A(r)cadie heureuse? Space, Place, and Engaged Pastoral in Zachary Richard's *Feu.*

Rachel A. Paparone
Ithaca College

Cajun musician, poet, and activist Zachary Richard is a vocal advocate for the revival of the Cajun French language and for the preservation of the environment. In his 2001 collection of poetry, *Feu* ('Fire'), Richard unites three themes that initially seem distinct: the promotion of Cajun French as his community's native language, the exploration and memorialization of his Acadian roots, and environmental exploitation.[1] On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that throughout the collection Richard frames energy production as an act of imperial aggression, thus aligning the historical persecution of the Acadians and the linguistic and cultural marginalization of the Cajuns with resource appropriation in Francophone North America. He therefore claims his place in the pantheon of North American writers who have "made pastoral serve their own counterhegemonic ends" (Buell, *Imagination* 63).

By foregrounding issues of identity in an environmentally engaged context, Richard deconstructs the idea that the North American continent was an Arcadian land of abundance, an idea that helped drive imperial expansion in North America and thus played a large role in shaping the Acadian and Cajun experience. In doing so, Richard problematizes the use of pastoral rhetoric to promote and install colonial regimes. An ecocritical reading of this collection may seem unorthodox, since Richard clearly engages heavily with issues of post-diasporic identity. And yet, diaspora is fundamentally an issue of displacement, and so grappling with identity in the wake of diaspora must encompass issues of place or, more accurately, lack thereof. Approaching the collection through an ecocritical lens thus elucidates the relationship between geographical and social marginalization.

The result of this poetic merger between geographical and social marginalization foregrounds the experiences of victims of political and corporate imperialism. By refocusing the reader's attention onto populations, landscapes, and histories marginalized as Europeans struggled to maintain influence in North America, Richard creatively intervenes in the typically static hegemonic narrative of resource domination in North America, thereby forcing a reevaluation of what it means to occupy physical and rhetorical space, an issue that has been seen as central to the modernization of the pastoral genre (Saunders 4).

Tales of Acadie: *Evangeline,* Pastoral, and the Cajunization of the Acadians

In order to appreciate how Richard deconstructs pastoral representations of North America and how his engagement with the pastoral mode enriches an understanding of his work, it is important to consider the cumulative impact of pastoral rhetoric on the Cajun community. Any discussion of pastoral poetry in Cajun literature must therefore first recognize the influence of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 epic poem *Evangeline*: *A Tale of Acadie* on the Cajun collective identity, and indeed the entire Cajun experience, since *Evangeline* had a significant impact on the cultural and economic development of southwest Louisiana (Ancelet, "Evangeline Hot Sauce").

When Longfellow selected the *Grand Dérangement* 'Great Upheaval' as the historical moment in which to set his epic, the expulsion was already a distant memory to Americans, many of whom had largely forgotten that nearly 10,000 Acadians had been rounded up by the British and dispersed throughout the Atlantic world less than a century prior (Hebert-Leiter 20). Longfellow's romantic epic, in which Evangeline is separated from her betrothed during the deportation, romanticized the horror of what John Mack Faragher has called possibly the first episode of systematic ethnic cleansing in North America (xix). Longfellow's use of pastoral imagery in casting *Acadie* 'Acadia' and Louisiana as lost Edens contributed to the romanticization of the expulsion.[2] Not coincidentally, the epic's publication coincides with the American expansion into Western territories, a movement that sought to narrow and centralize the nascent American identity as much as it promoted the acquisition new national territory. As one of the principal Cajun origin myths (Brasseaux, *In Search* 7) whose conception is contemporaneous with the delegitimization of the Cajun language and culture, *Evangeline* thus provides an excellent historical framework for understanding the exploitative by-product of pastoral rhetoric with which Richard engages.

Evangeline's importance to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans' understanding of Louisiana cannot be overstated since it led to the simultaneous idealization and marginalization of an entire community (Johnston 107). After all, the poem's pastoral representations of Louisiana, as well as its romanticized depictions of Acadians and Cajuns, have drawn travelers and tourists to Nova Scotia and to Louisiana since its publication (Hebert-Leiter 33).[3] Enormously successful, *Evangeline* provided a literary complement to the sources Longfellow consulted during his research, which Murray Hill points out were almost entirely prose depictions of western territories intended to entice American pioneers (Hill 163-66). Evangeline's tragic separation from Gabriel on the day of their marriage and her cross-country search for her exiled lover romanticized the plight of the Acadians while simultaneously casting the two protagonists as the embodiment of Manifest Destiny (Hebert-Lieter 26). Evangeline's sojourn in

Louisiana provides a clear illustration of Leo Marx's contention that the pastoral landscape was easily identified in North America, which was "a place apart, secluded from the world – a peaceful, lovely, classless, bountiful pasture" (116).

The poem was so influential that even the descendants of the deportees memorialize the diaspora through *Evangeline*. Carl Brasseaux points out that the story of Evangeline and Gabriel became a veritable "origin myth" albeit a "flawed one, since it originated outside of the culture instead of developing as the folks themselves sought self-definition" (*In Search* 7). Thanks to *Evangeline* and the cultural impact of the best-seller and its illustrations, Louisiana was fixed in the mind of Americans as a landscape that "bore a strong resemblance to an idealized rural England" (Johnston 110). This is, of course, a gross misrepresentation of the subtropical Louisiana climate, and travelers to Louisiana were instead confronted by the reality of a geographically varied landscape and an ethnically diverse population. The fact that Longfellow's poetic creation bore little resemblance to reality culminated in A.R. Waud's 1866 *Harper's Weekly* sketch titled "Washing Day among the Acadians on Bayou Lafourche" (Fig. 1). Waud's depiction of Acadians conveyed to the Victorian American reader a society characterized by indolence and loose moral values yet highlights the natural beauty of the landscape (Brasseaux, *Acadian* 101). In a relatively short span of time, the Acadians had gone from symbolizing the very essence of Manifest Destiny to representing the dregs of American society.

Figure 1: A.R. Waud, "Washing Day among the Acadians on Bayou lafourche" Harper's Weekly, 20 October 1866

Evangeline can therefore be understood as belonging to a broader nineteenth-century tradition that used rhetorical and literary representations of the land that—whether intentional or not—contributed to the marginalization of non-Anglo populations. Edward Watts argues that Anglo conquest of North America was primarily fueled by rhetoric, and often one that relied heavily on the pastoral. By relegating the French to an American prehistory, proponents of Anglo expansion locked French inhabitation of the Illinois and Louisiana territories into an Edenic past, which was "one of the most efficient techniques of idealization and, hence, exclusion" (Watts 66). Watts maintains that the French claim to land was systematically delegitimized by nineteenth-century rhetoricians, who suggested that the seemingly indolent French lifestyle, as well as the ability to coexist with Native American inhabitants, undermined French whiteness.[4]

The transformation of the Acadians to Cajuns, which relegated Cajuns to the bottom of the complexly stratified Louisiana social hierarchy (Brasseaux, *Acadian* 8) coincided with the delegitimization and assimilation of other minority populations in the United States. By the twentieth century, the marginalization of the French speaking Cajuns coincided with a national move toward cultural integration. The national drive to eliminate cultural and linguistic difference meant that entire generations of Cajuns saw their native language as a "sign of cultural illegitimacy" (Ancelet, "Problem" 345). At the same time, it was widely accepted that the French American disinclination toward systematic commodification of the land suggested a genetic unfitness that justified land appropriation by resource extraction companies. Industrial corporations could easily delegitimize the local population's claim to their own land, excluding them from any meaningful participation in determining the best use of their resources, consequently perpetuating the same exploitative practices that imperial forces used to physically alter the demography of North America.

Deconstructing A(r)cadie

Evangeline continues to impact the residents of Southwest Louisiana to this day, since it heavily shapes the "imaginary space in which they reside" (Hebert-Lieter 21). The case of *Evangeline* is merely one example of the important role of rhetoric in the continued disenfranchisement of the Acadians, and indeed the majority of French-speaking North Americans. After the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and the Louisiana Purchase (1803), which effectively ended French imperial presence in North America, to be Francophone North American meant to be treated as a second-class citizen and often meant eviction from one's land. By undermining French whiteness—a phenomenon seen throughout the United States and Canada—Anglo Americans could more easily claim desirable farmland in former French territories. Francophone North American poetry and music that aim to revalorize

cultural and linguistic practices that were marginalized for several centuries therefore often emphasize the importance of land to identity.

Richard's work is no exception, since land and identity in his poetry are so intricately connected as to be indistinguishable. His collective body of work includes four collections of poetry, twenty-three albums, two documentaries, and several children's books. *Feu*, published in 2001, is Richard's second collection of poems and is divided into four distinct parts: "Feu," "Arrangements pour la catastrophe" ('Arrangements for the catastrophe'), "Français d'Amérique" ('American French'), and "Un à la traine" ('One lags behind'). While each section ostensibly treats a different theme, the impact of imperial expansion on identity, and the rhetoric that drove it, forms a central motif. Throughout his collection, Richard establishes pre-expulsion Acadie as the collection's Arcadian space while also focusing on his ancestors' expulsion from Acadie, thus calling into question the long tradition of using pastoral rhetoric to promote imperial expansion.[5] It is important to note, as well, that while Richard focuses on his own Acadian roots, many of his poems also engage with the marginalization experienced by French-speaking Québécois, thus creating a pan-North American Francophone experience of marginalization. By recentering the historically marginalized French-speaking North Americans as well as the *Grand Dérangement*, as the expulsion came to be known, Richard calls attention to the artifice of Arcadian imagery, ultimately refusing to idealize his community's origins. He thus shifts the reader's focus onto the Acadian experience while simultaneously destroying the myth of possible return to an Acadian past.

In order to call into question the tradition of using pastoral rhetoric to promote imperial expansion, Richard must confront his community's expulsion from Nova Scotia. After all, Acadie was the first French territory gained by Anglo North Americans, a move toward imperial expansion that would continue until only Québec remained of the once vast Francophone community in North America. This moment of rupture from the homeland was, by all accounts, a traumatic event: when the Acadians were deported in 1755, kinship networks and communities were separated and distanced, crops were seized, and homes were burned. Some families and communities were eventually reunited, but the tragedy of exile and death—some historians estimate that almost half of the Acadian population died during deportation—looms large in the Cajun psyche.

In many of his poems, Richard acknowledges and explores the difficulties that arise when the site of identity is located in a country that no longer exists outside the imagination of the exile's descendants (*Feu* 71). In doing so, he creates a collection that memorializes his ancestors' suffering, thus engaging in the same sort of witnessing that frequently characterizes art created by descendants of diaspora. This act, which Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory, is something akin to memory and is typical of second-generation survivors of persecution who are

separated from the "locus of origin" by a "radical break of unknowable and incomprehensible persecution." She points out that this break is "impossible to bridge" (420).[6] For Hirsch, postmemory is an act of remembering in which the connection to the past is mediated through "imaginative investment and creation" (420).

In this same vein, Richard's poem "Terre" ('Earth') paints a portrait of an individual grappling with the effects of his community's marginalization. The poet reminds us, for example, that his ancestral land is nowhere: not in Louisiana, nor in the USA, nor in Acadie, nor in France. The result in this poem of such profound displacement is a sense of malaise that negatively colors the poet's Acadianity, such as when he calls himself "le Quasimodo acadien" (32) 'the Acadian Quasimodo' or when he writes that "être Acadien comme être alcoolique / une catastrophe dont on aimerait / bien se débarasser" (31) 'being Acadian is like being an alcoholic / a catastrophe of which you'd like / to be able to rid yourself.' Alcoholism, at least in this collection, functions as a frequent effect of displacement and is referred to progressively as "le destin acadien" (32) 'Acadian destiny,' "le suicide acadien" (31) 'Acadian suicide,' and "le cancer des Acadiens" (134) 'the Acadians' cancer.'

Richard suggests that excessive drinking is in fact a quest for oblivion, and yet through his poems he paradoxically accomplishes an act of witnessing that memorializes his community's suffering. Richard reminds the reader that "rien ne résiste à l'oubli / sauf l'imaginaire" (30) 'nothing resists being forgotten / except the imagination.' Given that the site of origin is absent, the act of remembering in "Terre" is necessarily a work of imagination, one that here seems to cast Acadie as lost paradise. While in Richard's collective body of work Louisiana is often an Arcadian representation of the beloved homeland, this stanza from *Terre* ('Earth') posits it as the antipode of both France and Acadie:[7]

Il fait encore chaud dans ce maudit pays de buveurs.
mais à Belle-Île-en-Mer, il fait frais, et
à Grand-Pré la récolte est rentrée.
Là-bas les arbres des coteaux s'habillent en rouge sang
appelant la neige à venir. (32)

It's still hot in this damned country of drunks.
but in Belle-Île-en-Mer, it's cool, and
in Grand-Pré, the harvest is in.
There the coastal trees are dressed in blood red
heralding the coming snows.

In contrast to Louisiana's characterization as a hot, damned country of drunks, Grand-Pré and France are cool, refreshing, and marked by abundance. Here, Richard transitions the reader from the previous laments of his "destin acadien" 'Acadian destiny' to the conclusion of the poem, which identifies exile as the cause for lamentation. True to pastoral form, the stanza cited above offers temporary respite from the emotionally fraught verses that precede it and the more introspective verses that follow. The pastoral function is compounded by the probable reference to iconic Acadian painter Claude Picard's 1993 painting, *L'Acadie heureuse* ('Fortunate Acadia') (Fig. 2), which was commissioned by a museum in Belle-Île-en-Mer, a small island off the coast of France where some Acadians took refuge after the expulsion.[8] The painting depicts the hay harvest, and while the figures are hard at work, the efforts of their labors are overshadowed by the couple in the foreground, obviously at rest, and the woman pausing to interact with a cat. The bucolic scene clearly idealizes the backbreaking labor required to harvest sufficient hay by hand. As A.J.B. Johnston points out, Picard, along with other late twentieth-century artists, communicates to the viewer that "*l'ancienne Acadie* was a time and a place that enjoyed wonderful weather, abundant agricultural productivity, and a happy and carefree existence" (122-23). By referencing such iconic pastoral paintings of Acadie, Richard allows for a brief nostalgic retreat to an idealized past.

Figure 2: Claude Picard, L'Acadie heureuse, 1993

Still, Richard never strays toward regressive fantasy, a charge often leveled at the pastoral genre (Buell, *Imagination* 33). Such idyllic representations of Acadie, and the nostalgia that they evoke, is ultimately interrupted by the specter of exile, intensifying the misfortune of the Acadians. Nor is Richard's representation of Acadie unequivocally Edenic, as evidenced in this stanza by his

reference to blood-red leaves that herald the coming snow. A simple reading of his imagery reminds the reader that winters were long and harsh for early colonials; delve further into the metaphor and it seems plausible that Richard foreshadows the trauma of the *Grand Dérangement* at the hands of the British, clad in their iconic red coats.[9] Richard's retreat to an idealized past is therefore not a retreat at all in the sense that he might seek to avoid the complexities of the present, but instead indicates a willingness to deconstruct notions of Arcadia that persist within the Acadian/Cajun collective memory.

Furthermore, Richard repeatedly calls attention to the artifice of Arcadian representations of the homeland by undermining any tendency toward idealization. In "7 août" ('August 7') for example, Richard again tempers pastoral tendencies, this time by consciously revealing the artifice of such idealization. Describing his arrival in Acadie, he writes:[10]

> Arrivée à Caraquet sous un ciel
> Bleu comme si ç'avait été peinturé
> Frais d'hier ou d'aujourd'hui,
> La peinture encore pas sèche.
> Vent du sud doux et par-dessous les maisons
> Drapeau français avec l'étoile de l'Acadie
> Dans le coin.
> Baie des Chaleurs calme,
> Goéland volant de son plaisir. (87)
>
> Arrived in Caraquet under a sky
> So blue it might have been freshly painted
> Yesterday or today,
> The paint still hasn't dried.
> Gentle south wind and above the houses
> French flag with the Acadian star
> In the corner.
> The Baie des Chaleurs calms,
> A seagull flying for his own pleasure.[11]

The "freshly painted" blue sky, the calm winds, and the seagull flying only for pleasure both stand in stark contrast to the Louisiana landscape that he has just left, which he describes as "trop chaud pour / Ce début d'août, les arbres / Fatigués par la chaleur de juillet. / Les feuilles jaunies" (75) 'too hot for / The beginning of August, trees / wilted by the July heat. / Yellowed leaves.' Yet the poet's emphasis on paint and painting reminds the reader that, like Picard's paintings, this is simply an artistic representation of Acadie, one that speaks more to the imagination than

to reality. By repeatedly referring to Acadie in terms of painting, Richard draws attention to its artifice; not only is Acadie an artistic construction, but the poet can only access artistic representations of the mythical homeland, impeding any meaningful return to his community's identified place of origin. The promise of restoration is ultimately unfulfilled, and like Arcadia, Richard's Acadie remains a mere poetic construction, a notion that is reinforced in the poem "8 août" ('August 8') with the admission that the idyllic scenes and the semblance of harmony between French and English that the poet encounters are "même pas vrai" 'not even true' (88).

More so than in other sections of the collection, in *Arrangements pour la catastrophe* Richard repeatedly insists on the violence of the *Grand Dérangement*, therefore creating a layered memory that memorializes his ancestor's suffering while also creating a lack of "before" in the reader's mind, as if the violence of rupture is enough to impede any meaningful representation of pre-expulsion Acadie.[12] By focusing on the moment of his community's rupture from their ancestral homeland and not on their experience before being exiled, Richard exposes the mythical nature of Arcadia. Indeed, Richard does not provide a description of what pre-expulsion life may have been like for his ancestors, and so a concrete image of Arcadian space is largely absent from the collection. Instead, the reader is invited to participate in the creation of pre-expulsion Acadie, thus individualizing the experience. The participatory effect of such a technique in turn indicates the true nature of Arcadian Acadie: a space that indeed exists only in imagination, but through which the community is reunited, even if only rhetorically. The poet's persistent longing for Acadie and the inability to reconcile myth with reality underscores the illusory nature of European dreams of Arcadia, dreams that nevertheless shaped geopolitical space in North America and altered the fate of countless non-Anglo inhabitants of the continent.

Refuting Hegemonic Narratives of Environmental Exploitation

The impact of historical events on personal and collective identity is a prominent theme throughout Richard's work. At the same time, he frequently calls attention to environmental destruction. A well-known environmental activist, his poetry, like his music, often calls attention to the destructive impact of human activity on the Gulf Coast ecosystem.[13] After all, the Louisiana Gulf Coast is disappearing at an alarming rate, and coastal erosion resulting from severe weather events and resource extraction in the region exposes the inhabitants of Southern Louisiana to the constant threat of a second exile, this time spurred by climate change. Likewise, contemporary Québécois society—and its important here to note that Richard divides his time between Louisiana and Montréal—maintains a complicated relationship with hydropower, the development of which arguably

contributed to the strengthening of Québécois cultural autonomy but also to the further marginalization of indigenous populations living on desirable land. It would therefore be difficult—and indeed nearly impossible—to separate identity and place in Richard's collection and reductive to claim that he equates environment with setting.

Throughout *Feu,* Richard challenges the hegemonic paradigm of resource development, reminding us that imperial and corporate expansion were, and are, both motivated by the drive to acquire material resources and accumulate wealth. By bringing the exploitation of marginalized societies to the forefront of his poem "Mon Royal" ('My Royal'), Richard evokes the same "betrayed Eden" (Buell, *Endangered* 37) revived in mid-century American environmental literature. The mythological, pristine garden that fueled "escapist fantasies of inexhaustible natural beauty" (Buell, *Endangered* 37) is in fact marred by technological and economic progress.[14] No paradise this, only the evocation of a landscape and way of life poisoned by "sperme électrique" 'electric sperm' (Richard 118). The deconstruction of pastoral modes of representation thus prepares the reader for the apocalyptic imagery that he uses to challenge progressive narratives of resource exploitation. Accordingly, the poem "Mon Royal" provides the ideal space for considering the possibilities of pastoral for social and environmental engagement.

The poem begins in the pastoral mode, luring the reader into a false sense of calm by evoking the abundant wilderness of Francophone North America:

> Mon Royal de mon cœur
> gros fleuve artère qui coule
> à travers l'Amérique
> Capillaires dans tous les sens
> rivières et ruisseaux qui donnent
> aux Illinois jusqu'au Nord-Manitoba (115)
>
> Mon Royal of my heart
> giant arterial river that flows
> across America
> Capillaries every which way
> rivers and streams that lead
> from Illinois country to North Manitoba

This opening stanza is anchored in a vision of North America that, like Richard's Acadie, must be recreated imaginatively. On the one hand, this can be read as a quintessentially American pastoral landscape, since it evokes the American primeval forests so beloved by pre-industrial writers. Richard frames this landscape with a metaphor designed to convey comfort, and the comparison between rivers

and the circulatory system relies on associations between the land and the life-giving mother. This stanza, then, allows the poet to temporarily return to the source of life and anchor himself in the landscape, and by activating a sense of place-belonging, Richard can begin to activate environmental concern in subsequent stanzas.

Here again, Richard strays toward idealization while simultaneously calling into question hegemonic narratives. On the one hand, the landscape is associated with comfort and creation, but behind this idealized representation lurks another association: the opening verse "Mon Royal de mon cœur" calls to mind the elevated language of odes or sonnets, suggesting that this is poetry for an elite class with elevated sensibilities. On the other hand, the reader can't help but remember that the Saint-Laurent was the principal waterway by which French explorers and *coureurs des bois* 'woodsmen' accessed the interior of North America, thus facilitating the establishment of an empire that ultimately sought to subjugate the land and the people living there.[15] The poem's first stanza thus creates a false sense of comfort, and the vast expanses of North America should not be read as an example of a simple pastoral landscape, intended only to provide temporary repose. By situating the poetic voice within an oasis of wilderness in the center of Quebec's largest urban landscape, Richard ultimately impedes full immersion in the wild landscape that opens the poem. Instead, the poetic gaze is pulled back from the pastoralized landscape, forcing more meaningful engagement with the social and environmental exploitation that characterized first imperial expansion and then large-scale corporate resource development.

From the vantage point of pastoralized urban space, Richard lulls the reader into a temporary state of repose, rendering even more shocking the violence of the remainder of the poem. In the next stanza, Richard engages full-force with the exploitative practices of corporate energy producers, immediately reorienting the reader toward the urban. Any hope of renewal from the pastoral landscape introduced in the first stanza is arrested by the first verse of the second stanza: "Mon Royal de mon cul" 'Mon Royal of my ass,' forms a clear counterpoint to the first stanza's "Mon Royal de mon cœur." Such an abrupt change of tone checks against what Marx calls our "susceptibility to idyllic fantasies" (Marx 23), resituating the poetic space within that of the vulgar and popular. In doing so, Richard represents a democratized space from which the voice of the masses, through the poet/spokesperson, can counter hegemonic narratives of resource acquisition. Richard leaves no doubt about how to interpret the new landscape: this is "Mon Royal de mon cul" and we are no longer in Mon Royal park, but instead looking down with the poet from the "penthouse du diable" 'the devil's penthouse,' taking in a city that has been corrupted by the "maladie électrique de la fin de siècle" 'the turn of the century's electric illness.' The inextricable relationship between

political, sexual, and corporate power relies on the age-old metaphor of imperial expansion as an act of sexual aggression.

Richard also links resource extraction to sexual exploitation in the poem "Feu Infâme" ('Shameful fire'), and the thematic similarities between "Feu Infâme" and "Mon Royal" merit exploration. In this poem, Richard frames resource extraction in terms of violent rape, and the "feu infâme" is sparked by the shameful sexual act. The poet, who speaks in the first person, addresses an undefined "tu" 'you,' which can be read as either a woman, since 'tu' has female sexual organs, or metaphorically as the earth. This conflation between woman and earth is defined in terms of resources, such as when the poet writes "la pointe de ma bite / Frottait contre tes ovaires. Silex, / charbon. Calciné. / frotter pierre contre pierre" (34) 'the tip of my dick / scraped against your ovaries. Silica, / coal. Burnt to cinders. / scraping rock against rock.' The woman/earth is identified as the object of desire several verses later, a desire that leads to natural disaster:

> Le 17 septembre dans le marais
> Un tuyau de gaz a explosé,
> Gazoduc allumette de dieu ou du diable
> Le creux de la flamme plus haut que les poteaux de telephone
> Les oiseaux
> Sont venus, attirés par ce pilier de Moïse,
> Et ils tombaient,
> Asphyxiés dans ce fossé de feu
> Le bleu du ciel taché par ce nuage noir
> L'espoir d'aimer brûlé, carbonisé.
> Ton nom sur mes lèvres devenues brasier. (35)

> September 17 in the bayou
> A gas pipe exploded
> God or the devil's pipeline match
> Flames higher than telephone poles
> Birds
> Came, attracted by Moses's pillar,
> And they fell
> Asphyxiated in this fiery grave
> The blue sky stained by this black cloud
> All hope of love burned, charred,
> Your name on my lips-turned-inferno.

In this stanza, Richard recognizes rural space as a site of production, eschewing tendencies toward pastoral idealization. Instead, he laments environmental destruction as one would lament a lost lover.

And yet paradoxically, his portrayal here of the "marais" 'bayou' destroyed by industrialization allows for what Buell refers to as a the "embodiment of toxic concern" (*Writing* 55), which in the vein of Williams's complex pastoral allows rural space to function as a point from which to engage critically with otherwise accepted cultural practices. As Buell points out in a different context, corporate dominance and its practices are so often diffused through time and space—and here we should recall Rob Nixon's similar observation in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2)—that the toxicity of these practices become "manifest only through [their] impact—emotional as well as physical—on particular bodies, families, places" (*Writing* 56). The image of the birds irresistibly drawn to their death reminds the reader of the collateral damage of resource extraction, and yet at the same time it creates a parallel between humans and the non-human victims of noxious practices driven by the human desire for resources; after all, our society seems to be utterly incapable of weaning ourselves from noxious consumption of fossil fuels, to our great detriment. The startling image of birds drawn to "ce pilier de Moïse" 'Moses's pillar' opposes natural elements with the dominant western religious traditions, traditions that are often accused of being anti-nature. By using the first person "je" and linking desire for the female "tu" with desire for the earth's resources, Richard invites us to consider the impact of our desires on our environment, much as Buell states that "by contemplating that impact [of toxic corporate practices] that pattern hegemony can be questioned, even if not controlled" (*Writing* 56).

Richard's equation of resource exploitation with sexual exploitation suggests that "Mon Royal" and "Feu Infâme" ultimately engage with excessive commodification. In the penultimate stanza of "Mon Royal," Richard conflates imperial expansion and resource exploitation, challenging established power dynamics by portraying the Queen of England as a prostitute:

> Sexe, man, c'est toute une histoire de sexe,
> chatte et pine. Who's fucking whom?
> la reine d'Angleterre n'est qu'une vieille conne
> Man, bonne pour sucer comme elle manque de dents.
> un bon numéro dans un bar de strip dans la rue Papineau,
> on en parle encore, de sa couronne croche et
> De ses gencives couvertes de sperme électrique,
> strobe light come on, coutchie coutchie. Elle est jeune et
> fait du bruit quand elle baise. (118)[16]

Sex, man, it's all about sex,
pussy and dick. Who's fucking whom?
the Queen of England is just an old bitch
Man, good at sucking since she's missing teeth.
a good number in a strip bar on rue Papineau
we're still talking about it, about her crooked crown and
About her gums covered in electric sperm,
strobe light come on, coutchie coutchie. She's young and
makes noise when she fucks.

His reference to the Queen of England reminds readers of Québec's colonial past under English rule, a past that remains an integral part of the Québécois cultural and collective identity. By casting the Queen as a succubus—the Queen is violently sexualized throughout the poem with an emphasis on the verb *sucer* 'to suck'—Richard highlights the exploitative nature of empire. This is further reinforced by the Queen's "crooked crown," repeated twice in the poem, rendering her complicit in the exploitation and marginalization of Francophone North Americans by the institution that she represents.

It is tempting to interpret this verse, and indeed the entire poem, as a general endorsement of Quebec sovereignty and thus a rejection of continued English influence in Quebec. After all, Richard wrote this poem only four years after the unsuccessful 1995 vote for sovereignty and is a self-professed militant francophone who, despite living in Quebec for much of his career, will not adopt Canadian citizenship because he refuses to swear allegiance to the Queen of England (Ouimet). Still, the negative associations that surround electricity in this poem, especially the poet's intentional linking of Quebec Power and Light and the "devil's penthouse" intentionally implicate large-scale energy producers in exploitative practices, shifting the onus of exploitation from imperial powers onto Quebec Power and Light. Similarly, "Feu Infâme" positions the speaker as the perpetrator whose desire ignites uncontrollable destruction. In both poems, Richard frames environmental exploitation in sexually explicit terms, creating in his readers a visceral reaction that translates into moral imperative.

The violent sexual imagery used throughout the poems renders sudden and eruptive the violence of neocolonial globalism which, as Nixon points out, is often diffused through time and space, but which disproportionately impacts marginalized communities (13). Richard's poetry thus provides a space where the slow chronological impact of resource exploitation can be compressed to render its effects high-impact. He writes in "Rue Sherbrook" ('Sherbrook Street'), for example, that it was probably an English-Canadian—and he blames Lord Sherbrook specifically—who put "la raffinerie de pétrole loin / Des habitations chic de Mont Royal. / la pollution des cheminées de la nausée / près de ceux qui méritent

le cancer du poumon" (120) 'the oil refinery far/From the chic houses in Mont Royal / the pollution from smokestacks / near those who deserve lung cancer.' In the span of five verses, he compresses the time between when the location for an oil refinery is chosen and when those living in the vicinity begin to develop symptoms of lung cancer several decades after its construction. He also compresses the space between the chic—primarily Anglo—neighborhoods and the oil refineries, and the contrast between the two draws attention to what Nixon refers to, in another context, as "catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects" (10). Richard's refusal to deliver his reader from the onslaught of violence, a refusal that persists throughout the collection and takes the form of representational and linguistic choices, makes it virtually impossible to idealize the injustices of resource extraction and energy production.

Richard further refuses to decouple environmental exploitation and ethnic persecution, and in much the same way that he compresses time to draw attention to high-impact effects of energy conglomerates on the environment, he also compresses time to draw attention to the near eradication of his heritage by cultural assimilation. In the poem "3 août" ('August 3') for example, the poet oscillates between historical events at the beginning of stanzas and reflections on the present human condition at the end of each stanza, so that a middle stanza of the poem begins with Napoleon selling Louisiana for guns and ends with an evocation of American neoliberalism with the enumeration of iconic brands such as "Wal-Mart, K-Mart, McDonald's, Burger King" (80). The implication, of course, is that both the environment and his community's ethnic identity have been subsumed by "[l]'Amérique devenue pauvre par sa richesse" (80) 'America made poor by its wealth.' Subsequent stanzas leave no doubt in the reader's mind as to Richard's intention: he is "[r]endu jusqu'ici, vestige de ma culture, / Témoin de sa mort" (80) 'brought here, a remnant of my culture, / Witness to its death.' This, then, is a poem of testimony, and the poet bears witness not only to the death of his culture, but also to the disappearance of the American Indians and the buffalo that once inhabited the prairies, to independent farmers whose wheat fields fell victim to factory farming, to the Acadians expelled in 1755, and to the fallen rainforests of Brazil (80-81). Suffering, then, is not limited to the Acadians and their descendants. Instead, he deliberately unifies the many victims of American imperial expansion and corporate imperialism—its contemporary avatar—in such a way that the subjugation of ethnic and economic minorities becomes an act of environmental subjugation as well.

How, then, do pastoral representations of Louisiana, evocations of Arcadia, and environmental commodification fit together to create a collection of poetry that can be called engaged pastoral? The answer lies in the elegiac quality of Richard's work. A sense of mourning pervades the collection, so that when Richard repeats the date 1755 (80, 82, 94, 96) or the duration of "deux-cent-trente-neuf ans" (95,

97, 99, 101, 103, 105) 'two hundred and thirty-nine years' since the *Grand Dérangement*, he engages in a ritualistic memorialization of his community's exile that invites us, as readers, to join in a collective act of remembrance.[17] Not only are we called to remember the Acadians' exile, but also the marginalization of all Francophone North Americans that resulted from Anglo American expansion into western territory. Here we should recall that Richard devotes a great deal of the collection's forward to discussing the difficulties of composing poetry in the language of his heritage but not his native language—that is to say, his parents and grandparents spoke the language to each other but purposely did not speak French to the children in the home—a linguistic crisis that stems directly from American policies of assimilation. Finally, we engage in remembering the victims of resource exploitation, both past and present, and are called upon to acknowledge our own role in the creation of these victims through our society's insatiable thirst for resources. Remembering thus becomes a fundamental act informing *Feu*. By representing a trauma that is both individual and collective in the sense that his experience is shared by his community and his ancestors, Richard is able to blur the lines between poet and *habitant* 'inhabitant,' recalling, as Paul Alpers reminds us (albeit in a different context) that the pastoral has, at its very root, always been about the interplay between herdsman and poets (31).[18]

In Richard's work, longing for Arcadia forms a central motif, and yet despite his desire for repatriation, his representations of Arcadia are always colored by the knowledge that first English and then American dreams of establishing their own empire shaped geographic and demographic realities that continue to influence contemporary North America. In challenging accepted narratives of resource domination, Richard allows for the imaginative reinhabitation of the very spaces from which his community was—and may yet be again—exiled.

Notes

1. All translations of Richard's work are my own. When block citations from his work appear, the formatting of the citation reflects the formatting of the published original.

2. I have chosen to use Acadie instead of Acadia for clarity, since repeated use of Acadia and Arcadia proved to be too confusing. Acadie and Arcadia is less so.

3. Take for example Longfellow's idealized representation of the Bayou Têche, which here functions as an ideal pastoral landscape, one where classical pastoral motifs take on a New World context: the herdsmen—exiled relatives of Evangeline

and Gabriel—keep cattle, not sheep; the minstrel plays the fiddle, not the lute; and the region is isolated by bayous and the Ozark mountains. Yet one cannot mistake the tropes at work in this section of *Evangeline:* addressing a gathering of fellow rustics, Basil, a blacksmith-*cum*-herdsman, paints a picture of an abundant nature unmarred by hardship (2.3.979-1020). Further, Basil reminds his companions explicitly that "[a]fter your houses are built, and your fields are yellow with harvests, / No King George of England shall drive you away from your homesteads, / Burning your dwellings and barns, and stealing your farms and your cattle" (2.3.996-999). With this statement, Longfellow underlines both political stability and personal liberty. By identifying Louisiana as this so-called "place apart" to which persecuted Acadians retreat to find solace and reconstruct their broken communities, he recreated in literature the large-scale pastoral retreat of westward expansion.

4. This phenomenon is not unique to Francophone inhabitants of the United States. French-speaking Canadians were often implored to "speak white"—a racial slur that signified to speak English in public.

5. Contemporary scholars such as Johnston have been able to establish the historical impact of *Evangeline* on westward expansion, but whether or not Longfellow himself wished to promote westward expansion remains uncertain. Still, Hebert-Lieter reminds us that Longfellow was certainly attempting to create what Lloyd Willis calls an "environmentally determined American literature" (629) that would have its roots in European literary traditions but be heavily influenced by American nature. *Evangeline* and *The Song of Hiawatha* are both examples of this attempt.

6. Hirsch writes particularly about second-generation survivors of the Holocaust, but asserts that the act of postmemory may feasibly be found in other diasporic traditions as well (420). She limits her analysis of postmemory in art to second-generation survivors, but I have expanded it to include, in the case of Richard, a seventh-generation survivor, to account for the intensity of the poems that engage with exile.

7. Richard is known as a militant activist for the reintroduction of Louisiana French in the school system, and many of his songs and poems celebrate Louisiana as "un beau pays" 'a beautiful country' ("Ma Louisiane") that provided refuge to the exiled Acadians.

8. While the opposition between Louisiana on the one hand and Grand Pré and Belle-Île-en-Mer on the other suggests that both are preferable to present conditions in the former, it is worth remembering, as Brasseaux states, that the Acadians

relocated to Belle-Île-en-Mer were reduced to such poverty that they were forced to "abandon their new homes and resume their wretched existence in French seaports" (*Founding* 59).

9. The contrasting image of blood red and white snow contradicts the innocence evoked by references to such idealized depictions of colonial North America, calling to mind Parsival's quest for the Holy Grail that sends him into exile in the wasteland. Nor can the reference to the colors of the Canadian flag be ignored, given the fraught relationship between French-speaking Quebeckers and the English-speaking majority in Canada.

10. *Arrangements pour la catastrophe*, the second of the four parts that comprise *Feu,* is a poetic journal of days that details Richard's trip to Acadie to participate in the first Acadian World Congress, a two-week event that celebrates Acadian heritage.

11. Richard's poetry is known for its semantic richness, and this verse is no exception. The original French "calme" could be translated as either a verb ('The Baie des Chaleurs calmes') or an adjective ('The Baie des Chaleurs is calm'). While either translation is correct, I have chosen to translate using the active 'calms,' since it highlights the tranquility of the landscape while also recognizing its impact on the poet's psyche.

12. Hirsch differentiates between Nadine Fresco's concept of absent memory—the void that arises when the place of origin no longer exists—and what Hirsch calls postmemory: an "elegiac aura of the memory of a place to which one cannot return" which creates "a strange sense of plenitude rather than a feeling of absence" (422). I have referred to the interplay between these two concepts as Richard's layered memory; his experience of the place of origin relies at once on absence (Acadie no longer exists as a political entity), imagination, and presence, since he frequently visits modern-day Acadie.

13. Of particular note are Richard's actions in response to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, which included the release of his 2010 album *Le Grand Gosier,* ('The Pelican') which includes songs inspired by the brown pelican. The proceeds from the sale of the album were donated to Gulf Aid Acadiana, a fund established to provide aid to those impacted by the spill. Other songs, notably "Le fou" ('The Mad One') and "Laisse le vent soufflé," ('Let the Wind Blow') both from Richard's eponymously titled 2012 album *Le Fou,* also address environmental destruction.

14. I have translated the title of this poem as ‘My Royal,’ since the author uses the possessive adjective. It is worth noting, however, that the play on words used by the author here does not translate effectively into English, since the title *Mon Royal*, when spoken aloud, is indistinguishable from Mont Royal, the name of Montréal’s central park and the source of the city’s name. Given the content of the poem, it seems likely that the author is in some sense claiming the city for himself and for all French speaking Canadians.

15. While *coureur des bois* best translates into English as ‘woodsmen,’ it does not adequately explain the role of the *coureur des bois* in colonial New France. The *coureurs des bois* predated state-sponsored explorers such as Frontenac, who traveled with an entourage. They were independent contractors who traveled the interior forests of New France, were skilled trappers and woodsmen, and often served as liaison between the French colonists and indigenous groups. Thanks to this latter role, they were considered racially inferior to colonists who remained in Montréal or Québec City with limited contact with indigenous Canadians (Havard 58).

16. The profanity in this stanza, which is found throughout the poem, should not be understood as gratuitous. In this collection Richard uses violent language when emphasizing violent and exploitative practices. His choice of language therefore shocks the reader out of complacency and forces a more active engagement with social and environmental issues.

17. The first Acadian World Congress, held in 1994, commemorated the 239th anniversary of the *Grand Dérangement*.

18. *Habitant* is used in Québec to refer to the farmers of French origin who settled the St. Lawrence River Valley. Watts uses it more broadly to refer to all North American farmers of French origin.

Works Cited

"Acadian World Congress / Congrès mondial acadien." *Acadian.org*, https://www.acadian.org/culture/acadian-world-congresscongres-mondial-acadien. Accessed 18 March 2018.

Alpers, Paul. "'The Philoctetes Problem' and the Poetics of Pastoral." *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*, edited by Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006, pp. 27-41.

Ancelet, Barry Jean. "A Perspective on Teaching the 'Problem Language' in Louisiana." *French Review*, vol. 61, no. 3, 1988, pp. 345-56.

---. "From Evangeline Hot Sauce to Cajun Ice: Signs of Ethnicity in South Louisiana." *Folklife in Louisiana: Louisiana's Living Traditions*, http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/main_misc_hot_sauce.html. Accessed 21 May 2018.

---. "Negotiating the Mainstream: The Creoles and Cajuns in Louisiana." *French Review*, vol. 80, no. 6, 2007, pp. 1235-55.

Brasseaux, Carl. *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*. U of Mississippi P, 1992.

---. *Founding of New Acadia. The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803*. Louisiana State UP, 1987.

---. *In Search of Evangeline: Birth and Evolution of the Evangeline Myth*. Blue Heron Press, 1989.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Belknap, 1996.

---. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Belknap Press, 2001.

Faragher, John. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*. Norton and Co., 2005.

Gerrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Oxford UP, 2004.

Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral*. Routledge, 2001.

---. "Post-Pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism." *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*, edited by Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006, pp. 14-24.

Havard, Gilles. "Virilité et 'ensauvagement': Le corps du coureur de bois (XVIIe et XVIIIe s.)." *Clio*, vol. 27, 2008, pp. 57-74.

Hebert-Leiter, Maria. *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American: The Acadian in American Literature from Longfellow to James Lee Burke*. Louisiana State UP, 2009.

Hill, Murray Gardener. "Some of Longfellow's Sources for the Second Part of Evangeline." *PMLA*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1916, pp. 161-80.

Hirsch, Marianne. “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile.” *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, edited by Susan Rubin Suleiman. Duke UP, 1998, pp. 418-46.

Johnston, A.J.B. “Imagining Paradise: The Visual Depiction of Pre-Deportation Acadia, 1850-2000.” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, pp. 105-28.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*. 1847. C.E. Merrill, 1895.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Oxford UP, 1964.

Morton, Timothy. “The Dark Ecology of Elegy.” *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, edited by Karen Weisman, Oxford UP, 2010, pp. 251-71

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.

Ouimet, Louis-Philippe. “Zachary Richard a toujours refusé de prêter serment à la reine.” *Radio-Canada*, 31 March 2017, https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1025475/zachary-richard-a-toujours-refuse-de-preter-serment-a-la-reine. Accessed 21 May 2018.

Picard, Claude. *L’Acadie heureuse*. 1993. Cultural Collection: Photographs. no. 50-C43-1992-118. Studio Laporte. Société Historique du Madawaska. www.demelerpinceaux.umce.ca.

Richard, Zachary. *Feu*. Les Intouchables, 2001.

---. “Ma Louisiane.” *Zack’s Bon Ton*, Rounder Records Corp., 1988.

Saunders, Timothy. “‘Using Green Words’ or ‘Abusing Bucolic Ground.’” *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*, edited by Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006, pp. 3-13.

Watts, Edward. *In This Remote Country: French Colonial Culture in the Anglo-American Imagination, 1780-1860*. U of North Carolina P, 2006.

Waud, A. R. “Washing Day among the Acadians on Bayou Lafourche.” *Harper’s Weekly*, 20 October 1866. Box 2, Folder 5. Collection 182 Prints, Sketches, and Poster Collection. Acadiana Manuscripts Collections, Edith Garland Dupré Library, U of Louisiana at Lafayette, Lafayette, LA. Accessed 12 January 2017.