

# ECO-PEDAGOGICAL WANDERING AND PONDERING IN PACIFIC SPIRIT PARK

*Nicole Rallis*

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## ABSTRACT

This poetry emerges from my ongoing Ph.D. research and coursework at the University of British Columbia, where I am engaging in an a/r/tographic-walking inquiry on environmental sustainability and climate change. After moving to the unceded and ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples, now known as Vancouver, I began walking the forest trails of Pacific Spirit Park. Inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) pedagogical discussions about the grammar of animacy, two-eyed ways of seeing, and childlike ways of seeing, my poems pay tribute to the plant elders and more-than-human beings guiding my learning journey. My ecopedagogical wandering and pondering align with environmental scientists' calls for developing more holistic understandings and feelings about our relationship with nature (i.e. the aesthetic, spiritual and non-utilitarian standpoints that increase the sense of awe with which we regard the natural world) (Prugh & Assadourian, 2003).

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## BIO

*Nicole Rallis* is a writer, documentary filmmaker and aspiring a/r/tographer. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia.  
Contact: [nicolerallis@gmail.com](mailto:nicolerallis@gmail.com)

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## *off balance*

we cannot own  
land

we cannot own  
waters

we cannot own  
sky

we cannot own  
each other

we cannot own  
our partners

our friends

our children

especially not our children

only in *loving freedom*<sup>1</sup> can we come into wisdom

to learn from and be with

*all our relations*<sup>2</sup>

in the context of family and community

relationship and ownership

cannot

co-exist

ownership obfuscates our coming into understanding

of ourselves and/with/in the land

we need to restore

balance

*a two-eyed ode to pacific spirit park*

***Polystichum munitum***

Kingdom: Plantae  
Clade: Tracheophytes  
Class: Polypodiopsida  
Order: Polypodiales  
Family: Dryopteridaceae

dear sword ferns,  
you grow so beautifully amongst and  
between the tall trees  
your bright green fronds  
attach to rhizome  
i marvel at your sacred geometry  
and thank you for your  
healing properties  
you share when my body aches

***Pseudotsuga menziessi var. menziesii***

Kingdom: Plantae  
Clade: Tracheophytes  
Division: Pinophyta  
Class: Pinopsida  
Order: Pinales  
Family: Pinaceae

marvelous and grand douglas firs,  
awe every time I visit  
look up to the sky, you grow  
so tall and magnificent  
i wonder of all the beings who have  
walked by you through the centuries  
oh the stories and wisdom you hold  
i place my hands upon you listening  
i feel the moss  
i hear the songbirds  
i see your cones on the forest floor  
signs of life,  
sustenance,  
abundance

***Rubus Sectabilis***

Kingdom: Plantae  
Clade: Tracheophytes.  
Clade: Angiosperms  
Clade: Eudicots  
Clade: Rosids  
Order: Rosales  
Family: Rosaceae

dear salmon berries,  
i remember the first time i came  
across you in mid-summer  
your colourful fruit caught my eye  
i thought you were a raspberry  
but you have your own distinct  
flavour and way of being  
my daughter and i return to your  
bushes each summer to pick from  
your bounty  
we make sure not to take too much  
you are a sharing being  
and remind us of the gift of  
generosity

***Acer Macrophyllum***

Kingdom: Plantae  
Clade: Angiosperms  
Clade: Eudicots  
Clade: Rosids  
Order: Sapindales  
Family: Sapindaceae

majestic big leaf maples,  
you grow amongst cedars  
and firs  
your large foliage brings us a  
special kind of beauty offering  
the gift of life itself  
i take a deep breath in, slowly  
exhale.  
in return,  
you breathe me in  
and release oxygen  
a profound reciprocal exchange  
unable to be properly described  
with language

***Strix Occidentalis***

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Strigiformes  
Family: Strigidae

magical spotted owl,  
i hear you more than I see you  
sometimes if I look closely  
at the forest floor  
i find your lovely feathers  
you remind me of my daughter  
named after a goddess  
accompanied by an owl friend  
before she was born, she visited me  
in a dream (the most vivid)  
as an owl  
when I hear you I think of  
the dreaming world, spirit worlds  
you remind me there is so much  
beyond what human eyes can see

***Haliaeetus Leucocephalus***

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Accipitriformes  
Family: Accipitridae

sacred bald eagles,  
i see you soaring above the forest  
your flying wonderous dance  
of graceful spirals  
as though you live in  
a liminal, magical space  
between the earth and the sun  
you nest within the tallest of trees  
a fierce protector of your young  
i am humbled in your presence

***Poecile Atricapillus***

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Passeriformes  
Family: Paridae

black-capped chickadee,  
lovely and tiny  
you sing the most beautiful songs  
composed of complex arrangements  
you make me feel serene  
sometimes I think you are singing  
a sweet lullaby to all forest beings  
you remind me that  
strong and resilient beings can  
manifest in the tiniest of forms

***Cantharellus***

Kingdom: Fungi  
Division: Basidiomycota  
Class: Agaricomycetes  
Order: Cantharellales  
Family: Cantharellaceae

wonderous chanterelle mushrooms,  
you remind me of the importance  
of inter-species relationships  
i wonder about the conversations  
you and red cedars must have  
your kinship inseparable  
i would rather sit and look at you  
than eat you  
so otherworldly  
a pop of bright yellow amongst  
the bark and the moss

*dear pacific spirit  
i can feel you  
manifested  
in all the sacred forms of being  
found beneath and above  
the forest canopy  
our animal cousins  
plant elders  
the waters, earth and wind*

*haunting*

in pacific spirit park because it is just that  
spirit.  
ghostly, maintained, contained remains of a stolen place  
winds ruffle leaves, carrying whispers  
human nature, humans in nature, wildlife  
now controlled.  
preserved and perverted from the truest of beauty  
which can only be found in utter freedom  
what is the difference between a park and a camp?  
markers on a map  
both are imagined lines, mythical boundaries  
that come to life and control  
how matter moves and how it grows  
binding and containing.  
let the haunting speak to you  
new imaginings can begin  
let the movement of your mind and body  
be  
be free.

## ENDNOTES

1. Simpson, L. (2014). Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), p.7.
2. Settee, P. (2008). Indigenous Knowledge as a basis for our future. In M. Nelson (Ed.), *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company. p. 46.

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- Kimmerer W. K. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, And The Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis, NM: Milkweed Editions.
- Prugh, T., & Assadourian, E. (2003). *What is sustainability anyway?* WorldWatch Institute. (pp.10-21).  
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- Settee, P. (2008). Indigenous Knowledge as a basis for our future. In M. Nelson (Ed.), [website] *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*. (pp. 42-47). Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company.
- Simpson, L. (2014). Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3), 1-25.

