This time they searched her skin, this time they found nothing and took it, too (Brand 1996: 89).

The vulgar term "dick", for instance, used to describe the man's phallus, which is sharp as a knife or a machete, emphasizes the sordidness of an act that lacerates and violates the female womb. Notably, the imagery of sand, which previously offered the illusion of escape, returns to convey first a feeling of suffocation and then a feeling of crumbling as if Elizete's body were made of sand: "She felt her lungs fill up and stiffen with sand. She felt her breath thicken, dense to sand [...]. If she lifted her head she knew that it would fall off grain by grain and so she lifted it and it fell and crumbled" (Brand 1996: 90-92).

The colonial position of Black women, and of people of colour in general, is also symbolically evoked through the description of Elizete during the rape as spread out "flat against the immense white wall, the continent" (Brand 1996: 89) – an image which alludes to the colonial exploitation of Africa and the historical displacement of the African slaves. By decolonizing rape myths, Brand thus opposes the historical "territorialization" of the black female body as "rape-able" by virtue of its embodiment as "a naturally submissive, sexually available, public reproductive technology" (McKittrick 2006: 39) which derives from the white ownership of black bodies during transatlantic slavery. Like Maracle, she also shows us how colonial oppression has led to lateral violence within the Black communities and to environmental racism, that is, the disproportionate hazards, such as exposure to polluted air, water and soil, that racialized minorities are subjected to and which affect their health and well-being¹⁵. In Toronto, for instance, Black immigrants inhabit unhealthy downtown apartments, in degraded areas along the rusty Canadian National railroad and near intoxicating factories; they tread through the maze of streets that "devastate you" as "the concrete-grained deserts high and wide sap your will" (Brand 1996: 63); and their labour is exploited for the humblest and less paid jobs. Belittled by the whites, like Indigenous men, Black men become violent against their women, who also learn a self-hatred that they then project onto their daughters: "they beat us abused us terrorized us as they had been terrorized and beaten and abused" (Brand 1996: 231).

A strategy of resistance that Brand suggests adopting against the violence occasioned by patriarchal colonialist attitudes is to embrace love and bonding among women, as implied by the lesbian love relationship between Elizete and Verlia, by Verlia's plight for sisterhood during the Revolution, and by Elizete's recovery of a matriarchal lineage. Discursive inscriptions of the female body as a territory to be exploited, which are upheld by the woman/nature analogy, can equally be subverted by re-evaluating the connection with the Earth. Although the environmental dimension is subordinated to gender and racial dynamics, the undertext of Brand's narrative stresses, in fact, the affinity between the feminine and

¹⁵ See Women's Earth Alliance 2016: 64.

natural worlds. Water imagery is, for instance, abundantly used to describe homosexual love and desire which favours Elizete's emancipation; the lush volcanic gardens of the Caribbean provide an imaginative space of escape from violence (Brand 1996: 105-107); and the samaan tree is like a mother for the orphaned Elizete (Brand 1996: 17).

A re-appropriation of the woman = nature metaphor in non-imperialistic terms is also undertaken by Margaret Atwood, who, like Brand and Maracle, deconstructs rape narratives to advocate a return to the feminine as an alternative to patriarchal violence. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the institutionalized rape of women is presented as a direct consequence of – and as a faulty male-centred measure against – the inconsiderate rape of the land, which has rendered the Earth a toxic, radioactive and infertile wasteland. Paradoxically, in fact, in the theocratic Republic of Gilead, which was created to contrast environmental doom and human extinction, women are sexually exploited as Handmaids for procreation like in the biblical story of Jacob. Deprived of their human rights, dignity and freedom, they are legally enslaved by a fundamentalist, military regime that hypocritically admits and justifies coercive sex not only for procreation but also to satisfy male desire. In Jezebel, the secret brothel, forced prostitution functions, for instance, as a means of control over women who refuse to comply with the role of handmaids. Reduced to sex slaves, their bodies are commodified for male pleasure, just as the handmaids' bodies are commodified as “two-legged wombs” (Atwood 2010: 146) to ensure the survival of the species.

Challenging such male-dominator attitudes, Atwood questions the legitimacy of the sociocultural, political and religious dictates that uphold the commodification of women's bodies and fuel (self-)victimization patterns. Her extensive intertextual parodic play with the Bible thus exposes the insidiousness of Judeo-Christian narratives which favour patriarchy and mythicize sexually abusive relationships. During the monthly impregnation ceremony, for instance, the Commander ritually reads out passages from the Old Testament to remind the Handmaids of their religious role as surrogate mothers for the survival of the community. Like the maid Bilhah who in Genesis is said to “bear upon [Rachel's] knees” (Atwood 2010: 99), they too are forced to lie between the legs of their Commanders' wives. Offred, the narrating protagonist of the tale, notices, however, that the orgiastic ritual functions to enforce power-over dialectics, not only of male over female, but also of social status among women:

I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton underdrawers [...]. Above me [...]. Serena Joy is arranged outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me [...].

Her arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any. The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers.

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body (Atwood 2010: 104).

Indeed, in this odd *menage a trois* the handmaid is at the complete mercy of both the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy, who equally inflict pain on her. Yet, having been brainwashed with the idea that it is her duty to “*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth*” (Atwood 2010: 99), Offred refuses to name this mating ritual as rape. After all, she tells us, “nothing is going on in here that I haven’t signed up for. There wasn’t a lot of choice, but there was some, and this is what I chose” (Atwood 2010: 105). In her typically ironic style, Atwood, however, wittingly parodies standard definitions of sexual assault and shows us that, like rape victims, Offred recurs to denial merely as a means of survival against the physical, psychological and emotional violence she is submitted to. Her thoughts, sensations and reactions tell, instead, a different story, one that implies that if this is not rape, then what is? Like Elizete, Offred, in fact, feels repugnance towards her assailant and experiences a sense of detachment from her body which, on one hand, allows her to imagine drifting away on the large white canopy placed above the bed and, on the other, makes her wonder if she has gone mad. “Maybe”, she ponders, “I’m crazy and this is some kind of new therapy. I wish it were true; then I could get better and this would go away” (Atwood 2010: 105). Moreover, as “the Commander fucks, with a regular two-four marching stroke, on and on like a tap dripping”, her only wish is to be released from this folly, which, she admits, is neither definable as “making love” nor “copulating” but only as vulgar “fucking” since it “has nothing to do with sexual desire” but only with the violation of the female body (Atwood 2010: 104-105).

Against Gilead’s male exploitation of women Atwood poses Offred’s feminine resistance strategies which refer not only to emotion but also to the natural world. Frequently, for instance, she refers to flowers and gardens, which symbolically counter the chemically poisoned and dying landscape: “I’ve tried to put some of the good things in as well. Flowers, for instance, because where would we be without them?” (Atwood 2010: 279). When Offred thinks of her own body she also uses natural imagery versus the Commander’s mechanical fucking: “I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland [...] I become the earth I set my ear against, for rumours of the future” (Atwood 2010: 83). Like Brand and Maracle’s narratives, Atwood’s tale thus re-inscribes the woman-earth connection to show the redeeming potential of loving and caring attitudes against the destructiveness of preying attitudes inherent in domination. As Coral Ann Howells has suggested, Offred, for instance, “finds her way to emotional survival” in Gilead thanks to her love relationship with Nick, the Commander’s chauffeur, “who turns out to be her rescuing hero at the end” (Howells 2005: 106) and enables her to finally become pregnant. Likewise, in the Historical Notes, Atwood points to the earth-centred beliefs of the Denai Peoples of Nunavit and the empowerment of women as a viable means to survival.

In the eco-narratives of all three writers rape is overtly named, described and condemned as an act of dominance that has harrowing physical, psychological, cultural and ecological consequences. All three narratives, however, also present heroines that remind us of what Joplin has described as “the embodied, resisting woman” who can resist her “status as privileged victim” thereby interrupting “the structure of reciprocal violence” (Joplin 1991: 55). Indeed, these Canadian female authors, from completely different ethnic back-

grounds, offer us a similar alternative to dominance, violence and environmental degradation. They show us that if violence against women is to be stopped, their bodies can no longer be considered as *terra nullius*, but cherished, valued and respected for their sacred life-giving qualities. Equally our relationship with the earth can no longer hinge on systems of power and domination which uphold environmental degradation. Instead, a more loving and caring attitude must be embraced in order to stop the destructive behaviours brought on by capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism. If humanity is to avoid Atwood's apocalyptic world marred by toxic chemicals, radiation, infertility and disease we ought to, indeed, start the healing, as Maracle suggests, and protect the sacred land-body connection, since if we poison the land we also poison our bodies. Likewise, if women are to be empowered rather than enslaved, rape paradigms need to be replaced by caring and partnership models. Maybe then, like Elizete in Brand's novel, we will enjoy female desire, sexuality and love "like a drink of cool water" (Brand 1996: 3).

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