

## WALKING STUDIES, THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS, AND WILLIAM S.

### MESSIER'S *DIXIE*

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After dominating Québécois fiction and criticism since the Quiet Revolution, Montreal appears to be giving way to a growing interest in the 'regions'. These are to be understood as spaces and places outside of Montreal which are important within writers' imaginaries, rather than areas which coincide precisely with administrative units like Mauricie or Outaouais. The last few years have seen a tendency in francophone Québécois fiction towards what Samuel Archibald identifies as 'le néoterroir en littérature';<sup>1</sup> a trend to which *Arvida* (2011), his collection of short stories set in the Saguenay village of the same name, has contributed significantly.<sup>2</sup> Other recent examples demonstrating what Archibald describes as 'une démontréalisation marquée de la littérature québécoise'<sup>3</sup> include Mélanie Vincelette's novel on the Great North, *Polynie* (2011), Myriam Caron's novel set in Sept-Îles, *Bleu* (2014) and Andrée A. Michaud's *Bondrée* (2014), a *polar* set on the border with the United States.<sup>4</sup> The specifically Québécois reasons for moving away from the focus on Montreal may include such diverse motivations as renewed public attention on the regions following the latter's shock support for Mario Dumont's Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ) in the 2007 provincial elections – seen by some as a 'regional' protest vote –;<sup>5</sup> reconfigurations of understandings of the national associated with the Quiet Revolution; a desire on the part of individual authors to return to the areas of their youth; and the emergence of 'hipster' writers,<sup>6</sup> such as those associated with 'l'école de la tché'n'ssâ' (Chainsaw School), like Archibald.<sup>7</sup> However, these go alongside a broader interest in challenging the fetishization of the urban outside of the specifically Québécois context. The rise in studies on the rural,<sup>8</sup> as well as on suburban, exurban and peri-urban spaces attests to this.<sup>9</sup> This article looks at an example of

‘regional’ or exurban writing from ‘l’école de la tché’n’ssâ’; namely *Dixie* (2013) by William S. Messier.<sup>10</sup> It adopts a performative approach in order to think about what participatory and creative methodologies can bring to literary analysis; specifically to understanding relationships between material and imaginary geographies. It is difficult to conceptualize the latter, even if there is a general acknowledgement that such relationships exist. For example, writing on the urban, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift claim: ‘a city named in certain ways also becomes that city through the practices of people in response to the labels. They perform the labels’.<sup>11</sup> Paul Cloke suggests we apply a similar approach to conceive of non-urban spaces: ‘as Amin and Thrift (2002) have argued for cities, so we can begin to conceptualize our approach to non-city spaces by seeking to map the intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, fixtures and flows and emotions and practices’.<sup>12</sup>

Walking offers a possible way of ‘map[ping] the intermesh’ proposed by Cloke.<sup>13</sup> The last ten years or so have seen a growing interest in walking across a range of disciplines, such as urban and cultural geography, literary and cultural studies and visual and performing arts.<sup>14</sup> In what have come to be seen as some of the founding texts on walking in urban studies, notably Guy Debord’s ‘Theory of the Dérive’ (1956) and Michel de Certeau’s ‘Walking in the City’ (1980), the act tends to be represented as liberating and/or subversive.<sup>15</sup> More recent interventions have problematized walking as a means of knowing the city or as necessarily emancipatory.<sup>16</sup> All the same, walking has been, and continues to be, a prompt to creative and performative work, as in the psychogeographic texts produced by Iain Sinclair, Will Self and others;<sup>17</sup> the ‘histories’ by writers like Rebecca Solnit and Robert Macfarlane;<sup>18</sup> and pieces by performance artists such as Rosana Cade.<sup>19</sup> In her analysis of autobiographical performances which are informed by walking, Roberta Mock proposes, ‘I would [...] describe personal writing as an embodied practice that performs its own theory’.<sup>20</sup> In an example of this kind of ‘personal’ writing,<sup>21</sup> John Wylie uses a day’s walk along a

Devonshire coastal path to reflect on ‘issues of landscape, subjectivity and corporeality’.<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein, this ‘meandering’<sup>23</sup> article takes up a walk informed by a novel – itself partly inspired by walks – in order to think about how bodies, words, material geographies and imaginary geographies come together. In an effort to explore how participatory methods can combine with traditional literary studies methods of contextualized close readings, I arranged to carry out a walking interview with Messier in spring 2015. In so doing, I was informed by James Evans’s and Phil Jones’s article on this methodology, which seeks to test the impact which bodily moving through a landscape has on the speaker:

It is argued that walking interviews generate richer data, because interviewees are prompted by meanings and connections to the surrounding environment and are less likely to try and give the ‘right’ answer. Indeed, it seems intuitively sensible for researchers to ask interviewees to talk about the places that they are interested in while they are in that place.<sup>24</sup>

Walking in locations chosen by Messier for their prominence within *Dixie*, he and I discussed elements such as the importance of place in his writing, orality and the presence of the past in the present. This kind of rural palimpsest is found in Robert Macfarlane’s *The Old Ways*, where paths become connectors between past and present – and, I would add, the future<sup>25</sup> – as well as between one place and another; ‘ghost-lines’ which are ‘means of communion as well as means of motion’.<sup>26</sup>

*Dixie*’s ‘ghost-lines’<sup>27</sup> are situated in Québec’s Eastern Townships, which lie to the southeast of Montreal and border the United States. The popular imagination tends to link the region with Loyalist settlement – a connection frequently evoked in Louise Penny’s internationally bestselling Inspector Gamache series, which is largely set in a fictionalized village in the Townships.<sup>28</sup> However, historian Guy Laperrière informs us that this is only part of the story: not only were there Abenakis living in the region before the arrival of settlers, but those Americans who established themselves there in the first half of the nineteenth century can be seen to have done so as part of a more generalized colonialist drive towards the north.<sup>29</sup> During the same time period, British and other Europeans settled in the

region, often on former French holdings. The region has been associated with farming – particularly dairy farming. Less acknowledged is its industrial history, with pulp and paper, textiles and asbestos being very important. Since the 1970s, however, these have all given way to third sector industries, notably tourism.<sup>30</sup> In terms of language, the Townships were predominantly anglophone until the late nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Certain areas, such as that around Lake Memphrémagog, are more anglophone and others more francophone. Whilst there is a high degree of bilingualism in the Townships, particularly since Québec’s language laws of the 1970s, Laperrière’s description of them as they were in the 1860s as ‘un modèle de juxtaposition et non d’intégration des ethnies’<sup>32</sup> is described as remaining true in the present day by geographer John Canning.<sup>33</sup>

The Eastern Townships are, and have historically been, associated with creative writing, with a number of authors living there or holidaying there regularly. They are best associated – particularly in terms of literature in English – with poetry. Indeed, we can talk of there having been an anglo-Québec literary ‘scene’ in the Townships, in the sense of one of the characteristics Will Straw identifies with this phenomenon; namely this being a ‘poin[t] of assembly’.<sup>34</sup> According to poets Jason Camlot and Steve Luxton,<sup>35</sup> this scene had its heyday in the 1960s or even earlier, with writers like Frank Scott and Ralph Gustafson being some of the names associated with the region. All the same, the 1970s saw the creative writing and literary journals, *Matrix* and *Moosehead Review* founded there. More recently, the region has been associated amongst readers of English crime fiction in the original language and in translation with Penny’s Three Pines novels. Penny has a francophone counterpart in the form of Johanne Seymour, whose Kate MacDougall novels have a darker feel than the Three Pines series.<sup>36</sup> This crime fiction offers a contrast to the popular imaginings of the Townships as natural idylls, gardens or farms often taken up in leisure and tourist advertising. These latter kinds of representations are to be found in some examples of francophone fiction, as in

Hélène Lapierre's *Les Barricades* (2014) and Monique Lachapelle's *L'Origine du monde* (2014).<sup>37</sup> As far as literary fiction in English is concerned, Mordecai Richler's *Joshua Then and Now* (1980) represents the Townships as a pastoral playground for an essentially anglophone rich.<sup>38</sup>

Set in and around Saint-Armand, a Township in the Brome-Missisquoi region, and Eccles Hill, on the border with the United States, *Dixie* is a self-described 'roman sudiste'.<sup>39</sup> As its title suggests, it transposes the atmosphere of the U.S. South to Québec.<sup>40</sup> Like Messier's earlier novel, *Épique* (2010),<sup>41</sup> in which a contemporary story of friendship and love is played out to a soundtrack of big band jazz music favoured by the local radio DJ, music is important, with the banjo occupying a key place. The novel centres around a group of 'Bromisquois' (p. 52) – most of whom are farmers, farmworkers and their children – who gather in Léo Swanson's garage after the discovery of an escaped U.S. convict hiding out on a nearby farm (p. 15). The police are called and arrest the man, but the latter manages to escape a second time when the patrol car crashes on its way to the penitentiary at Cowansville. After swerving to avoid a coyote, the car ends up in la rivière aux Brochets (p. 44). The convict, who is unnamed throughout and referred to only by the descriptor 'le colosse' (p. 44), goes on the run. In the meantime, we learn more about the lives of a seven year-old boy, Gervais Huot, and his family. The two narratives come together again by the end, when Gervais takes his sister Dorothée and her friend Ida to a hideout, where they come across the dead body of the convict. We learn that Gervais's older brother Euchariste had discovered that 'le colosse' had protected Gervais against the coyote and become seriously wounded in the process (pp. 144–5). The brothers supplied the convict with food to last long enough for him to recover or die from his injuries (p. 146). The close of the novel sees a New Orleans style cortege effect an unsanctioned delivery of the body to the dead man's associates on the U.S. side of the border.

On 27 April 2015, Messier met me at the bus stop at l'autoparc 747, situated at a gas and service station at the side of the highway outside Bromont. I had spent the journey preparing for the interview; re-reading sections of *Dixie, Épique* and Messier's anthology of short stories, *Townships* (2009),<sup>42</sup> and noting down possible questions. I was nervous for a number of reasons. Messier is an excellent writer and I felt a little star-struck. I was new to interviewing and worried about making mistakes in my second language. I had also begun to think of myself – if not quite as disabled – as certainly less able than I had been. As Sue Porter reminds us, “‘ability’ is a dynamic definition for all human subjects’.”<sup>43</sup> A serious illness, diagnosed as Lyme Disease in Québec according to my symptoms, but not recognized as such in the U.K. due to a lack of conclusive blood tests, had seen me take a lengthy leave of absence from work, whilst I struggled to overcome memory loss, difficulties with speech, mobility problems, visual disturbances and neuropathic pain. Although returned to considerably better health, I still had some difficulties with memory and speech as well as a slight limp. I tried to remind myself of Phil Smith's challenges to the romantic impulses which inform some of the recent writing on walking: ‘an overriding quality of walking [...] can be its connectedness. But not at the expense of disruption, of tripping up and over, stumbling and righting, of falling’.<sup>44</sup> On my arrival, Messier and I had a short discussion as to how the interview might go. We agreed that he would lead the interview in terms of both choice of location and the direction of the conversation. The author then drove me to the first of two locations he considered important within *Dixie*, pointing out various personal and local landmarks on the way. We parked first on a quiet side road on Eccles Hill and later drove to Saint-Armand.

It was a cool and wet day: on the recording, Messier's words are set against a backdrop of the sounds of falling rain. In the interview, he describes how walking was a part of his preparation for the novel: ‘en faisant mes recherches pour *Dixie*, je me promenais dans

la région'.<sup>45</sup> Phil Jones suggests that there is something about moving through a landscape which 'gives [...] space to the imagination'.<sup>46</sup> This is to do with 'the embodied rhythms of walking'.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the time and effort required for walking facilitate acts like observing, remembering, reflecting, dreaming and imagining. Macfarlane, who self-consciously inscribes his work within various traditions of walking and writing, suggests that paths connect a text to many others: 'the compact between walking and writing is almost as old as literature'.<sup>48</sup>

Although Messier and his family are from the Townships, at the time of writing the novel, the author was living and working in Montreal. In one sense, then, *Dixie* can be seen as a kind of imaginative recovery of the region; similar to Anne Hébert's lyrical invoking of the Lower Saint-Lawrence in works like *Kamouraska* (1970) whilst the author was established in France.<sup>49</sup> Accompanying me through an area which has been important within the life narrative of his family – his uncle has a farm outside Bromont; his parents got married at the church in Saint-Armand – Messier recounted how he drew on some of its geographical features to bring together the U.S. South and Southern Québec: 'en me promenant dans les rues, j'ai eu vite un sentiment de me promener dans les rangs du Mississippi, des chemins d'asphalte, mais pas de trottoirs, en campagne'.<sup>50</sup> In *Épique* and *Townships*, Messier showcases his talent for reimagining his native region in ways which demonstrate a local attachment to place whilst also invoking *l'américanité* of Québécois identity and culture.<sup>51</sup>

The latter can be seen in the diner – a common signifier of North-Americanness – where the conjoined twins work in *Townships*; as well as the humorously apocalyptic backdrop to *Épique*, whose anti-hero cleans up roadkill for a living. This makes a play on the conventions of the road novel; also typically associated with North America; particularly with the U. S. As with Messier's earlier texts, *Dixie* brings together personal, familial, and regional memories, and imagination.<sup>52</sup> The novel gives a sense of the palimpsest in its representation of the village

of Saint-Armand and the surrounding region, with a major theme being the uncovering, or recovery, of elements from the past.

During the interview, Messier guided me through ‘downtown Saint-Armand’;<sup>53</sup> past the general store selling everything from worms to beer, and the church where his parents got married. He and I looked far along a road out of the village, which was strung loosely with telegraph wires. Messier pointed out the direction of a key site within *Dixie*; namely one which held traces of a “Negro Cemetery” (p. 55) in the village. The novel gives us the following description:

de l’autre côté du rang Luke, vers l’ouest, une butte cache un rocher où du monde aurait trouvé des ossements et les restes de baraques de Noirs en excavant la terre. Des gens prétendent qu’ils appartiennent à des anciens esclaves amenés de ce côté-ci des lignes par des Loyalistes au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. (p. 55)

With the possible exception of the Great North, many popular imaginings of Québec’s *hors-Montréal* cast this as an essentially white space.<sup>54</sup> This is typical of Western understandings of the rural which, as Tim Edensor highlights, are frequently associated with whiteness.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, *Dixie* draws attention to the current and past presence of people of colour in this particular area. In addition to the cemetery, there is a reference to a photograph in which the great-uncle of the Huot children is pictured sitting on a rock next to a friend described as having ‘les cheveux crépus et la peau foncée’ (p. 38). There is also Léandre Pelletier, who is characterized as ‘aussi noir qu’une nuit de janvier’ (p. 64), and who teaches the young Gervais Huot the banjo. Pelletier is paid to monitor the comings and goings across the border from his nearby cabin (p. 64). Messier explained to me how preparation for his novel led him to realize that the association he wanted to make between the region and dixieland music was not as stretched as it first appeared:

c’est un hommage à une culture ou un type de production musicale culturelle [...] qui est mariné dans une histoire lourde et difficile [...]. Je voulais reproduire ça jusqu’à un certain point pour ma région. Puis faisant mes recherches, je me suis aperçu que je n’avais pas besoin de reproduire grande chose, que c’était beaucoup là, [...], déjà.



For him, writing about this past brings to light Canada's little-mentioned involvement in slavery: 'on se targue de ne jamais avoir fait ça, alors que les faits historiques disent le contraire'.<sup>56</sup> As such, it represents an active political engagement: 'si je n'ai pas le talent ou la volonté d'être historien puis de mettre ça au grand jour, tout de même dans la fiction, je pourrais m'en servir, y faire allusion. Ce serait ma petite contribution à ça'.<sup>57</sup>

The other key site Messier and I visited was the monument on Eccles Hill to what *Dixie* recalls as the attempted Fenian invasion of 1870 (p. 59). Whilst burying a dead cat, Léo Swanson unearths two guns inscribed with the words 'Red Sashes' (p. 59) – an allusion to the local militia who defended the border against the Irish. A Huot family photograph also references this event, in the disturbing image of soldiers posing with one of the Irish men lying face down on the ground (p. 98) – a reference to a real-life photograph belonging to Brome County Historical Society.<sup>58</sup> The image is reproduced in an illustration – one of a number by Julien Bosseau, which pose as reproductions of Huot family portraits. The invasion is further represented by the Fenian ghost which visits Léandre Pelletier to recount the horror of a woman being killed in front of him (pp. 101–4). Walking to take a look at the monument to the invasion on Eccles Hill, Messier explained how he was struck by the small scale of its memorialization:

c'est sûr qu'ici, il y a bel et bien un monument, mais tu sais, on s'entend que si on enlevait le tas de roches, puis qu'on rasait un peu les structures, ça paraîtrait comme un champ ou un pâturage, là, on pourrait mettre nos vaches ou nos brebis ici, puis ils détonneraient pas.<sup>59</sup>

Like the conversation with Messier, *Dixie* displays a certain 'spectrality'; described by Jacques Derrida as 'what makes the present waver'.<sup>60</sup> However, rather than suggesting the immateriality of all existence, Messier's novel appears to point to multiple layers of histories of collective living in a particular place. As such, it has more in common with Certeau's conception of haunting. In 'Walking in the City', Certeau claims 'haunted places are the only ones people can live in'.<sup>61</sup> Here, he is referring to the way in which places are made habitable

by everyday practices which challenge the panoptical power he identifies with the city. Such practices famously include walking, whose movement cannot be captured: 'it is true that the operations of walking [...] can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths' (p. 97). However, the resulting 'maps' only trace the routes taken by walkers, and not the act of walking itself (p. 97). Whilst Certeau's work on walking has become widely taken up in urban studies, less attention tends to be paid to the claims he makes for memory. Certeau argues that remembering is another, potentially subversive practice which can 'elud[e] urbanistic systemicity'.<sup>62</sup> Although urban spaces share a set of characteristics, such as population density, which cannot be said to be universal, the spread of a kind of 'urbanicity' into non-urban areas offers the possibility of applying urban theories to other kinds of spatial organizations. This is underlined by Cloke, who draws on the globalization of communications to claim that 'most seemingly rural places in the Western world are effectively culturally urbanized'.<sup>63</sup> *Dixie*'s use of memory signals the phantasmagoric aspects of place described by Certeau, but offers a greater sense of social cohesion than that offered by the philosopher.

Another major preoccupation of both Messier's novel and the interview with the author is the border, or frontier. In their work on Canada and the US, Gillian Roberts and David Stirrup refer to 'the heavy presence' of the border which, they suggest, can comprise 'a state of mind', or a 'scar'.<sup>64</sup> The border is ever-present in *Dixie*, which represents it as having a kind of panoptical power: 'ici, la frontière hante les gens comme un œil tout-puissant' (p. 134). Several of the chapters open with a description of its particular characteristics, so that we have 'c'est près des frontières, dans les zones limitrophes, que les passions vibrent le plus fort' (p. 131), and 'la frontière, ce pandémonium! Ce filtre, cette moustiquaire, cette porte-patio!' (p. 153). The authority of the border is signalled in references to '[les] douaniers américains' (p. 14) as well as in the sign marking it, which is inscribed with various warnings

in English (p. 65). However, as with Certeau's urban walkers, visitors to and residents of the region are described as carrying out their own set of untraceable everyday practices which circumvent the mappings of power: 'le long du rang Dutch, des gens louches se faufilent [...] Ils préfèrent souvent les sentiers de motocross aux chemins pavés' (p. 109).

In the interview, Messier described his fascination for the border and its various crossings, highlighting how the border near Eccles Hill subverts several assumptions around the formality and scale of this marker of national limits:

On a l'habitude de passer, d'entrer à la frontière par des grands chemins, mais la frontière, c'est aussi une quantité infinie presque [...] de petits chemins de terre; de petits passages illicites [...] mais finalement l'idée de la frontière entre deux pays est un peu absurde [...]. Sur le chemin d'Eccles Hill, la frontière est tout petite. On [ne] peut pas traverser. Il y a une clôture, mais c'est une clôture qui se ressemble en tous points à la clôture à vaches qu'il y avait sur la ferme chez mes grands-parents.<sup>65</sup>

He goes on to recall how the coyote which appears on several occasions in *Dixie* cuts across the border, highlighting its artificiality. In the novel, the frontier is '[un] lieu de paradoxes' (p. 156). It marks a line of distinction between two legal territories,<sup>66</sup> yet is also a mirror, as represented when the volunteers assisting the police in the search for the escaped thief – a ragbag of drunken 'Bromisquois' (p. 52) for the most part – is met by a very similar group approaching from the opposite direction (p. 56). Similarly, after the dead body of the prisoner is found by Gervais, Dorothée and Ida, it is returned across the border when the Québec cortège – many members of which had originally participated in the manhunt – hands it to a counterpart on the U.S. side (pp. 148–9).

As Roberts and Stirrup highlight, in reference to an article by Grant Stoddard, the border between Canada and the United States is 'arbitrary, artificial, yet culturally significant'.<sup>67</sup> One of the ways in which *Dixie* represents the border as 'culturally significant' is through language use. The novel points to the existence of 'une cartographie orale' (p. 109) which, like Certeau's 'path', challenges and subverts the panoptical 'map'. This oral map is an underground one; associated with clandestine activities (p. 109). It is also likely composed

of a blend of French and English – with elements of other languages – , as might be anticipated of such border, or ‘contact’ zones.<sup>68</sup> In *Dixie*’s opening scene, we are offered various negative or derogatory local responses when the escaped prisoner begins speaking in English: ‘il t’a une langue sale, à part ça! – Yes no toaster, hostie!’ (p. 17). Elsewhere in the novel, however, we have spontaneous examples of code-switching, as in, ‘stop that, gros sacrament!’ (p. 19). During the manhunt for the escaped prisoner, the participants, who are becoming increasingly drunk on moonshine, call ‘Shit de Goddamn! – Saranac! – Eh, Jésus-Fifi!’ (p. 55). There is a trace of Iroquois in ‘saranac’, which is translated as ‘amas d’étoiles’ (p. 20). For his part, Gervais learns from Léandre a song to accompany a musical refrain played on the banjo which is meant to scare away the coyote: ‘please, dégage, incarnation du yâb’ (p. 82). This evokes a Louisiana Creole bound up in a history of slavery and the comingling of African and European languages. Further examples of spontaneous code-switching include the warning Euchariste offers to Gervais when he tries to teach the latter how to make moonshine. He informs his younger brother that he should not listen to those who claim that regular sweetcorn grown for animal fodder is an acceptable ingredient of the drink: ‘on truste pas ce monde-là’ (p. 85). Some of the atmosphere and humour of Messier’s novel comes from an orality that is a part of francophone Québécois culture,<sup>69</sup> which is combined with wisecracking in French and English. This can be seen in an anecdote Euchariste recounts of a smuggling across the border that went wrong when the load fell onto the road: ‘Holy shit que la fille était en tabarnac de l’autre bord. [...] Hank était comme “Hey relax, Sugartits, you know it’s all gonna end up as meat loaf anyway”’ (p. 40).

Of course, this coming together of French and English, with elements of Iroquois and Creole, offers a challenge to conceptions of Québec as composed for the most part of ‘two solitudes’.<sup>70</sup> It should perhaps be acknowledged that the fact that Hank and Eugene are American, rather than anglo-Quebecer or anglo-Canadian makes for a potentially less fraught

social dynamic than might otherwise be the case. All the same, a number of the francophones in *Dixie* are not necessarily of French origin. Like Messier's mother's family, the Huots are figured as having come to Québec from the Netherlands, as suggested by the references to Gervais's maternal great-grandfather, who reinvented himself as a jazz freak after seeing Sidney Bechet in concert in the 1950s (p. 25). Thereafter, Théophile Huot became an aficionado of "oude stijl", described as 'une version hollandaise du jazz dixieland' (p. 25). In this way, *Dixie* reminds us that cultural forms and practices are not homogeneous; that it is possible for them to be both rooted in a particular place and to travel and adapt. '[La] porosité identitaire' (p. 134) is an important theme in the novel, which is often linked to the presence of the border: 'les plus paranoïaques hésitent, ici, à se dire "Québécois", voire "Canadiens", de peur qu'une infime ondulation politique, géographique ou même cartographique ne les envoie un beau jour du côté des États' (p. 134).

As preparation for this article, I asked to meet with Phil Jones to discuss the walking interview. In response to my concerns that pre-selecting locations based on their significance within Messier's novel might have impacted on the discussion I had with the author, reducing its spontaneity, Jones suggested that actual location is less important than the act of walking.<sup>71</sup> In his view, walking in company makes the interview process less intense than one undertaken in controlled conditions and hence more open to the imagination. He described how locations often prompt memories or thoughts of other ones. This is apt when thinking about *Dixie*, which draws on the U.S. south and southern Québec; personal and collective memories. Although it was not a true 'dérive',<sup>72</sup> in that it had a purpose, the walk and discussion with Messier contained elements of the drift or its political heritage; combining play and invention with a voicing of little-acknowledged aspects of the past, which also appear in the author's novel. Bringing together a walking interview and close literary analysis does not offer a simple response to the question of how we are to understand the relation

between material and imagined geographies. However, the process underlines the ways in which the two are always in tension; with dream and imagination playing key roles in our bodily experiencing not only of ‘stone’,<sup>73</sup> but also of sand, water, concrete and so on.

Camlot makes the point that, as so many writers and others travel regularly between the Eastern Townships and Montreal, it is difficult to maintain a clear separation between the two.<sup>74</sup> Whilst the particular comings and goings between the city and the towns, villages and dwellings of the Townships might be specific to that region, the blurring of the boundaries between the rural and the urban is a more widespread phenomenon. As Cloke reminds us, this blurring cannot be understood purely as the imposition of one mode onto another: ‘[it] works in both directions, indicating an urbanization of the rural and (albeit to a lesser extent) a ruralization of the urban’.<sup>75</sup> The renewed attention paid to *hors-Montréal* by several Québécois writers can be seen as participating in a redefinition of spatial and cultural relations which undercut the power and authority of the urban. Of course, this has the potential to give rise to conservative or reactionary narratives which seek to challenge the ethnic diversity which frequently characterizes the city – which, in Québec’s case, is identified with Montreal. Whilst not sharing the degree of diversity of Toronto and Vancouver, Montreal is significantly more mixed than its regional counterparts,<sup>76</sup> with this being particularly true of certain neighbourhoods like Côte-des-Neiges and Parc-Extension. However, novels such as *Dixie*, along with other examples, like Michèle Plomer’s trilogy, *Dragonville*, point to the longstanding presence of non-whites in Québec’s ‘regions’.<sup>77</sup> In so doing, they contribute to an understanding of Québec-ness – and, by implication, national identities in general – as collective, shifting and negotiated; informed by all aspects of their pasts, presents and futures.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Archibald, 'Le Néoterritoir et moi', in *Les Régions à nos portes*, ed. by Pierre Lefebvre (*Liberté*, 295 (avril 2012)), 16–26 (p. 17).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Archibald, *Arvida* (Montreal: Le Quartanier, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Archibald, 'Le Néoterritoir et moi', p. 17 (Archibald's italics).

<sup>4</sup> Mélanie Vincelette, *Polynie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2011); Myriam Caron, *Bleu* (Montreal: Leméac, 2014); Andrée A. Michaud, *Bondrée* (Montreal: Québec/Amérique, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> A. Brian Tanguay claims, 'in the 2007 election, a split between Montreal and the regions over so-called lifestyle issues was a key determinant of voting behaviour, one that yielded enormous electoral benefits for Dumont and the ADQ outside of Montreal'. A. Brian Tanguay, 'Epitaph for a Conservative Insurgency in Quebec: The Rise and Fall – and Rise and Fall – of the Action démocratique du Québec, 1994–2008', in *Conservatism in Canada*, ed. by James Farney and David Rayside (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 317–38 (p. 329).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Chartier, private conversation, October 2015.

<sup>7</sup> This is described as 'composée de jeunes écrivains contemporains caractérisés par une présence forte de la forêt, la représentation de la masculinité, le refus de l'idéalisation et une langue marquée par l'oralité' <oreilletendue.com> [accessed 12 February 2016].

<sup>8</sup> Michael Woods claims that 'the emergence of Rural Geography as a specific line of geographical enquiry spans only the past 30 years or so and might only be thought to have

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“taken off” during the 1980s’. Michael Woods, Foreword, *Rural Geography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Sage, 2011), pp. xi–xii (p. xi).

<sup>9</sup> During the welcoming remarks at the A Suburban Revolution? conference at York University, Ontario in 2013, Roger Keil claimed that if the twentieth century was identified with urbanization, the twenty-first century would be associated with suburbanisation. Roger Keil, A Suburban Revolution? Conference, York University, Ontario, 27–8 September 2013. Tim Edensor describes how ‘regional’ British lifestyle publications like *Cheshire Life* ‘feature and blur the boundaries between rural and suburban’. Tim Edensor, ‘Performing Rurality’, in *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, pp. 484–95 (p. 490). This kind of smudging is already highlighted in Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*: ‘there is a wide range of settlements between the traditional poles of country and city: suburb, dormitory town, shanty town, industrial estate’. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), p. 1. First published 1973.

<sup>10</sup> William S. Messier, *Dixie* (Montreal: Marchand de feuilles, 2013). Subsequent references to this work will be given in the body of the article.

<sup>11</sup> Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Cloke, ‘Conceptualizing Rurality’, in *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, ed. by Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden and Patrick Mooney (London: Sage, 2006), pp. 18–28 (p. 25).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jennie Middleton, ‘Walking the City: the Geographies of Everyday Pedestrian Practices’, *Geography Compass*, 5:2 (2011), 90–105; *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*, ed. by Tina Richardson (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); *Walking, Writing and Performance: Autobiographical Texts by Deirdre Heddon, Carl Lavery and Phil Smith*, ed. by Roberta Mock (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009).



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- <sup>15</sup> Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 62–6. First published 1956; Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Randall (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1984), pp. xi–xxiv. First published 1980.
- <sup>16</sup> Nigel Thrift, 'Driving in the City', in *Non-Representational Theory: Space/Politics/Affect* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 75–88; John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 65.
- <sup>17</sup> Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Granta, 2002); Will Self, *Psychogeography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).
- <sup>18</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Viking, 2000); Robert E. Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012).
- <sup>19</sup> Rosana Cade, 'Walking: Holding' (2011–present).
- <sup>20</sup> Roberta Mock, 'Introduction: It's (Not Really) All about Me, Me, Me', in *Walking, Writing and Performance*, pp. 7–23 (p. 14).
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> John Wylie, 'A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the Southwest Coast Path', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30:2 (2005), 234–47 (p. 234).
- <sup>23</sup> Susan Bruce, informal feedback on draft of article, January 2016. Thanks to Susan and to Scott McCracken for their comments on an earlier version of this piece.
- <sup>24</sup> James Evans and Phil Jones, 'The Walking Interview: Methodology, Mobility and Place', *Applied Geography* 31 (2011), 849–58 (p. 849).
- <sup>25</sup> Kathy Battista and others point out that cities are to be understood in terms of their positioning within multiple, and simultaneous, temporalities. Kathy Battista, Brandon LaBelle, Barbara Penner, Steve Pile and Jane Rendell, 'Exploring "an Area of Outstanding Unnatural Beauty": a Treasure Hunt around Kings Cross, London', *Cultural Geographies*, 12 (2005), 429–62 (p. 439).

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<sup>26</sup> Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Louise Penny, *Still Life* (London: Headline, 2005), *Dead Cold* (London: Headline, 2006), *The Cruellest Month* (London: Headline, 2007), *The Murder Stone* (London: Headline, 2008), *The Brutal Telling* (London: Headline, 2009), *Bury Your Dead* (London: Sphere, 2010), *A Trick of the Light* (New York: Minotaur Books, 2011), *Dead Cold* (London: Sphere [2011]), *The Beautiful Mystery* (New York: Minotaur Books, 2012), *How the Light Gets In* (New York: Minotaur Books, 2013), *The Long Way Home* (New York: Minotaur Books, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Guy Laperrrière, *Les Cantons-de-l'Est* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), pp. 25–6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.140.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> John Canning, private conversation, August 2014. Bill 101, The Charter of the French Language (1977), made French the sole official language of Québec.

<sup>34</sup> Will Straw, 'Some Things a Scene Might Be', *Cultural Studies*, 29:3 (2015), 476–85 (p. 479).

<sup>35</sup> Jason Camlot, private conversation, April 2015; Steve Luxton, interview, April 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Johanne Seymour, *Le Cri du cerf* (Outremont: Libre expression, 2005), *Le Cercle des pénitents* (Montreal: Libre expression, 2007), *Le Défilé des mirages* (Montreal: Libre expression, 2008), *Vanités* (Montreal: Libre expression, 2010), *Eaux fortes* (Montreal: Libre expression, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Hélène Lapierre, *Les Barricades* (Montreal: Québec/Amérique, 2014); Monique Lachapelle, *L'Origine du monde* (Montreal: Annika Parance éditeur, 2014).

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<sup>38</sup> Mordecai Richler, *Joshua Then and Now* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980).

<sup>39</sup> Book cover, *Dixie*.

<sup>40</sup> William S. Messier describes how Faulkner is an important influence on his work.

Interview, 27 April 2015.

<sup>41</sup> William S. Messier, *Épique* (Montreal: Marchand de feuilles, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> William S. Messier, *Townships: récits d'origine* (Montreal: Marchand de feuilles, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Sue Porter, 'Walking in Someone Else's Shoes', "'Walking" Studies Today' workshop, Keele University, 26 May 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Phil Smith, *On Walking... and Stalking Sebald: A Guide to Going beyond Wandering around Looking at Stuff* (Axminster, Devon: Triarchy Press, 2014), p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with William S. Messier, 27 April 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Phil Jones, private conversation, August 2015.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Anne Hébert, *Kamouraska* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

<sup>50</sup> Interview, April 2015.

<sup>51</sup> *Épique* contains the finely observed description of 'l'homme qui loue le bungalow situé en plein centre de la plaine' who speaks with 'son drôle d'accent anglophone qui le fait féminiser comme par précaution tous les mots qu'il prononce' (p. 49).

<sup>52</sup> When I mentioned to Messier in an earlier interview that I had difficulty understanding some of the expressions in the novel, he explained that this was not surprising, in that he had used some which were invented and used by his family. Interview with William S. Messier, August 2014, Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, Concordia University, Montreal.

<sup>53</sup> Interview, 27 April 2015.

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<sup>54</sup> For example, most representations of Quebec City identify this with whiteness, as Bill Marshall highlights. Bill Marshall, *The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 170. This is despite the fact that the city has historically been one of the poles of immigration to North America.

<sup>55</sup> Tim Edensor, 'Performing Rurality', in *The Handbook of Rural Studies*, pp. 484–95 (p. 485).

<sup>56</sup> Interview, 27 April 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Interview, 27 April 2015.

<sup>58</sup> The photograph is reproduced in Hereward Senior, *The Last Invasion of Canada: the Fenian Raids, 1866–1870* (Toronto: Dundurn Press in collaboration with the Canadian War Museum, Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991). Thanks to Steve Hewitt for drawing this to my attention.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, 27 April 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by P. Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 38. First published 1993. Cited in Tom Lewis, in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'*, ed. by Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 134–67 (p. 139).

<sup>61</sup> Certeau, 'Walking in the City', p. 108.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>63</sup> Cloke, 'Conceptualizing Rurality', p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> Gillian Roberts and David Stirrup, 'Introduction: Culture at the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel: Nationalism, Indigeneity, and the Hemispheric', in *Parallel Encounters: Culture and the Canada-US Border*, ed. by Gillian Roberts and David Stirrup (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), pp. 1–24 (p. 11, p. 19, p. 22).

<sup>65</sup> Interview, 27 April 2015.

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<sup>66</sup> Gillian Roberts reminds us that ‘the Canada-US border testifies to colonial history, cutting across tribal lands, and acts as a reminder that nation-state citizenship is not simply a straightforward guarantee of rights but also, in the context of Indigenous peoples, part of an imposed colonial political system’. Gillian Roberts, *Discrepant Parallels: Cultural Implications of the Canada-U.S. Border* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), p. 126.

<sup>67</sup> Roberts and Stirrup, *Parallel Encounters*, p. 4. Grant Stoddard, ‘The Lost Canadians’, *The Walrus*, 81 (2011), 24–31.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992). Pratt defines ‘contact zones’ as ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today’ (p. 4).

<sup>69</sup> Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani refers to Roxanne Bouchard’s use of orality in her fiction. Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani, “‘Le ‘je/jeu’ intertextuel’”: Textual Interplay and Intertextual Identity in Roxanne Bouchard’s *Whisky et paraboles*’, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 28:2 (2015), 225–47 (p. 228, p. 231).

<sup>70</sup> Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Collins, 1945).

<sup>71</sup> Conversation with Phil Jones, August 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Debord describes the ‘dérive’ in the following terms: ‘in a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there’. Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive’, p. 62.

<sup>73</sup> Cloke, ‘Conceptualizing Rurality’, p. 25

<sup>74</sup> Jason Camlot, private conversation, April 2015.

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<sup>75</sup> Cloke, 'Conceptualizing Rurality', p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> A National Household Survey of 2011 offers the following picture in relation to percentages of foreign born – a self-identifying category used by the Canadian government – residents of the country's three largest cities. 46% of Toronto residents defined themselves as such, compared with 40% in Vancouver and 22.6% in Montreal.

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm>

[accessed 27 August 2015].

<sup>77</sup> Michèle Plomer, *Dragonville* (Montreal: Marchand de feuilles, 2011–13).