"Vitality . . . Waiting in the Wilderness": The Construction of the Environmental Native in Christie Harris's Art and Archive

—Tricia Grattan

Of the documents in the Christie Harris archive—an extensive collection of manuscripts, letters, diaries, and other documents housed in the University of Calgary Special Collections—one of the most striking is a caricature of Harris as Mouse Woman. This drawing, a kind-of tribute by Douglas Tait, the non-Native illustrator of many of her books, seems both appropriate and problematic. Harris has often been identified with her most famous character: in an essay in Raincoast Books' recent reissue of *Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses*, Harris's daughter Moira Johnston Black suggests that Harris might be Mouse Woman's reincarnation (13). Harris herself strongly identified with the subjects of her stories, even contemplating in her 1994 essay, "Caught in the Current," whether she could have been born a Native boy in a previous life (11). Because Christie Harris is without Aboriginal blood or background, however, her identification with Mouse Woman and her use of Native legends and myths are problematic.[1] An exploration of Harris's published and unpublished writings reveals that her Haida, Tsimshian, and Tlingit characters are more reflective of her life in twentieth-century Canada than of an insider's depiction of Native culture. Harris's retellings of Native stories represent her efforts to reclaim an environmental sensibility she feels is lacking in North America, and to instill more positive values in Canadian children.

Christie Harris, sometimes referred to as the "matriarch" of Canadian children's literature,[2] was last published in 1994. In the 1960s and 1970s, her influential writing brought the stories of the Native peoples of the Pacific Northwest to a broader audience. Though *CCL* has reviewed and analyzed several of her works, and featured a lengthy interview with her in a 1988 issue,

there has not been an extensive consideration of her work, and no attention has been paid to her personal writings. With Raincoast Books' recent reissuing of *Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses*, *Mouse Woman and the Mischief Makers*, and *Mouse Woman and the Muddleheads*, it seems timely to re-examine Harris's work. With three of her most successful books now reaching a new generation of children, it is important to consider how Harris's ideas about both Western and Native cultures manifest themselves in her writing.

As Alexandra West observes, "to be writing about such an author as Harris is to be involved in controversy" (xi): it would be naïve to write about Harris's Native legends without acknowledging the colonial nature of her writing. As Diana Brydon notes, the "borrowing" of indigenous people's narratives seems to "repeat the imperialist history of plunder and theft" (99) that has so shaped our nation. Because Harris was one of the few easily accessible voices of the Haida and other Pacific Northwest groups in the 1960s and 1970s, her stories gained an authority that now seems illegitimate. Harris was praised at the time for her depth of knowledge; Jean Karl, her longtime editor, even commented that she had clearly "assimilated the Indian point of view." Although Harris did copious amounts of research, her understanding of the Native groups of the Pacific Northwest Coast remains that of an outsider, and, as Lee Maracle states, "if a white person writes a story, it's a white person's story" (82).

The 1992 reissue of *Raven's Cry*, Harris's epic historical depiction of Haida artist Charles Edenshaw and his people, further addresses the complexities of appropriation. In a foreword by Robert Davidson and Margaret Blackman, both of Haida descent, Harris's work is praised for its impact on Native children in the 1960s and 1970s. Davidson and Blackman recount how *Raven's Cry* was instrumental in engendering an appreciation for their cultural legacy and heritage. Although they are careful to avoid assessing the book's accuracy, and they acknowledge its anglicized ideas (x), Davidson and Blackman credit Harris with "trying to look at history from a native point of view" (viii). Harris may have appropriated Native ideas, but she did so with a great deal of reverence and admiration for the cultures of the Pacific Northwest. While her attempts to speak for Native people were misguided, works like *Raven's Cry* and the three Mouse Woman collections seem to have been created with the best of intentions and to some positive effect.[3]

Margery Fee comments that "because of the sympathy for Native people common to much contemporary English Canadian writing, it seems

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simplistic to dismiss the almost obsessive literary concern with Native people as mere exploitation" (15). Fee speaks to the need to examine more closely an appropriation of the Native voice in literature in order to better understand it. Reading Harris's Mouse Woman tales in conjunction with her diaries and correspondence, accessible in the University of Calgary archives, a picture emerges of a writer frustrated with the state of the world and seeking a vision of a different kind of society. Harris looked to her writing and the Native cultures of British Columbia to bring a new system of values to the world—one that, as Moira Johnston Black notes, would bring Native children "pride in their cultural identity" and non-Native children "respect for nature . . . and sensitivity towards the people who had honored the natural balances long before" Europeans arrived in Canada (13). In her diary entry for February 12, 1971, Harris describes her fascination with Native spirituality: "all that vitality is there, waiting in the wilderness." In both her public and private writing, Harris used Native culture to construct a natural, environmental "vitality" for her beleaguered society.

Harris certainly is not the only white writer to use images of the indigene to represent and connect with the environment. Gordon Johnston notes that "for Rousseau and countless others, Indian figures have been interesting, not in themselves, but as symbolic referents in a discourse about European civilization's virtues and vices, triumphs and failures" (50). Drawing on Baudrillard, Gerald Vizenor argues that within this symbolic discourse, "the *indian* is a simulation, the absence of natives; the *indian* transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories or native stories" (15). For Europeans and North Americans, this "simulacrum" of the Native often represents a state of harmony with the natural world that the white colonizer feels is missing in his or her culture. Lawrence Buell notes that Thoreau

valued the Native "first as a romanticized image of a life close to nature" and later for the ability to read and use the environment (211). This representation seems particularly apparent in recent works for children such as Disney's 1995 film, *Pocahontas*, in which the Native heroine's affinity with nature is juxtaposed directly with the invasive European presence.[4] In addition, many environmentally themed picture books embrace the ecological Native in order to present an ideal world, with varying degrees of accuracy. In his analysis of Susan Jeffers's *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*, ostensibly an illustrated version of a speech given by Chief Seattle, Jon Stott shows how non-Natives manipulate source material in order to promote a vision of environmental harmony and brotherly love (22).[5] Though Christie Harris's books reflect a greater concern for accuracy and authenticity than these examples, they still operate within this tradition of environmental writing.

The Native as ecological symbol has particular resonance in Canadian literature. Because Canadians tend to view ourselves as a marginal society, historically dwarfed by Britain and the United States, there is a strong impulse to associate ourselves with the Native. As Fee astutely comments, "we are afraid that if we don't believe in Indians, we will have to become Americans" (30). Though the perceived marginalization of both Native people and Canadians allows Native characters to take a more primary role in some national literature, they remain limited and symbolic rather than fully developed characters. Monkman notes the long history of symbolic appropriation, describing how "in each era of Canadian literary history, writers have turned to the Indian and his culture for standards by which to measure the values and goals of white, Canadian society" (3). In Harris's writing, it is the environmental standards of her ideal Native that Western society cannot meet.

Harris's construction of the Native was based on several sources. In her published writings, she emphasized the need to have direct contact with the cultural background of Native tales before one can even start to write them. While speaking to the Canadian Authors Association in 1980, Harris stressed that people "should not write about anything [they haven't] seen." The need to write about what one knows is a common refrain in her speeches, letters, and publications. She points out that she would never write Native legends "unless [she] could spend years and years studying the culture" ("Christie Harris Visits Norway House"), and describes how, living on the Northwest Coast, she "attended Native ceremonies and made Indian friends who were generous in helping [her] to understand both the culture and the stories"

("Feasthouse" 9). These experiences with Native people influenced her understanding and depiction of their stories, and seem to have contributed to her great reverence for Native culture and values.

Despite occasional exposure to Native life, as an outsider, Harris's understanding of what she saw was necessarily limited. When constructing her new versions of Mouse Woman tales, she relied heavily on anthropologists' accounts of old myths and legends, referring to them as "my treasured sources" ("Feasthouse" 9). As Jeannette Armstrong argues, when an old tale has been removed from its oral roots and transcribed by white anthropologists, "the intent of the story has been totally corrupted, without the cultural context that it emerges from . . . and a great loss occurs in that gap" (12). The stories are necessarily difficult to understand; Penny Petrone explains that "to the non-Indian mind, Indian tales are baffling in their intricacies, inconsistencies, and leaps of logic" (11). This leaves the reteller a great deal of room to transform the stories to fit his or her ideological assumptions. Harris explained in a 1974 conference that she saw herself as "the link between the old Indian storytellers . . . and the modern storytellers who use [her] books" (Canadian Library Association). It is within this middle space that she constructed a figure of the Native to suit her ideal environmental and spiritual conception of the world.

Harris's dissatisfaction with the Western world, as illuminated by her personal writings, offers a particular insight into her construction of the Native in her fiction. An avid diarist and letter writer, she often expressed her frustration with the state of society. Harris saw the Western world as missing a basic understanding of environmental balance. All that white society lacked, she believed, could be found in the "old Indian values" that she constructed out of her interpretation of Pacific Northwest Native tales. Her personal writings between 1974 and 1978, the years she worked on her Mouse Woman stories, reveal a search for the values she felt her society lacked.

Harris's diaries reflect an acute concern with the state of the Western world. She frequently expresses her worries about the condition of the country, complaining in her June 23, 1976 entry that "the whole Western system seems to be collapsing." Her worries vary, and include anxiety over the Quebec question, Pierre Trudeau's leadership of the country, and economic strikes. Harris's exact political position is hard to ascertain from her personal writings; she often expresses her opposition to the Trudeau Liberals, but also is unsatisfied with the Mulroney Conservatives. According to Harris, the country is in trouble. On December 16, 1975, she writes: "it's a mess. Like

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our economy—our unions—our army. Morale lost everywhere." Though these concerns are wide-ranging, her most intense alarm is at the lack of environmental and spiritual understanding she perceives in North American society.

Harris's concern for the environment is part of her strong identification with nature. Her reverence for the natural world transcends an ordinary appreciation for the wilderness: she views the environment with a kind of awe that reflects a deeply felt, personal affinity. Harris describes the land of British Columbia as "absolutely enthralling," exclaiming: "I do feel this country" (4 Nov. 1975). Her spiritual connection with the land contributes to her fascination with Native people; as Gordon Johnston remarks, Native characters often function in literature as "proto-ecologists protecting the land" (56), symbols of a harmony and balance that white culture is lacking.

In contrast to the environmentally focused society that she seeks, Harris is continually dismayed by the consumerist world in which she finds herself. Upon reading a consumer report on vacuum cleaners, Harris writes on May 5, 1971 that "CONSUMER is an awful classification for a human. Unworthy." She sees a clear contrast between the spirituality of her Native ideal and the materialist and mechanized nature of her actual world. In conceiving of an idea for a book, Harris notes that the theme will include how "the good guys are spiritual [and] the bad guys are the mechanistic minded" (9 Jan. 1974). For Harris, the more a society develops and industrializes, the further it strays from its integral spiritual base.

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annoying but "immoral. Making people want more when we are grabbing too much, wasting too much, polluting the world too much." For Harris, commercial messages are representative of larger problems in a society she views as increasingly detached from her values.

As Harris sees it, another indication of civilization's downfall is the American imperialist domination of Western culture. Harris uses her diary to criticize American political and cultural actions. She condemns the United States's role in Vietnam, writing on April 1, 1975 that they "will have to get out of that criminality now. And maybe they've learned." In recounting a story of American racism, her conclusion is simply "those Americans!" (30 Jan. 1974). Harris's remarks fit Linda Hutcheon's observation that some Canadians feel that they are "'colonized' by American capital" and "politically threatened by the constant reminders of the power and imperialist impulses of our neighbour to the south" (80). Harris's diary entries reflect a concern that the American need to dominate and control will destroy the values of Western culture. Predictably, Harris is particularly vehement toward American environmental policy. She describes her anger at the American decision to build the Alaskan pipeline, without "even a nod towards Canadian concern in all those gigantic tankers which, sooner or later, will have an accident and ruin our beautiful, wilderness coastline" (19 Jan. 1971). All of these factors contribute to Harris's dissatisfaction with American materialist domination, and her need to create an alternate, ecologically sound society to resist the direction of current culture.

Harris writes in a 1977 letter that "the basic Indian ethic is more in tune with today's ecologically-oriented children" than European myths (Memo to the Script Department). For Harris, Native people represent the change that needs to come to Western society. Margery Fee notes that a nostalgic interest in the Native stems from "the urban individual's loss of community, nature, and a personal sense of the numinous" (25). Feeling increasingly disconnected from the industrial nature of society, Harris envisions an environmental utopia where people live in harmony with themselves and nature. In this utopia, those who fail to respect nature must either repent of their actions or perish. In a family letter, Harris notes how most violence she hears about is rooted in European civilization, complaining that the "basic Indian ethic" is lacking in the world (Letter to Sheilagh Simpson). Through her Mouse Woman stories, and as reflected in her personal writings, Harris constructs a Native environmental utopia to combat the degradation of Western society.

Christie Harris's Native ideal is informed by a

strong sense of ecological spirituality. She often asserts her belief in nature spirits, explaining in a 1980 school interview, "if I didn't believe in them, I wouldn't work with Indian legends" ("Christie Harris Visits Norway House"). For Harris, a regard for Native spirituality is a way to feel a part of the nature that surrounds her. As Terry Goldie notes, "the Indians have [historically] been the repository of mystical connections to the land, of what is native and indigenous" ("Fear and Temptation" 75). Harris shows her conviction of the superiority and necessity of Native spirituality when she writes in her diary, "I do believe in these nature spirits. And I do think this is the sort of thing that could change the world" (15 April 1976).

Though Harris's ecological-Native ideal emerges in much of the personal and professional writing that spans her long career, I have concentrated on her engagement with the Mouse Woman character. Critics such as Gwyneth Evans note the blatant environmental focus of these didactic tales (55). In particular, *Mouse Woman and the Mischief Makers* and *Mouse Woman and the Muddleheads*, the second and third books of the series, focus on those who are "disturbing the proper order of the world" (*Mischief Makers* 16). For example, in "Mouse Woman and the Porcupine Hunter," the porcupine hunter and his greedy wife recklessly hunt animals without any respect for conservation or balance, until Mouse Woman and the Porcupine *narnauk* stop them (*Mischief Makers*). In "The Sea Hunters Who Were Swallowed by a Whirlpool," the chief sea hunter disobeys his promise to respect the gods of the sea and ends up dead (*Muddleheads*).

Although themes of respect for nature are certainly present in the tales' original source material, Harris gives them greater emphasis, making balance and order paramount in her Native ideal. As Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer explain, many Tlingit tales "emphasize the 'cosmic connection' of human action and experience—how we behave in the physical world has significance in the spiritual world"— and taboos are often associated with respect for both spirits and other life forms (24). Harris's emphasis on the notion of balance and order is much less subtle and more explicitly didactic: in "Mouse Woman and the Porcupine Hunter," the narrator explains that "by taking more than [the hunters] needed, they were upsetting the order of the world. And where would it all end? What would happen if there were no more porcupines to move into these mountain valleys?" (*Mischief Makers* 20). She makes an explicit connection between Native legends and conservation, recalling current issues of animal endangerment. All of the Mouse Woman tales end with a clear

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reestablishment of the order of nature. Characters who mistreat animals, nature spirits, or each other are punished, and those who act respectfully toward their environment triumph. Harris emphasizes the restoration of order that these tales provide, ending most of the tales with Mouse Woman expressing how she is "strangely satisfied" by how things are "made equal" (*Vanished Princesses* 118).

One tale that very obviously confronts issues of equality and balance in nature is "The Princess and the Bears" from *Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses*. The story of a girl who is taken to be the wife of a bear, gives birth to his children, and then escapes back to her village is a common one in Pacific-Northwest Native mythology. Marius Barbeau, a major collector of Haida myths and one of Harris's primary sources, gives three versions of this story, each containing the same central elements (84-153). Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer's more recent collection and translation of Tlingit oral narratives gives two versions of the story, noting its popularity among the inland Tlingit. They explain that "the story is told mainly to remind people of how sensitive animals are and, like people, are not to be insulted" (369). While adhering loosely to this theme, Harris's version of the story differs in its explicit focus on ideas of conservation and equality. Harris envisions the Bear Prince's desire to marry a human as a strategic step to "turn enemies into relatives," in order to lessen the human slaughter of the bear (46). Rh-pi-sunt, a spoiled girl who insults the bears and is willfully ignorant of their importance in providing her with "food and warm robes" (55), becomes indelibly connected to nature by giving birth to bear cub children. In Harris's version of the myth, the Native community becomes more respectful of nature, making sure to return the gift of food and shelter to the bear with "proper reverence, so that it would come back to the mountains again" (90). In her November 8, 1974 diary entry, Harris comments on her efforts to make sure that the "all-things-equal" theme is clearly

illustrated by her tale. For Harris, the didactic reinforcement of themes of environmental balance is imperative to the success of her writing. On the surface, Harris's version of "The Princess and the Bears" is faithful to its source story, but she has shifted the focus from taboos and rituals to notions of harmony with nature, dramatically changing the story's effect.

Even when Harris adheres more faithfully to her original sources, her retelling often places a stronger emphasis on the environmentalist message of the tales. "Mouse Woman and Porcupine Hunter," from *Mouse Woman and the Mischief Makers*, closely follows "The Story of the Porcupine Hunter," collected by Franz Boas.[6] In both tales, a porcupine hunter has become too successful, greatly distressing the porcupines. He is confronted by Chief Porcupine and, after suffering frequent attacks from the porcupine's quills, finally succeeds in discovering the name of his attacker. This leads the chief to heal the hunter, asking him to hunt fewer porcupines in the future. In Boas's version, Chief Porcupine makes the following requests:

> Now I will ask you kindly not to smoke the porcupines out of their dens; and if you need porcupine meat, do not kill so many of them; and when you have killed one or more, dry their meat in a good fire and eat them before winter sets in, so that my people may not have any sickness in winter, and cast their bones into the fire; and do not let your young people eat the heads of young porcupines, lest they become forgetful. (110)

Harris's story also ends with a request made by Chief Porcupine: "You will tell the people what has happened in the house of Sea-Otter-on-Green-Mountain. You will tell them that people must take only what they need" (33). Although these two passages have similar basic messages, Harris's version simplifies the language for her readers. In doing so, however, it loses much of the complexity and specificity of the use of the porcupine, distilling Chief Porcupine's request into a fairly generic conservationist message.[7] By using the Mouse Woman stories to strongly advocate for environmental balance, Harris overlooks many other equally important elements of the stories.

While these tales make the case for natural equilibrium, the clearest expression of natural harmony is Mouse Woman herself. This "tiny narnauk," or supernatural being, represents the importance of balance. In a letter to Jean Karl, Harris describes Mouse Woman as a figure of "making-all-things-equal" (21 Oct. 1974). Her research notes indicate a fascination with this

concept, and her enjoyment of playing with it. Several pages of notes contain examples of the sort of balance Harris believes Mouse Woman epitomizes, including statements such as "give kindness to get kindness . . . the biter is bitten . . . the smiter is smitten" (Notes for *Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses*).

Though she is small—Harris describes her repeatedly as the tiniest of the supernatural beings—Mouse Woman is able to effect great change. When, in a letter to her son, Harris describes Mouse Woman as a "great little character," the reference to size does not seem accidental. Part of the power of Mouse Woman is that her stature does not stop her from rescuing those in trouble. The pleasing contradiction of the littlest figure having the largest impact seems particularly appropriate to children's literature. Mouse Woman's agency suggests that child readers can effect positive change in the world. In the concluding story of *Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses*, Harris describes how just "as the tiny pool [of water] held the whole great starry world in its smallness, so [Mouse Woman] held the balance of the vast green wilderness in her ravelly fingers" (185). In Harris's ideal world of ecological balance, even the smallest of creatures has an important role.

Mouse Woman also illustrates Harris's belief in the importance of gift giving. She writes in her diary that a gift carries two obligations: "to receive [and] to give back" (30 Oct. 1974). The notion of exchange is another way that Harris envisions idyllic environmental equilibrium in Native society. She comments in a letter to Jean Karl that "you give to get" and "if no one owns anything, everyone owns everything" (21 Oct. 1974). In almost every Mouse Woman tale, there is a scene where Mouse Woman arrives to help a young person out of trouble. Always, she demands a gift; due to her mouse-like nature, she especially appreciates "woolen ear ornaments" that she can tear "into a lovely, loose, nesty pile of mountain sheep wool" (*Vanished Princesses* 133). This scene is invariably followed by a description of Mouse Woman's "favorite giving—advice to a young person who had been tricked into trouble" (*Vanished Princesses* 133). Harris views these scenes as important enough to be repeated often: the giving of gifts indicates the balance that must be maintained in order to be in harmony with the environment.

Christie Harris felt deeply the importance of creating a spiritual connection with the environment, and she was not content to let others' materialism and selfishness destroy her country. Her Mouse Woman tales, and her personal writings, betray her conviction that striving for an idealized Native utopia is the way to get Canadian

society on track. Moira Johnston Black describes her mother as "a feisty and effective activist" (14): in addition to writing about them, Harris actively protested the injustices she perceived in the world. In her 1971 diary, Harris describes going to Sierra Club demonstrations and signing petitions against the Alaskan pipeline and what she terms the "certain ecological disaster for our beautiful coast" (15 Feb.). In her archives, one can also find letters addressed to both Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney, bemoaning their poor environmental records. Late in her career, Harris was still actively looking out for what she viewed as the welfare of the country and its Native inhabitants. In 1989, she became involved with the Writer's Union of Canada's Haida committee, formed in response to the Haida's decision to limit the access of non-Haida to their records. Documentation of this work emphasizes Harris's commitment to treat the Haida with respect: during negotiations, she suggested using "the tone we would use to [address] an independent nation" (Memo to Cynthia Flood), and she promoted providing financial and other assistance to Haida who wished to publish their own work ("Report on Work").

Harris was, however, primarily a writer, and it is through her books that one can most clearly see her attempts to institute environmental and spiritual change in society. As a writer for children, Harris was inevitably involved in the socialization of the young, a process that critics such as Jacqueline Rose have identified as another kind of colonization. As Elizabeth Waterston notes, Native stories have often been used to "transmit to children a sense that humans need not be antagonists or victims of nature" (35). Harris's books, letters, and diaries indicate her desire to construct an environmental Native ideal that would change the way that young people interact with the natural world.

By choosing to retell Native legends, Harris is one of many Canadian writers who, as Margaret Atwood notes, attempt "to find in Indian legends mythological material which would function for Canadian writers much as the Greek myths and the Bible long functioned for Europeans" (124). Harris is explicit about her feelings that North American children need North American, and therefore Native, mythology to develop their connection to the land. In a 1989 letter, she expresses her discontent that as a child she was unaware of the richness of Native stories, believing that "mythology was something that belonged to Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, etc." (Letter to Harold Bishop School). Harris makes clear her intention to reverse this situation, telling Jean Karl in a 1970 letter that she tends "to resent the leprechauns and elves who don't belong on

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this continent." This loyalty to Native mythology is derived partly from her desire to inculcate environmental values in children. Harris explains that "because of the natives' sensitivity to nature and their sense of the Oneness of all things, [Native mythology] seems more in tune with today than does Old World mythology" (Letter to Frances Gray). By claiming the mythology of the Native as the cultural heritage of all North Americans, Harris further attempts to connect Native ecological values with her society.

Harris's diary entries also address her desire to bring spiritual values to her readers. Working against a perceived pressure to write more commercial and materialistic stories, Harris emphasizes her responsibility to combat such forces. She criticizes the "fools" of consumerist North America, writing "glad I'm promoting the opposite in my fantasy. Couldn't live with myself if I weren't" (26 Feb. 1971). Her desire to set her books apart from morally bankrupt Western society emerges again when she describes a CBC report on rampant drinking and other inappropriate behaviour at a high school graduation. Her response to this situation focuses once more on her books: "it's sad. What a society! I'm glad I'm probably making kids aware of spiritual things" (20 Feb. 1975). Harris's writing indicates her belief that ideas in her books could change the values of the world.

In emphasizing the value and importance of Native spirituality and its connection to environmentalist values, Harris intended her influence to extend not just to her white readers but to her Native ones as well. Her letters reveal the great pride she took in knowing that her writings helped the Native people of the Northwest Coast. In a 1979 letter to Jean Karl, Harris delights in recounting a meeting with a young teacher of Haida students in the Queen Charlotte Islands. Harris describes the teacher's comments that *Raven's Cry* "is tremendously popular with the Haida . . . the kids think it's the greatest story ever written, because it's about them" (18 Jan.). Robert Davidson notes the

importance of *Raven's Cry*, and of an outsider expressing an interest in his people (ix). In retrospect, it is easy to see Harris's concern for Native people as naïve. Her desire to "fix" the absence of a Haida chief by suggesting a possible candidate reflects her lack of appreciation for the complexities of the Haida society (Letter to Jean Karl, 21 Aug. 1964). Despite some patronizing attempts to resolve issues that she could not fully understand, however, Harris's intentions of helping Native children develop an appreciation for their environmental and spiritual history are admirable.

Christie Harris's writings, both personal and public, express her respect and admiration for Native people; but because her Native is a symbolic, environmental construction rather than an insider's picture, this representation is necessarily flawed. Like many white writers, Harris focuses not on the contemporary Native but on the past cultures of the Pacific-Northwest Coast. Though some of her fantasies feature the use of Native spirits in a present-day setting, her writing mostly avoids contemporary depictions of Native cultures. Her use of the Native as an environmental symbol leads her to construct an utopia set firmly in the past, seeming to represent a desire to capture something that is entirely lost.[8] Fee observes the tendency of white writers to focus on the past when she states that, for most people, "dead Indians, even whole extinct tribes, work as well as or better than 'live' contemporary Indians" (16). This divide between representation and contemporary experience is dangerous because it fosters the assumption that Native cultures are dying cultures.[9] Thomas King describes Native writers' responses to this practice:

> Most [Native] writers have consciously set our literature in the present, a period that is reasonably free of literary monoliths and which allows for greater latitude in the creation of characters and situations, and more important, allows us the opportunity to create for ourselves and our respective cultures both a present and a future. (xii)

By leaving her Native characters in the past, Harris limited her ability to reflect Native Canadians' presence in the contemporary world.

Harris's representations of Native people are also limited because they are so closely associated with nature. Although she may have intended this association to represent a positive trait, it also suggests her objectification of Native people, who are characterized through difference. Goldie views this as a problem inherent in white depictions of Native people, writing that "the indigenes begin and, to date, end as 'children of nature'" (*Fear and*

Temptation 40). When writing in her diary of the "Columbia river sellout," Harris exclaims, "such criminal treatment of a valley! And a people! Infuriating!" (16 Feb. 1975). Earlier, she writes of the importance of protecting "the rivers, lakes, natives, etc." (28 Feb. 1971). In Harris's ideology, the Native person becomes an extension of the landscape, one more thing to preserve and protect. Though her concern for the welfare of this group of people is well-intentioned, such a one-dimensional view severely restricts the accuracy and the effectiveness of Harris's depictions.

Christie Harris's work, though well-regarded in her time, is less known to today's children. Until a few years ago, only *Raven's Cry* and *Something Weird Is Going On* were still in print. One must ask why Raincoast Books made the decision to republish the Mouse Woman series, despite the current climate of unease with white appropriation of Native images. When interviewed, Jesse Finkelstein, associate publisher, discussed Harris's role as an esteemed figure in British Columbian literary studies. Finkelstein noted Raincoast's surprise that such well-known books as the Mouse Woman tales were of limited availability today, and resolved to correct that situation. Moira Johnston Black echoes and expands on this sentiment, writing that "it is time again for Mouse Woman to emerge from the shadows, to once again give nurture and help a generation of young people facing new kinds of trouble, needing guidance through new threats on the cosmic scale of Mouse Woman's supernatural realm" (15). Harris's writings offer a respect for nature and a reverence for spirituality that is in tune with today's concern for the environment. It is important, however, to view Harris's Native characters as the constructions of a white environmentalist rather than as accurate representations of Haida, Tlingit, or Tsimshian culture. Harris's diaries and letters offer unique insights into how one writer used her conception of Native culture to create an idealist society in harmony with itself and its environment. Perhaps, rather than Mouse Woman, this insider's view of the appropriation of Native stories will be Harris's legacy.

Notes

[1] The correct terminology for Native Canadians varies depending on personal opinion and context. While Christie Harris was writing, the term "Indian" was standard and that is the language that is used in her papers. Some Native Canadians now favour the terms "Native American/Canadian," "First Nations," or "Aboriginal." For others, "Indian," though etymologically misleading, is still preferred. Most critics agree, however, that whenever possible, it is preferable to use specific tribal names instead of blanket terms, recognizing that each Native group is distinct in language and culture. I will use "Native" as a general term and "native" or "Indian" when Christie Harris or other writers use them. Whenever possible, however, I will refer specifically to different tribes of the Northwest Coast.

[2] Harris's designation as the matriarch of Canadian children's literature has been asserted in popular and academic contexts, including Alexandra West's biocritical essay within the Harris archives (xii), and Raincoast Books' 2006 promotional material for the Mouse Woman reissues.

[3] In their recent publication, *With Good Intentions: Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal Relations in Colonial Canada*, Celia Haig-Brown and David A. Nock analyze the problematic consequences of non-Natives working with "good intentions" toward Aboriginal people in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Canada. The essays in this collection argue that even those who attempt to act in the best interests of Native peoples cannot escape their own complicity in the colonial process.

[4] For a more detailed analysis of this film, see Pauline Turner Strong's essay "Playing Indian in the 1990s: *Pocahontas* and *The Indian in the Cupboard*."

[5] In the second edition of *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman discusses how Ted Perry, a film writer in the early 1970s, created this speech, based loosely on Chief Seattle's actual words. He quotes reporter Stephen Strauss, who reported that Perry told him of his intention to create a text that "pushed the environment idea a lot further" (qtd. in Nodelman 135). Despite some effort to make *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*'s publishers aware of this appropriation of identity, they still used the speech and attributed it to Seattle.

[6] Harris's tale positions the wife of the hunter, a minor figure in Boas's version, as the villain of the story, who compels her husband to hunt more than he should. Other than this added dimension of gender, however, this is one of the Mouse Woman tales that most closely follows the original.

[7] Of course, Boas's transcriptions also represent a non-Native interpretation of a Native tale. Though Boas may have attempted to represent the voice of the Native teller as accurately as possible, it is still a story removed from its original context and written by and for non-Natives.

[8] Clare Bradford's *Reading Race* is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of these matters. In this comprehensive analysis of the construction of Aboriginality in Australian children's literature, she discusses representations of Aboriginality as "con-

stituted by a remote, homogenized, traditional culture" (119), locking the indigenous population of Australia in the past.

[9] For another discussion of the notion of white representations of indigenous cultures as valuable yet doomed to become extinct, see Opal Moore and Donnarae MacCann's discussion of *Julie of the Wolves*, a novel written in the same time-period when Harris was publishing her Native stories.

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