Tips for Surviving 'Atwood': Confronting the Complexities of the Wilderness Celebrity

Erin Aspenlieder

For Canadians, North is a constant. It's one of those ideas that's reinterpreted generation after generation, and by region after region...When the Americans send icebreakers through the Northwest Passage, why do Canadians get so stirred up about it? Not many people go there. It's not as though it happens where they are physically. It happens in their minds. It's a violation of their mental space.

Margaret Atwood[1]

In this comment from an 1987 interview Margaret Atwood offers her interpretation of a universal and perpetual Canadian concern: the North. Rather than focusing on Atwood's arguably reductive equation of Canadian "mental space" with "the North," I consider this statement for its insight into Atwood's own preoccupations with the Canadian wilderness and nation. An examination of this concern with the wilderness in Atwood's critical and creative writing throughout the 1970s and 80s reveals the evolution of a symbiotic relationship wherein the wilderness aesthetic of Atwood's public statements coincides with her emergence as a national celebrity.

The term "wilderness aesthetic" encompasses the range of ways in which Atwood's celebrity -- or "star text"[2] -- becomes inextricably connected to the Canadian wilderness. That is to say, the constellation of texts, both by and about Atwood, that contribute to her celebrity fuse the iconic status of the wilderness in discourses of Canadian national identity with Atwood's reported experiences in and meditations on that same wilderness. Atwood thus becomes what Graham Huggan calls a "national icon," and what I term a national celebrity, through the identification of her "star text" with the wilderness -- the same wilderness that, according to Atwood, unifies Canada and Canadians.

Despite Atwood's changing attitudes toward the wilderness, a comparative analysis of the reception of *Survival* in the 1970s and *Wilderness Tips* in the early 1990s demonstrates how consistently her wilderness aesthetic is tied up with her functioning as a synecdoche for Canada. The focus here on the *emergence* of Atwood's star text and its relationship with Canada, and not the complete trajectory of her star text in relation to the wilderness, follows from a conviction that a concentrated study reveals the slippages among Atwood, nation, and wilderness that first took place in the 1970s. The success of her wilderness aesthetic ensured that even as her views on the wilderness changed through the 1980s, she maintained a position as placeholder for the nation.

Given the complex interaction of multiple factors in Atwood's star text, assigning sole responsibility for the intentional fusion of Atwood with wilderness and nation would be futile; however, one possible national motivation for maintaining Atwood's wilderness aesthetic arises from her function as a synecdoche for Canada in the eyes of international audiences. As a careful examination of her 1991 Clarendon Lectures will reveal, it was the wilderness aesthetic that provided the basis for that synecdoche.

Atwood's personal interests in fostering -- or contesting -- the wilderness aesthetic of her star text can be gleaned from her public interviews, essays and creative works. While her creative works cannot be taken as autobiographical statements, they do indicate conceptual concerns that Atwood grapples with and

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1 Hancock, Geoff. *Canadian Writers at Work: Interviews with Geoff Hancock*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1987. 259.

2 Richard Dyer first explored the "star text" in his 1980s text, *Stars*, in relation to film actors. The star text incorporates the body of the stars and the discourses surrounding that star: discourses either produced by the star him/herself or emerging from the consumptive demands of audiences. Given the multiple sources conferring meaning the star text often contains contradictions. Despite its association with film, the term remains useful here for its reference to multiple or contesting meanings.

Celebrity, likewise includes both the individual and the discourses circulating around the individual, but also indicates a degree of public recognition or notoriety. Graeme Turner, Frances Bonner and P. David Marshall offer a succinct explanation when they write that celebrity is not "a property of specific individuals. Rather, it is constituted discursively, by the way in which the individual is represented" (11). Celebrity is used here as an all purpose term indicating visibility and recognition.

are included here with the recognition that it is not "Atwood" speaking as her characters, but rather, that characters give voice to issues the author is interested in exploring from any number of possible perspectives and in a number of different genres.

Together with *Surfacing*, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* stands as one of the earliest examples of the formation of Atwood's star text as metonymic of Canada through the workings of the wilderness aesthetic. When Atwood wrote *Survival* in 1972 she did so with the intention of helping the small publishing firm Anansi, where she worked, to "survive" in the struggling Canadian publishing industry. *Survival* did more than keep Anansi afloat; the first edition rapidly sold out and the book has been in print ever since. Popular and academic reviews of the text vary in their opinion of its relative merits, but all of them agree that *Survival* was an "In" book, a book to read, a book to have an opinion about. Atwood acknowledged the popularity of the text in a lecture given at the Empire Club in the spring of 1972: "[When] what you happen to be saying coincides with what is going on in society; then you become a 'thing' and this is what seems to have happened to me" (4).

While Atwood enjoyed a certain kind of recognition[3] before *Survival*, what her statement at the Empire Club suggests and what closer consideration of *Survival*'s reviews confirms, is the critical role the text played in securing her national celebrity. Phyllis Grosskurth's review of *Survival* in *New Statesman* notes this trajectory; she writes, "author Margaret Atwood was already something of a cult figure with her five books of poetry and an intriguing novel...By now there are few Canadians who are unfamiliar with photographs of this enigmatically beautiful young woman" (254). By emphasizing visual representations of the "beautiful young woman" Grosskurth here highlights an important aspect of Atwood's transition from established author to recognized celebrity: her visibility. While acknowledging Atwood's achievement of celebrity status, reviews of *Survival* limit her celebrity to Canada, writing that *Survival* "is the most important book that has come out of this country" (Grosskurth, "Truth" 33), and that Atwood is "widely recognized as Anglophone Canada's foremost writer" (McCombs 32). The limitation of her celebrity to Canada occurs both because of the perceived importance of the text to circulating questions about the possibility for authentic Canadian literature, and also because of the emergence of Atwood's wilderness aesthetic within the text.

Atwood suggests the principle cause of *Survival's* success is its embodiment of, and engagement with, nationalist concerns facing its 1970s readership. Although *Survival* makes no explicit claims to "defining the nation" it does state its goal as "produc[ing] a short easy-to-use guide to Canadian literature"(11). This goal begins from the premise that literature produced in Canada shares distinct qualities, and thus implicitly relies on the reader's acceptance of a unified nation which produces this national literature. The echo in *Survival*'s Introduction of Northrop Frye's now haunting question "Where is here?" signals Atwood's awareness of an anxiety present in discourses of the nation about how to define the nation; the Introduction exacerbates this anxiety further through a candid categorization of Canadians as "lost" within the nation (18). Atwood poses Canadian literature as the bittersweet balm for this anxiety of absence, bittersweet because in *Survival* she characterizes Canada as a wilderness nation of victims and survivors. She writes, "The central symbol for Canada – and this is based on numerous instances of occurrence in both English and French Canadian literature – is undoubtedly Survival, la Survivance" (32).

While the text does not explicitly define Canada as the wilderness nation, its evocation of the national subject as "survivor" does prefigure the wilderness, because for Atwood, it is the wilderness that most often must be "survived." Coral Ann Howells similarly argues that Atwood's definition of Canadianness "hinges on concepts of wilderness and survival" (*Margaret Atwood* 23) and goes on to suggest that "Atwood began by representing wilderness to Canadians as their own distinctive national space" (*Margaret Atwood* 21). If, for Atwood, the survivor is the subject asking "where is here?" then the "here" for this subject is the wilderness. The wilderness is not simply trees, bears and snow; it is, as Howells points out, "not only 'geography and geology' but is also discursively located within the text as the site of dynamic transformations. It also functions as metaphor for the lost place of origin with its traces of Amerindian prehistory in the submerged rock paintings and its forgotten Indian sacred sites" (*Margaret Atwood* 25-26). Therefore, wilderness operates in *Survival* both as a literal place of dynamic interaction between human and nature and as a figurative space of nostalgic longing for the national myth of belonging in the natural world. Given this porous boundary between survival and wilderness in the text, Atwood's stated subject – survival –

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[3] Winning the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1966 for *The Circle Game* ensured she received her share of academic interest, likewise the publication of *The Edible Woman* in 1969 generated some public interest.

and methodology – the systematic analysis of forms of survival as indicative of the nation -- can be productively extended to include the wilderness and the wilderness nation.

Survival's participation in popular discussions of Canadian identity played an instrumental role in its notoriety; but this explanation does not address the question of why with *Survival* Atwood became" *recognized* as Anglophone Canada's foremost writer" (McCombs 32 – emphasis added), that is to say, why with its publication she became a national celebrity. I pose here Atwood's wilderness aesthetic, emergent at the time of *Survival*'s publication, as one convincing answer to this question.

Both celebrity production and consumption[4] factor into the surfacing of Atwood's wilderness aesthetic. Atwood's produces her wilderness aesthetic in her critical writing of the 1970s, but the aesthetic also emerges in *Surfacing* as readers persuaded by the autobiographical fallacy mistake Atwood's protagonist for Atwood herself. George Woodcock, for one, similarly assumes an autobiographical inclination in *Survival.* He writes, "In *Survival,* we meet, stated in expository terms (and with a personal narrative implied in exposition) the ideas we have already absorbed osmotically from the reading of her verse, and we recognize that in part at least *Survival* is a work of self-examination" ("Surfacing to Survive" 23). Atwood maintains a well established disdain for autobiographical readings of her works, yet labels herself an "autogeographical" writer (Cooke 10), a term which recognizes the influence of personally lived geographies on her self and writing. Critics eager to read *Surfacing* (or *Survival*) as an autobiographical text might do well to also consider its acknowledged autogeographical influences: Atwood's intimate familiarity with, and regular public reference to, the novel's setting in Northern Ontario.

In an article written for *Macleans* magazine in 1973 Atwood describes her "Travels Back" to Northern Ontario – the site of geographic influence on her. She meditates on her childhood as she encounters again the "snow-sided road borders, [and] dark trees" (28). She says, "my childhood – woodsy, isolated, nomadic [...] it is what the glossy magazine ads say Canada is supposed to be like" (28). Here Atwood aligns her childhood experiences with the same national myth of a wilderness identity that she triumphs in *Survival,* but does so by ventriloquizing the authority of "glossy magazines."

Atwood spends the remainder of the article recounting similar childhood experiences of the North, leaving the reader to connect these experiences of the wilderness to "what Canada is supposed to be like," and furthermore, what a Canadian is supposed to experience. The first paragraph of the article highlights Atwood's affiliation with the wilderness:

> I step off the bus into six inches of early snow...this if anywhere is where I live. Highway 17 was my first highway, I traveled along it six months after I was born, from Ottawa to North Bay and then to Temiskaming, and from there over a one-track dirt road into the bush. After that, twice a year, north when the ice went out, south when the snow came, the time between spent in tents; or in the cabin built by my father. (28)

The statements here about comfortable and authentic belonging on the land participate in Atwood's production of her wilderness aesthetic by naturalizing her attachment to the land as the logical outcome of experiences in the wilderness. These details about Atwood's early childhood in the bush are likely familiar to anyone who has read an Atwood biography, as contributors to her star text – like biographers – repeatedly reference the narrative of childhood submersion in the wilderness as evidence of Atwood's position as "Peggy Nature" (Sullivan 82).

As the article continues, Atwood moves from reflections on the past to her contemporary circumstances – she is in the North giving poetry readings. She continues building her wilderness aesthetic as the poetry readings – the ostensible focus of the article – are subsumed by further descriptions of the wilderness. She writes, "Out [the] living room window, across the Ottawa River, solid trees, is my place. More or less. Freezing rain overnight: I make it to the next poetry reading pulling my suitcases on a toboggan two miles over thin ice" (38). The hostile elements of the wilderness are no match for Peggy Nature who feels entirely at home in "[her] place." The reader, therefore, determines that the daunting natural elements –

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[4] "Production" and "consumption" being the terms used by Richard Dyer to explain the "differently determining forces in the creation of stars" (20), with the individual or manager controlling productive aspects of the star text and the viewers directing consumptive demands.

rain, sleet, snow, ice – are no match for Atwood because she has been from birth a woman of the Canadian wilderness.

In the article Atwood eventually comments on Canadian literature and the necessity of reading it in the conclusion, but once again situates the literature in the land. About Canada and Canadian literature she writes:

> I live in one [Canada] and read the other [Canadian literature] for a simple reason: they are mine, with all the sense of territory that implies. Refusing to acknowledge where you come from...is an act of amputation: you may become free floating, a citizen of the world (and in what other country is that an ambition?) but only at the cost of arms, legs or heart. By discovering your place you discover yourself. (28)

In claiming territorial ownership over both Canadian land and Canadian literature Atwood contributes to her wilderness aesthetic by explicitly linking the two and by asserting her absolute belonging within both. Because she has repeatedly claimed the wilderness as "her place," Atwood's suggestion to the reader that "by discovering your place you discover yourself" furthers consolidates the reader's suspicions that Atwood *is* the wilderness.

"Travels Back" appeared again in the collection *Second Words* and its reprinted context offers an opportunity for extending the analysis of its concluding paragraph. In *Second Words* the essay follows "Mathews and Misrepresentation," a formal response to Robin Mathews's critical review of *Survival.* In "Mathews and Misrpresentation" Atwood advances a polemical defence and justification for her occlusion of immigrant writers in *Survival* by writing "It seems to me dangerous to talk about 'Canadian' patterns of sensibility in the works of people who entered and/or entered-and-left the country at a developmentally late stage of their lives" (142). This statement read alongside "Travels Back" points to a problematic construction of Canadianness as inextricably tied to and born from experiences on the land. Atwood can inhabit an authentic Canadian identity and write authentic Canadian literature because "they are hers" by virtue of her early experiences in the wilderness; what remains patently problematic in this construction is the necessary exclusion from "Canadian" identity and literature of those who did not have these same experiences.

"Travels Back" demonstrates the extent of Atwood's own participation in the construction of the wilderness aesthetic of her star text; reviews of *Survival* circulating at the same time as this article contribute to her visibility as a celebrity and likewise emphasize her "natural" connection to the land. Critics and reviewers of *Survival* – and *Surfacing* – frequently used Atwood's biography as an entry point into her work with comments like this one from Howells, "Atwood spent a great deal of her childhood in the forests of northern Ontario and Quebec, and then attended summer camps as a teenager in the 1950s; this is the territory to which she keeps returning in her fiction" (Howells, *Margaret Atwood* 22), and this one from reviewer Jay Waltz, "[Atwood is] a child of Canada's bleak bush country" (Waltz 34). The reviewers' attention to Atwood's wilderness childhood provides both biographical background for their readers, but also participates in establishing her as a celebrity of national significance.

The associations among Atwood, the wilderness, and Canada allow Atwood to metonymically stand in for both the wilderness and for Canada (and likewise for the wilderness to stand in for Canada). The naturalization of the links between Atwood and Canada, or Atwood and the wilderness, tends to foreclose interest in how these links emerged – not at all naturally -- and also complicates later readings of Atwood's work that involve the Canadian wilderness. If readers approach Atwood's writing and her star text certain of her wilderness aesthetic, there is little room for noting her changing public position on issues of nature or nation. When notice is taken, it is clear that Atwood has changed her understanding of the relationship between the wilderness and Canada, yet through the 80s and early 90s Atwood's star text did not reflect these changes.

The short story collection *Wilderness Tips* (1991) and two critical essays from 1987 and 1989 demonstrate Atwood's changing position on nature and nation. Howells notes in "Atwood's Canadian Signature: From *Surfacing* and *Survival* to *Wilderness Tips*" two fundamental changes in Atwood's position: a questioning of the validity of constructing Canada as a nation born out of the survival of the dangerous wilderness and a shift from viewing the wilderness as a national issue to representing it as a global, environmental concern. Given these ideological shifts one might expect Atwood's star text to adopt a similar

global focus, or at least a dissolution of the naturalized ties to the nation. An analysis of Atwood's writing reveals moments when her changing position is clear, but it also indicates the extent to which she continues to produce her celebrity as tied to the wilderness . This period of the 1980s and early 1990s is fascinating precisely because of the discrepancy between Atwood's professed position and the circulated meanings associated with her star text.

With respect to Atwood's apparent problematizing Canada as survivor nation and her altered position on Canadian identity Howells poses the question "What does it mean to be Canadian?" to which she theorizes that "twenty years on the answer is less clear, and through the multiple answers to that question wilderness is exposed as a national myth which stands in need of revision in contemporary urban multicultural Canada" ("Atwood's Canadian Signature" 33). For Howells, the 1980s marks a period of ideological revision for Atwood and she observes instances in *Wilderness Tips*, specifically the stories set in the Canadian North ("True Trash," "Death by Landscape," and "Wilderness Tips,") that demonstrate that "while Atwood acknowledges the romantic appeal of the wilderness as a cherished white myth of origins, she also casts doubts on the viability of this tradition in contemporary Canada" ("Atwood's Canadian Signature" 35). Atwood's move in this fictional work to destabilize her previously unquestioned association between Canada and wilderness speaks to her recognition of the emergence of counter-narratives of Canadianness in the 1980s that attempted to include immigrant and First Nations positions and voices; nevertheless the fictional work repeats, even as it troubles, the association between wilderness and nation.

"Death by Landscape" exemplifies this tension between ideological change and continuity. In the story a group of campers plan a canoe trip, "'You go on big water,' says Cappie. This is her idea – all their ideas – of how Indians talk. 'You go where no man has ever trod. You go many moons.' This is not true. They are only going for a week, not many moons" (118). The line "this is not true" serves a dual function here; it corrects the inaccurate timeline of the canoe trip, but it also amends Cappie's misunderstanding both of "how Indians talk" and of the land as the space "where no man has ever trod." The narrator undercuts the dialogue in a way that reveals what Howells describes as "[the] anxious concerns about the survival of the wilderness tradition, which is shown to be a cherished white Anglophone cultural myth in need of revision in a postmodern multicultural Canada" ("Atwood's Canadian Signature" 35). That is to say, "Death By Landscape" narrates the mythic wilderness nation, but also self-consciously notes that "this is not true." Atwood's writing in *Wilderness Tips* displays a tension between the continued construction of a mythic notion of Canada as a wilderness nation and configuring a version of Canada more in keeping with the lived reality of the vast majority of its inhabitants: that of an urban, multicultural, immigrant experience.

Wilderness Tips not only provides a useful lens for considering Atwood's changing understanding of the wilderness nation, but the text also illuminates the differing locations of Atwood's environmental concerns. The scenes in *Surfacing* involving the polluting "Americans" are notable in that the narrator's frustration with the "American" polluters stems from the damage done to the Canadian wilderness and not, as in the 1980s writing, with the threat to the global environment. Howells points out that the stories in *Wilderness Tips*

> suggest...that the wilderness myth for all it anachronism remains the sign of values worth preserving in some form, with its nostalgia for an unpolluted environment and the moral concepts of nobility and honour personified by the Indians in the old wilderness codes. These values, she warns, are frequently lacking in contemporary life. ("Canadian Signature" 37)

The stories in *Wilderness Tips* are similar to *Surfacing* in that they take the Canadian wilderness as their setting; thus the difference in Atwood's position on the environment as an international (rather than national) concern is most apparent in two critical pieces she wrote just prior to the publication of *Wilderness Tips*: "Preface: *The Canadian Green Consumer Guide*" (1987) and "True North" (1989). In both pieces she shifts attention from the wilderness as an uncomplicated site of national belonging to a necessary fiction used to mobilize a global audience to think and act with environmental responsibility.

In "Preface: *The Canadian Green Consumer Guide*" Atwood begins with the global and moves to the local. She alerts the readers to the global environmental crisis by signalling their complicity in it: "We've heard about the thinning ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, acid rain, the destruction of the world's forests, arable lands, and drinking water" (70). She then proceeds to incite action by – perhaps hyperbolically – underscoring the global reach of the environmental threat. She writes: "The danger we're in is enormous: if

we don't do something about it, its results could be as devastating as those of a worldwide nuclear catastrophe" (70). Once again the reader experiences a hostile environment in which she must "survive," but in Atwood's changing understanding of the natural world, it is a global citizen who must survive and the wilderness dangers are self-created.

While the "Green Guide" broadens the scope of environmental interest, in her exploration of environmental action Atwood once again turns to the nation. She concludes the essay with the note, "Pollution control, like charity, must begin at home" (71). "Home" can be read here both as the individual domestic spaces of her readers and as the nation-as-home; it is therefore incumbent upon the individual home and the home-nation to respond not to the threat of the wilderness, but to the threatened wilderness. Just as her view of the wilderness nation experienced partial alteration, Atwood tentatively confronted global environmental issues: by the mid 1980s, she readily admits the global scope of the environmental crisis but insists on nation-specific action.

Atwood complicates the responsibility of individual nations for environmental protection in her essay "True North," written in 1989. In this essay she fingers the global superpowers of the time – the United States and the U.S.S.R – with the liability for endangering the environmental health, and indeed survival, of the globe. She concludes the essay by writing, "Now we know that if the two superpowers begin hurling things at each other through the sky, they're likely to do it across the Arctic, with big bangs and fallout all over the north. The wind blows everywhere. Survival gear and knowing which moss you can eat is not going to be a large help. The north is no longer a refuge" (57). The sentence "The wind blows everywhere" insists that when it comes to issues of the environment there are no national borders that matter; it is, instead, a case of global responsibility and complicity in whatever the consequences might come of continued environmental negligence and abuse.

Though "True North" does end by figuring the Canadian North as a space of global significance, there are some curious inclusions in the essay that hearken back to Atwood's investment in the wilderness nation. Atwood first writes that the reason acid rain has become such a prominent issue for Canadians is because "It's territorial, partly; partly a felt violation of some area in us that we hardly ever think about unless it's invaded or tampered with" (49-50). By locating the area under threat – the North – as "in us" she once again signals the primacy of the land in constructing national belonging, or even more – a national psyche; the corollary being that if a citizen did not perceive the threat to the North as a threat to herself then she is not a true citizen at all. Atwood tries to open up the "us" in this statement by following it up with this statement: "In northern Canada, the roads are civilization, owned by the collective human *we*. Off the road is *other*. Try walking in it, and you'll soon find out why all the early traffic here was by water. 'Impenetrable wilderness' is not just verbal" (50). Of course this statement elides the First Nations groups who "owned," by virtue of generations of inhabitance, the land well before the Canadian settlers, and certainly before Atwood symbolically leased the land to humanity. The statement does, however, signal the shift in Atwood's rhetoric of wilderness from constructing it as constitutive of Canadianness, to forming it as an issue of global significance and belonging to the "collective human *we*."

One would not expect Atwood to dissociate herself from her childhood experiences in the rugged terrain of Northern Ontario, but given her changing ideological position on the wilderness one might be justified in expecting her to complicate these experiences by divorcing them from the 1970s collision and collapsing of wilderness with authentic nationality. Yet this is not the case. In her introduction to *Roughing it in the Bush* (1987) Atwood mirrors her experiences of the land with those of the nineteenth-century settler, Susanna Moodie. She writes "I myself had spent a large part of my childhood in cabins, log and otherwise, in the bush, and did not find anything exotic about the notion" (34), and that "Life in a log cabin in the bush had been normal and pleasant for me, but it was...quite otherwise for her. I got culture shock from flush toilets, she got it from mosquitoes, swamps, trackless wildernesses, and the thought of bears. In some ways, we were each other's obverse" (36). Moodie figures as the quintessential Canadian in a myth of wilderness and national origins: a middle class, white, British immigrant who battled and survived the hostile land. By mirroring herself in Moodie, Atwood not only establishes her own authenticity as a Canadian writer – by placing herself in a tradition of Canadian female writers – but she also reinforces the problematic construction of Canada and Canadianness as originating in a pioneer encounter with, and inhabitancy of, the wilderness landscape. So it is that in 1986 Atwood still produces her wilderness aesthetic, and still identifies this aesthetic with the foundations of Canadian Literature when she says that "the confrontation with a harsh and vast geography was, and was to become, a dominant motif in Canadian writing" (40).

Atwood's continued – though more complicated -- participation in the production of her wilderness aesthetic in the 1980s lends a partial explanation to the continued circulation of her star text as synecdoche for the nation. While Richard Dyer argues "producers always hav[e] more power over commodities than consumers" (20) (when commodities are understood as celebrities), the consumer maintains power in shaping the star text. The reviewers of *Wilderness Tips* stray even less from Atwood's wilderness aesthetic than she does. In a preview for a national review in *The Globe and Mail* in August 1991 Val Ross describes Atwood as "a literary camp counselor, cheerfully warning of dangers along the trail" (C1), but the story ran in the next day claiming Atwood as "Canada's camp counselor, warning of the dangers lurking in a landscape she always describes in sombre, mysterious terms" (C3). The slippage in the two articles between Atwood as "camp counselor of *literature*" and Atwood as "camp counselor of *Canada*" foreground her continued production as celebrity in both the literary and national realms. In both instances the objects – literature and Canada, respectively -- are implicitly conflated with the wilderness because they require the presence of Atwood, the skilled "camp counselor" and guide of the wilderness, in order to be understood.

The camp counselor articles also demonstrate the belatedness of reviewers in attending to Atwood's gradual shift in relation to the wilderness. For Ross, the wilderness remains something dangerous enough to require a guide, while Atwood focuses the majority of her discussion of the wilderness to the threat humanity poses to nature: "Nature is no longer implacable, dangerous, ready to jump you; it is on the run, pursued by a number of unfair bullies with the latest technologies" ("True North" 56) – though her continued assertions of her similarity to Moodie, or the wilderness as "*other*," indicate the incomplete change in her wilderness assertions.

By the time McClelland and Stewart published *Wilderness Tips* Atwood enjoyed unquestioned celebrity status in Canada; reviewers claimed her as "Canada's foremost literary star" (Ross "Elusive" 17) and "the Queen of CanLit" ("CBC") without hesitation or rebuttal. As I have argued, the success of *Survival* and the establishment of Atwood's wilderness aesthetic played instrumental roles in her rise to national celebrity; however, by 1991, Atwood's celebrity had gained international recognition and her works appealed to a large – and growing – global audience. Atwood's international recognition has not always been tied to her nationality, though instances of intentionally ignoring or inadvertently overlooking her Canadianness most frequently occur in commentary about those fictional works that are not overtly set in a Canadian context (e.g. *A Handmaid's Tale; Oryx and Crake; The Penelopiad).* A much longer study would be needed to analyze the complete trajectory of Atwood's wilderness aesthetic, but such a work might grapple with how her representation as Canadian "wilderness" author, rather than feminist author, or dystopic author, for instance, changes in different international contexts, and also over time.

Given my interest in the emergence through the 1970s and 80s of Atwood's national celebrity I'd like to offer an analysis of several instances where her Canadian identity is referenced and/or fore grounded in international contexts and suggest that in these instances her star text routinely references "authentic Canadianness" by virtue of her wilderness aesthetic. Atwood's role as Canada's global representative poses one reason why her wilderness aesthetic remained intact internationally. That is to say, in order to represent Canada to the world Atwood's star text consolidated and fixed meaning for "Canadian," and that meaning continued to be that of the wilderness. Graham Huggan similarly sees Atwood as a "translator and interpreter of Canadian culture" (26) and argues that this position contributes to her remarkable celebrity success. He considers instances of Atwood as Canadian translator and suggests "these images when taken together have fuelled the common (mis)perception of Atwood as a 'representative' or even 'quintessential,' Canadian or Canadian writer" (26). Huggan's identification of the "(mis)perception" of Atwood's representative status bears further consideration. As he draws attention to the ways in which Atwood's star text is at one and the same time – and perhaps inextricably – constructed as quintessentially Canadian, he nevertheless reminds the reader that this construction is ideologically based and necessarily reductive.

How then does Atwood come to be internationally received as "translator and interpreter" or as the Representative Canadian? In the same year that *Wilderness Tips* generated national discussions of changing environmental conditions and calls for protection of the environment, Atwood delivered the Clarendon Lectures at Oxford University. In the lectures, titled *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995), Atwood once again draws on a wilderness aesthetic in order to metonymically stand in for her country on the international stage and to work as a synecdoche for Canadian myths of wilderness origins. Laura Moss argues in "Margaret Atwood: Branding an Icon Abroad" that "there it is undoubtedly a link between what Atwood presents to a foreign audience and what she thinks they want to

hear" (20) and that Atwood likely "panders to what survives in the British [...] of the sense that Canadians are rough-hewn folk struggling to survive in a snow-and-bear covered landscape" (20). Another possibility, rather than pandering, is that by maintaining her wilderness aesthetic in *Strange Things* and by presenting herself as national representative to an international audience, Atwood capitalized on contemporary anxieties about the cultural cohesion of nations.

Richard Dyer understands that stars "rather than representing stable ideas, may represent values that are thought to be under threat or at issue" (116). In Canada in 1991 the notion of a fixed or identifiable Canadian identity had certainly been questioned – recall the haunting "Where is here?" -- however, new questions had also emerged through discussions about the viability of state multiculturalism and as critics continued to problematize any configuration of Canadian identity as "naturally" or "authentically" related to originary experiences of the land. Furthermore, the evocation of the wilderness aesthetic in the Lectures simultaneously buttresses Atwood as representative of the nation in an international context, and indicates the uncanny persistence of Atwood's production of Canadians as survivors of "the malevolent North."

The fact that one of Canada's most recognized citizens is an international literary celebrity is worthy of celebration. What needs to continue be examined further, however, is the extent to which Atwood's star text and its wilderness aesthetic persists in signifying an impossible, mythic version of an authentic Canadian identity based on an originary experience of the wilderness.

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The Blind Assassin in Japanese — An Analysis[1]

Rusty Allred

How does a Margaret Atwood novel stand up to translation into Japanese? Leaving to others detailed analyses of Atwood's work, this is the primary question of the present paper. Three main elements combined to motivate this inquiry: 1) Atwood's propensity to use humor to weave complex ideas into the novel, so well exhibited by Passage 7 below, 2) an understanding of the difficulty of literary translation in general, summarized below, and 3) an appreciation of the challenges of Japanese translation in particular, given Japanese cultural and linguistic preferences for indirectness as discussed by Sanae Tsuda (72).

To answer the question above, the present author analyzed Yukiko Kounosu's excellent Japanese translation of Atwood's *The Blind Assassin.* Facilitating the analysis is a list of quotes collected from the original English version of the novel. While these were not collected specifically in anticipation of the analysis, they are suitable for the task since they tend to be reasonably-sized passages from various locations within the text. Furthermore, they tend to contain elements of humor and other complexities which could present a translator with challenges.

Pertinent selections of the vast and diverse literature regarding the complexity of language translation are summarized below. For instance, Jonathan Culler writes that disparities between languages give rise to translation difficulties, particularly as regards literature (21 – 22). Mahmoud Ordudary notes that to deal with these disparities there exist numerous "procedures, strategies and methods" for translating literature (2).

Peter Newmark describes eight such translation methods: word-for-word, literal, faithful, semantic, adaptation, free, idiomatic and communicative (45 – 47). In previous work, the present author has suggested two approaches that form rough categorization of Newmark's eight: 1) Cultural differences are expected, and overly-literal translations often do not read well in the target language. Therefore, one valid translation method involves not only linguistic, but also cultural translation. That is, the information is represented as the translator would expect it to have been written had the original author been a native English speaker of similar training. This approach tends toward the "idiomatic and communicative" end of Newmark's spectrum. 2) In other circumstances the purpose is to convey exact details of the original rather than to assure the translation reads like native English. While care is still taken to produce a grammatical translation, this approach tends more toward the "word-for-word" end of the spectrum (Allred 3). Note that the best translations will rarely be at either extreme, but a translator may choose the appropriate approach depending upon the translation's purpose.

While mistranslations are sometimes fodder for humorists, more common than outright errors are legitimate differences in interpretation of the original, and in determining how best to communicate with the target audience. André Lefevere maintains that translators "make mistakes only on the linguistic level. The rest is strategy" (99). It is not always easy to represent the original humor, irony, puns and ambiguities in the target language. Cultural differences must also be taken into account since the target audience will often not have access to the same references as the original audience (see Karamanian 3, 5, 6, 9).