Contemporary Literary Criticism

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Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers

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Preface

Named "one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years" by *Reference Quarterly,* the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*) series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC,* therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today's reader.

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Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author's career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

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Gretel Ehrlich
1946-

American essayist, nonfiction writer, novelist, short story writer, poet, memoirist, author of juvenilia, and biographer.

The following entry presents an overview of Ehrlich's career through 2005.

INTRODUCTION

Ehrlich is one of the most influential and acclaimed nature writers in contemporary literature. Her early poetry, fiction, and essays feature the beauty of the landscape and center on human interaction with the open spaces that comprise the American West. Her more recent works demonstrate an increasing concern with global ecological issues and the desire to retain balance with the natural world. All of Ehrlich's writings, however, are infused with a deep respect and appreciation for the land. Frequently cited as a successor to naturalist writers Henry David Thoreau and John Muir as well as poets Walt Whitman and Robert Frost, Ehrlich has endeavored to craft, through imagery and metaphor, works that illustrate the impact of nature on humankind. Ehrlich was awarded the Harold D. Vurcell Award for Distinguished Prose by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1986 for her collection of essays titled *The Solace of Open Spaces* (1985), the publication of which prompted author Annie Dillard to declare: "Wyoming has found its Whitman."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Santa Barbara, California, to Grant and Gretchen Woerz Ehrlich, Ehrlich spent her childhood in Montecito, California. At an early age she expressed the desire to become a writer and her interest in literature and language was matched only by her enthusiasm for nature and the outdoors. After secondary school, she originally attended Bennington College in Vermont where she studied dance, but soon realized that she wanted to learn the process of directing and writing for the screen. Consequently, she transferred to the University of California at Los Angeles School of Theater, Film, and Television. During the ten years following her education, Ehrlich found employment as a screenwriter for PBS. She also published two collections of poetry, *Geode/Rock Body* (1970) and *To Touch the Water* (1981). While Ehrlich was filming a documentary in Wyoming in 1976, her life and career path were forever changed by the news of her longtime boyfriend's death from cancer. Devastated, she decided to quit her filmmaking career. After some traveling, Ehrlich relocated to Wyoming to mourn, heal, and rebuild her life. Her first job after the move was that of a sheepherder. The solitude of the job and the vast Wyoming sky had a profound effect on Ehrlich, prompting her to detail her experiences in *The Solace of Open Spaces.* In this collection of essays, Ehrlich recounts the pain and anguish she felt after her boyfriend's death and underscored the impact of the local community and the land itself on her recovery process. She eventually fell in love with Press Stephen; the two married and purchased a sheep ranch in Shell, Wyoming. In 1991, the couple separated, soon after which Ehrlich was struck by lightning while out walking near the ranch. She suffered brain injuries and moved back to California to receive medical care. Ehrlich chronicles her recovery from this freak accident in *A Match to the Heart* (1994). Since her recuperation from the lightning strike, Ehrlich has resumed her travels. She journeyed to China to reconnect with the Zen Buddhist teachings she had studied as a teen and young adult, to Chile and northern Canada to study glaciers, and to Greenland, a country that particularly captivated her, inspiring many return trips and the travelogue *This Cold Heaven* (2001). When not traveling, Ehrlich divides her time between California and Wyoming.

MAJOR WORKS

Ehrlich's first two poetry collections, *Geode/Rock Body* and *To Touch the Water,* are characterized by a decidedly Asian influence, but also incorporate the imagery and expansiveness of the American West. Ehrlich's studies of Zen Buddhism and Eastern literature led her to examine the differences between spatial distance and spiritual and personal isolation—themes that blend seamlessly when considering the vast reaches of the American West and Ehrlich's personal journey of healing and rebirth. These themes are further investigated in the short-fiction collection *Wyoming Stories* (1986) and in her first volume of essays, *The Solace of Open Spaces.* The latter work begins with an essay docu-

menting Ehrlich's arrival in Wyoming, the loss of her lover, and the deep pain of mourning. Subsequent essays demonstrate Ehrlich's acceptance of the Wyoming landscape and her burgeoning sense of belonging. The book ends with her marriage and new life as both a property owner and one who feels possessed by the land. Through these essays, Ehrlich dismantled the perception that physical isolation begets loneliness, purporting that the combination of space and personal solitude leads to deeper, richer social interactions when people meet and share company.

The large Wyoming sky is the backdrop for Ehrlich's novel *Heart Mountain* (1988), a fictionalization of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Set at Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, the novel depicts the unlikely romance that blossoms between a young female Nisei—or second-generation Japanese American—named Mariko, and McKay, a local Caucasian rancher. Illustrating the paradox of personal isolation in a crowded camp, the narrative traces the interaction between the two cultures and each individual's relationship with the powerful landscape of Wyoming. Nature's indifference to humanity served as the catalyst for Ehrlich's memoir *A Match to the Heart,* in which she relates her near-death encounter with lightning and her painful physical and spiritual rehabilitation process. Through the story of her recovery, she also explores the inner wilderness of the human body and the phenomenon of lightning. Rather than turn her back on nature, as soon as Ehrlich had healed sufficiently, she began to travel again, seeking out the majesty and unparalleled beauty of the natural world.

After visiting China to reconnect with Buddhist teachings—as detailed in *Questions of Heaven* (1997)—Ehrlich set out to explore new vistas and unrelenting natural forces. Her travels stretched from the southern tip of Chile to the northern reaches of Canada, and also encompassed numerous trips to the interior of Greenland. *This Cold Heaven* documents Ehrlich's travels to Greenland over a period of seven years. Interweaving her personal narrative, the lives and history of the Inuit people, and the biography of early Arctic explorer and anthropologist Knud Rasmussen, the book depicts the harsh, yet beautiful landscape of Greenland and how such an environment shapes, and is shaped by, the human lives around it. *The Future of Ice* (2004) celebrates the beauty of winter in the Earth's coldest territories and reflects on the rhythm of weather and the ecological significance of global warming. In it, Ehrlich describes the shrinking glacier fields of South America and the Arctic, cautioning that man must take measures to retain the precious natural resources that are left on the planet.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Responses to Ehrlich's works are largely positive. Commentators have applauded her seamless fusion of genres and her poetic, yet precise, imagery. As reviewer Gregory L. Morris explained in his assessment of the essay collection *Islands, the Universe, Home* (1991), "Ehrlich's is the eye of both the fiction writer and the naturalist, and so she takes particular interest in the interconnectedness and relatedness of things. . . . The West, for Ehrlich, transforms itself (or is transformed by Ehrlich's vision) into a small part of a vast metaphor for the universe. We inhabit, says Ehrlich, various 'islands'—islands 'of the psyche and the soul,' the island that is earth itself, the diminutive island that is home." Similarly, in his review of *The Future of Ice,* Douglas Carlson maintained that "Ehrlich speaks in many voices: storyteller, natural historian, journalist, memoirist, and poet. Her narration is always engaging and forthright, and her analysis has the weight of science and research. Most gratifying is an imagery that takes risks, enlarges, and clarifies." In addition, critics have commended Ehrlich for her exploration and deconstruction of paradoxes in her fiction and travel writings, such as the contradictions of belonging versus ownership, isolation versus community, and a healing nature versus one of apathy. Through her work, Ehrlich has demonstrated that these seemingly opposing themes are not as disparate as they superficially appear. According to essayist Bonney MacDonald, "Ehrlich not only wants to map out the front along which opposites meet, she also wants to see what happens at the admittedly hazy point of convergence." Some observers have categorized Ehrlich's writings as eco-feminism, while others have argued that because of her nonconformity to feminist trope, she has presented a concern for nature that is universal rather than gender specific. Described as a nature writer, a Western writer, and a travel writer, Ehrlich has blended elements of autobiography, ethnography, philosophy, poetry, and natural history to create a body of work that celebrates life and the Earth's beauty.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Geode/Rock Body (poetry) 1970
To Touch the Water (poetry) 1981
The Solace of Open Spaces (essays) 1985
**Wyoming Stories* (short stories) 1986
Heart Mountain (novel) 1988
Drinking Dry Clouds: Stories from Wyoming (short stories) 1991

Islands, the Universe, Home (essays) 1991
Arctic Heart: A Poem Cycle (poetry) 1992
A Match to the Heart: One Woman's Story of Being Struck by Lightning (memoir) 1994
Yellowstone: Land of Fire and Ice (nonfiction) 1995
Questions of Heaven: The Chinese Journeys of an American Buddhist (travel essay) 1997
A Blizzard Year: Timmy's Almanac of the Seasons (juvenilia) 1999
John Muir: Nature's Visionary (biography) 2000
This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland (nonfiction) 2001
The Future of Ice: A Journey into Cold (nonfiction) 2004

*Published with *City Tales*, by Edward Hoagland.

CRITICISM

Thomas Brown (review date September 1990)

SOURCE: Brown, Thomas. "Gretel Ehrlich's Use of 'Fictive History' in *Heart Mountain.*" *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 20, no. 4 (September 1990): 3-5.

[*In the following review, Brown examines themes of history, nature, and love in* Heart Mountain.]

History, a character in Gretel Ehrlich's novel ***Heart Mountain*** (New York: Viking, 1988) muses, is not an event "transfixed in time, but an accumulation of wills over time and continuing now" (45). Ehrlich's Faulknerian sense of history's power to impinge on lives into the present is central to the structure and meaning of this distinguished first novel.

Set just west of the Shoshone River in northern Wyoming, near the Montana border, the narrative, "a blend of fact and fiction" (xv), begins in February, 1942, and ends some months after Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945. The time frame is essential to Ehrlich's purpose, for against this backdrop of World War II, she examines the social and political implications of President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 (1942) which empowered the Secretary of War to intern over 110,000 Japanese immigrants and Japanese-American citizens for the duration of the war. One of the ten internment camps was located at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, the setting for the novel.

Weaving political realities that are faithful to fact with a fictional narrative and a fictional cast of characters, Ehrlich explores the impact of the internment camp on the local community as well as its impact on the Japanese prisoners. Ehrlich poses the troubling political questions, "How can a nation that purports to fight fascism use fascist techniques to solve problems at home—and expect not to get caught in a lie" (92)? In seeking an answer, Ehrlich reveals her stance towards the use of history:

> What's important is what use we make of it; its moral use. By writing history we can widen readers' thinking and deepen their sympathy in every direction. Perhaps history should show us not how to control the world, but how to enlarge, deepen, and discipline ourselves.
>
> (45)

The novel's title suggests the other central theme, also Faulknerian, that of "the human heart in conflict with itself." Protagonist, antagonists, minor characters—both inside and outside the internment camp—all undergo struggles of the heart with love, birth, death, divorce, separation, loss, madness, or alcoholism. As Kai, a Japanese character, mournfully asks himself, "How does one learn to live" (224)? Human life is depicted as chaotic, messy, random; "the arbitrariness of their lives seemed absurd" (78). Madeleine concludes that "to have suffered an absence or to have experienced a great love—finally they came to the same thing" (387).

The natural world, on the other hand, the vistas so vast that "there was no place the sky stopped when he looked" (354), possesses a patience and timelessness unknown to man. The sweeping high plains, the majestic mountain ranges, and the endless sky reinforce nature's eternality. The four sections of the novel correspond to the seasons of the year, and within each section a full year unfolds with all its natural rhythms, "the same seasonal routines year after year for a hundred years" (279). At least one of the characters recognizes nature's preoccupation with itself:

> This bend in the road and the little towns on either side, lined by great acreages of desolation, had neither accepted not rejected them. . . . The convulsions of weather and seasons would always be greater than they were. That was a comfort, too, Carol thought.
>
> (78)

Ehrlich's central concern with history, however, is closely linked with both love and nature. How does one point with any certainty to where love begins or ends? Where does nature begin and end? Ehrlich even develops a simile linking nature and history:

> So how is one to say exactly where history begins or ends? It is all oscillations, curves, and waves which take so long to reveal themselves. . . . like watching a tree grow.
>
> (45)

Ehrlich has succeeded in this "fictive history" in widening her readers' thinking and deepening "their sympathies in every direction." She has also dramatized most effectively how little control humans have upon the world or upon the destinies of their own lives, and in doing so she has encouraged us "to enlarge, deepen, and discipline ourselves" (45).

Donna K. Nagata (review date July-October 1991)

SOURCE: Nagata, Donna K. Review of *Heart Mountain,* by Gretel Ehrlich. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 26, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1991): 321-22.

[*In the following review, Nagata commends Ehrlich's ability to create a novel based on the internment of Japanese Americans, but voices concern that readers may not be able to distinguish fact from fiction, thereby resulting in a misrepresentation of the living conditions and experiences of imprisoned Asian Americans.*]

In February of 1942, shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, an order which eventually led to the removal and incarceration of over 110,000 Japanese Americans from the Western and Southwestern portions of the United States. Threat of potential espionage was cited as a major reason for the internment and the government imprisoned the Japanese Americans solely on the basis of their ancestry. Two-thirds of the internees were citizens born in the United States. Yet, citizenship proved no protection against imprisonment in one of the ten so-called "relocation camps" located in the most barren and harsh areas of the interior.

The desolate landscape surrounding one particular camp sets the stage for Gretel Ehrlich's novel ***Heart Mountain.*** The Heart Mountain Relocation Camp actually existed during World War II and was situated in Wyoming near the border of Montana. In her novel, Ehrlich weaves a tale of differing perspectives on the years from 1942 to 1945, recounting the experiences of Japanese Americans in the Heart Mountain Camp as well as those of Caucasian Americans living in the surrounding area. The central character is a rancher named McKay, who is left alone to run his family's property while his two brothers are off fighting in the War. Although McKay lives outside of the camp, he is sympathetic to the plight of the Japanese Americans and eventually finds himself drawn to a Japanese American woman, Mariko, who is interned at Heart Mountain. Other characters living near McKay, including a neighbor whose husband is missing in action overseas and McKay's alcoholic ranch hand add further viewpoints on the life of Caucasian Americans around Heart Mountain at that time.

Ehrlich also touches upon the lives of Japanese Americans at Heart Mountain. Placed throughout the story are extensive diary entries of Kai Nakamura, a second generation Japanese American (Nisei) who describes not only the events which take place in the Heart Mountain Camp, but also his feelings of anger, disillusionment, and confusion at being imprisoned by his own government. In addition, the reader catches a glimpse of other Japanese Americans in the camp as well as of the discomfort experienced by McKay's Japanese American cook, who is spared from internment because he already lives in the interior of the U.S. yet worries that perhaps some of his own distant relatives might be interned nearby.

Previous literary works on the internment have focused primarily upon the experiences of the Japanese Americans themselves and many of these are written by those who personally experienced the camps. Ehrlich's ***Heart Mountain*** is unique for three reasons. First, Ehrlich is not Japanese American. Second, she is not old enough to have witnessed the events of the 1940's. Third, the novel describes the perspectives of both Caucasian and Japanese Americans to illustrate the similarities and differences in the wartime circumstances within and between these two groups.

Ehrlich has done considerable research in preparing this book. The research is evident in her lengthy list of acknowledgments and the detail with which her character's diary entries are written. However, she also notes that while the political realities described in the novel "are faithful to fact," the novel is "a blend of fact and fiction (p. xv)." It is commendable that Ehrlich took the time and effort to include a good deal of accurate historical material. Yet, one drawback to this approach is that readers may not be able to disentangle fact from fiction, or colorful characterizations from representative personality types. For example, while the love relationship between the Caucasian rancher McKay and the interned Mariko forms a central portion of the novel, attention is not paid to the fact that such romantic relationships between Caucasians and Asians were rare and that antimiscegenation laws prevented most marriages between members of these two groups until after the War. Since there is no bibliography included in the book to provide additional references on the internment, readers have little guidance in expanding their understanding of this highly significant historical event. Many individuals continue to hold misconceptions about the Japanese American experience and it is particularly important that accurate information be provided.

Heart Mountain is a novel and does not purport to be a non-fictional work. However, there is a fine line between fiction and truth in such a "docu-drama" and

it is hoped that readers of this book will go beyond this fictional account to learn more about the unjust incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Gregory L. Morris (essay date winter 1992)

SOURCE: Morris, Gregory L. "When East Meets West: The Passions of Landscape and Culture in Gretel Ehrlich's *Heart Mountain.*" *Great Plains Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (winter 1992): 50-9.

[*In the following essay, Morris underscores Ehrlich's utilization of Japanese poetry and literary forms in her novel* Heart Mountain.]

Gretel Ehrlich is a writer who has taken for the subject of her art—and who has taken for her home—the Big Horn Basin of northern Wyoming. That particular extension of plains landscape, stretched between the Big Horn Mountains to the east (a sort of geological intrusion upon an otherwise Great Plains terrain) and the Absarokas to the west, has provided both an intensely personal and a brilliantly imaginative source of inspiration for Ehrlich's fiction and non-fiction. What on one hand has been a distinctly restorative (and even erotic) landscape for Ehrlich also has proven to be a potently politicized landscape.

It is upon that latter geography that Ehrlich focuses her attention in her novel, ***Heart Mountain,*** concerned with the historical and emotional impact of the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, established in the Basin in 1942 to intern Japanese-Americans during World War II. What Ehrlich studies in this novel is the relationship between landscape and culture and the ways in which two radically opposed—and suddenly juxtaposed—cultures affect perspective upon the geography of both heart and landform. More specifically, Ehrlich, by making both direct and indirect use of elements of the Oriental artistic tradition, imagines in her novel the ways in which the Eastern aesthetic actually shapes the perceptions of her decidedly Western (and western) characters.

Gretel Ehrlich first came to Wyoming in 1976 to make a film about the sheepherding culture of northern Wyoming. In the process of making that film (*Sheepherders*), she lost a lover, lost and recovered herself, and discovered a landscape that would become her adopted home. As Ehrlich wrote in the title piece of her collection of essays, ***The Solace of Open Spaces***

> I came here four years ago. I had not planned to stay, but I couldn't make myself leave. John, the sheepman, put me to work immediately. It was spring, and shearing time. For fourteen days of fourteen hours each, we moved thousands of sheep through sorting corrals to be sheared, branded, and deloused. I suspect that my original motive for coming here was to "lose myself" in new and unpopulated territory. Instead of producing the numbness I thought I wanted, life on the sheep ranch woke me up. The vitality of the people I was working with flushed out what had become a hallucinatory rawness inside me. I threw away my clothes and bought new ones; I cut my hair. The arid country was a clean slate. Its absolute indifference steadied me.

What Ehrlich describes here and elsewhere in the collection is her personal *and* her artistic relationship with this intermontane landscape, a landscape (she writes earlier in the same essay) that "seems to be the doing of a mad architect—tumbled and twisted, ribboned with faded, deathbed colors, thrust up and pulled down as if the place had been startled out of a deep sleep and thrown into a pure light."[1] What Ehrlich reveals in these essays is the intimate making of peace with place and private circumstance; the Wyoming of her personal experience becomes a jumping-off point, a geography of possibility and renewal.

But relocation also suggests dispossession, the pulling up of roots, the denial of possibility, and it was this specific vision of the Wyoming landscape that guided Ehrlich when she next turned to that landscape, seeking to capture imaginatively and fictively another, significant part of its broader history. Ehrlich's novel, ***Heart Mountain*** (which actually had its beginnings in a collection, published in 1986, called ***Wyoming Stories***),[2] concerns itself with "two larger, intertwined stories": one, the story of the Japanese-Americans evacuated from the West Coast after Pearl Harbor to the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp; the other, the story of a family-owned cattle ranch that skirts the camp. As Ehrlich tells us in her "Author's Note":

> My novel, ***Heart Mountain,*** is a blend of fact and fiction. The Heart Mountain Relocation Camp did exist and the political realities are faithful to fact. For purposes of the narrative, I have compressed some of the geographical elements, conveniently eliminating miles between actual creeks, ranches, bars, towns, and highways, and have taken the further liberty of "relocating" a waterfall from Clark's Fork Canyon to Heart Mountain.[3]

Such rearrangement of landscape is certainly not uncommon in fiction: the "mad architect" does not always see things with a writer's eye, and so the novelist must sometimes take matters of geography into her own hands. (And there may even be a danger in making such "improvements": as Ehrlich notes, a few weeks before she completed her novel, Snuff's, a bar that figures prominently in the novel, burned to the ground—that "mad architect" getting even, perhaps?)

Of particular interest here is this "blend of fact and fiction" and its relation to the landscape against which the novel plays itself out. ***Heart Mountain*** is, among other things, a love story told within a very specific historical and physical framework: a northern Wyoming rancher falls profoundly, and hopelessly, in love with a Nisei (second-generation Japanese-American) woman interned in the relocation camp. The relationship works itself out within the shadows of the landscape's two dominant features: the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp and its namesake, Heart Mountain. What happens in the course of the novel is that perspectives upon that landscape change as the relationship itself changes, as individual perceptions (particularly those of the rancher) fall under the influences of the heart and culture of the beloved.

Certainly the most persuasive cultural influence working within the novel and its story is the Eastern-Oriental influence. Ehrlich herself is a serious student of Eastern art and culture, having traveled and studied in Japan often; and ***Heart Mountain*** is a novel infused with several strains of that culture: Zen spiritualism, the Noh theater, the paintings of Hitoshige. The dominant strain, though, is poetic, as Ehrlich makes direct use of specific poets of the Eastern tradition: the Chinese poet of the eighth century, Tu Mu; the Japanese collection the *Kokinshū*; and *The Crazy Cloud Anthology,* which gathers the work of the rather unorthodox fifteenth-century monk-poet, Ikkyū, also known as Crazy Cloud.[4] Ehrlich weaves these various strains through the novel—through its landscape, through its characters and their actions—in ways that are both historical and imaginative and in ways that allow us to see Wyoming and the West from a perspective completely different from that seen by the generally unaccustomed Western eye.

The factual, historical context clearly concerns the camp itself, a geographical eccentricity, a political mark of shame: Executive Order 9066, signed by Franklin Roosevelt on 19 February 1942, authorized the removal of more than 120,000 Japanese-Americans from the West Coast of the United States to ten relocation camps constructed throughout the U.S. (though primarily in the West). In spite of vociferous local protest, the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp was constructed in July and August of 1942, in Park County, Wyoming, on the west bank of the Shoshone River. As Douglas W. Nelson describes it, the task of the camp's construction was "enormous":

> Builders ordered huge supplies of materials and offered high wages to attract adequate labor. By the end of July 3,000 men worked at the site, and the government had allocated over five and one-half million dollars for the project. But even with such manpower and funding, the deadline was a demanding one. The Army supervisors soon established double shifts and twelve-hour days so that work might go on around the clock. Draftsmen reduced designs to their simplest and crudest forms. Maximum prefabrication was used and much shoddy work was simply overlooked. While none of these methods was conductive to quality buildings, they did achieve great savings in time. The engineers boasted that once their system was perfected an entire "apartment building" large enough to house thirty evacuees could be built "from foundation to roof" in 58 minutes. On August 10, sixty-two days after work began, the WRA [War Relocation Authority] declared the Heart Mountain Center ready for occupancy.

When completed, the camp itself ("Four hundred and fifty oblong barracks, 120' × 20', . . . laid out in twenty blocks divided by unpaved streets") stood out amidst that Wyoming landscape as a freakish geographical anomaly; as one observer noted at the time: "Most settlements . . . look as if they belonged. This one looks stuck here; it doesn't fit the landscape; it is so obviously created by decree."[5]

This camp received more than 10,000 internees in its two-year existence—10,000 Issei, Nissei, and Kibei picked up and set down in this alien, desolate landscape—and those internees have told eloquent, powerful stories of that experience. In their history of the relocation, Audrie Girdner and Anne Loftis use some of these stories to paint a picture of the camp and the landscape it inhabited:

> The Heart Mountain Center was almost completely colorless. The landscape was "a dull, gray brown tinged with faint green during spring and early summer." "I'd never seen such desolate country." Lily Aratant told newspaper reporters in Los Angeles. The desolation stretched out many miles until it reached a group of low, shelf-like hills and the odd, flat-topped Heart Mountain that jutted up beyond. . . . The surrounding country was as barren of people as of vegetation. At night coyotes crept into the camp.

Colonists recalled with especial vividness the winters, recalled waking to temperatures of thirty degrees below zero, recalled snowfalls that seemed to come from nowhere: "For the last few days we've been having a real taste of Wyoming winter. It started out with a blizzard—and, oh, what a blizzard! It's just like the kind we see in the movies. I never thought I'd really be in one. . . . The laundry and latrine barrack is about fifty yards away from our doorsteps. Dad wets his hair there and by the time he comes back to our barrack, his hair is frozen to ice!"[6] This is the historical context and the dominant historical feature of this Wyoming landscape in ***Heart Mountain.*** The camp rests there, artificial, plunked down upon the natural terrain like an oddity fallen out of the sky, as rare a thing as a blizzard.

But the camp also serves an imaginative purpose, transforming itself into a symbolic presence, integrating itself into the fictional fabric of the novel, claiming existence as one of the several significant elements in the novel's created geography. Those elements also include the wildlife native to the region (deer, antelope, elk), the day and night skies with their meaningful patterns of clouds and stars, and most compelling. Heart Mountain itself, which looms above the human presence and draws the human eye and human imagination to its existence.

The primary human presences are those of the two lovers, McKay Allison, a blonde-haired, twenty-four-year-old rancher, and Mariko, a dark, exquisite, Japanese-American painter. McKay manages the family ranch alone, his two brothers off and involved in the War; but he is a rancher raised in a household already touched by the Eastern presence: a Japanese cook, a mother who read to McKay from the *Kokinshū*. McKay's is a temperament mixed of both Western and Eastern traditions. Moreover, he is a man caught tight in a thicket of desire, a man "crazy all the time"; and, indeed, like Ikkyū, McKay is swept by love, for a woman and the world that she has come to inhabit.

As it happens, one of the meanings of "Crazy Cloud" is "crazy about love," and this connection between McKay and Ikkyū is more than just chance occurrence, for the name, Ikkyū, resonates with pertinent meaning. In her Introduction to *Ikkyū and the Crazy Cloud Anthology,* Sonja Arntzen describes the suggestive amplitude of Ikkyū's name:

> Ikkyū called himself "Crazy Cloud," a sobriquet rich in connotation. Self-ironic, it declared his craziness to the world. Yet in the paradoxical reasoning of Zen, opposites often trade places. Calling himself crazy also asserted his sanity in a world gone mad. "Cloud" calls up a conventional term for monk, *unsui,* "cloud-water." The term, by way of metaphor, stresses the foremost quality of a monk, that is, his nonattachment to the world. Like a floating cloud or flowing water, he should move through the world with neither material possessions nor the baggage of desire. Thus "Crazy Cloud" can simply mean crazy monk. However, a reader familiar with Ikkyū's writing cannot fail also to hear in the word "cloud," the echo of *un'u,* "cloud-rain," a euphemism for physical love, which abounds in his poetry. Thus, under the surface of his name lies the esoteric meaning "crazy about love"; the crazy monk asserts his loving bondage with the world.[7]

This passion, this "crazy love" McKay experiences, draws directly from its Oriental source; indeed, Ehrlich is fairly clear about the almost ancestral relation—spanning time and culture—between her cowboy and the monk-poet.

So possessed is McKay by this love that everything around him becomes charged with erotic meaning; elements of the landscape, which before carried their familiar workaday meanings, now appear as revelations of desire and physical need. For example, elements of the skyscape turn ominous, suggestive, capable of being read. Clouds shape-shift and reflect emotion. Isolated in his longing, McKay at one point rides to the river:

> Overhead the clouds looked more like waves, the kind of waves that come toward the shore but never break, whose cresting swells suddenly flatten and return to deeper water. He thought he had reached the bottom of his loneliness, but now another depth revealed itself—one that he could not push beyond and as he approached the river, orange and scarlet clouds traveled over him without breaking.
>
> (184-85)

McKay (like Ikkyū) becomes immersed in cloud, in the "cloud-rain" of passion and physical love. This pervasive cloud imagery culminates in the nuclear cloud—that craziest and most deadly of clouds—that mushrooms over Hiroshima, and that Ehrlich figures symbolically into her novel as a sort of counterpoint to the aesthetic envisioning of cloud shapes elsewhere.

Further, the stars of the nighttime sky—the North Star, the Northern Lights, Orion's Belt—besides being signs of direction, location, place, also tell stories. In particular, the vast glittering sweep of the Milky Way ("the 'Great River,' as Mariko called it . . . the great heart of the sky") is part of a narrative of desire that plays itself out both above and below. For one, it figures significantly in the festival of Tanabata, a legend of Chinese origin that recounts the story of two lovers condemned by the woman's father to be separate, one on each side of the Milky Way.

Ehrlich's use of this tale also establishes another immediate aesthetic link between Ehrlich's fiction and the Japanese literary tradition. The *Kokinshū* includes a sequence of eleven poems (#173-183) that celebrate the festival of Tanabata, and Ehrlich makes direct, dramatic use of three of these poems in her novel. In one instance (***HM* [*Heart Mountain*]** 307), Ehrlich's in-camp narrator, Kai Nakamura, quotes an entire Tanabata poem, #177, by the Kanpyo-era (889-898) poet, Ki no Tomonori. Later in the novel (356), Kai and Mariko lie listening to a group of "old Issei men" reciting Tanabata poems, and one of the poems sung is the same poem recalled earlier by Kai (though here it remains untranslated into English). In this same scene, the men recite an anonymous poem, #174, and a third Tanabata poem, #182. (Interestingly, Ehrlich chooses to alter the translation given by Laurel Rasplica Rodd of the poem's last line—"sleeves are drenched and will not dry"—to: "sleeves are drenched with tears.")[8] Here, again, we see Ehrlich's dramatic use of the Eastern literary tradition, for the Tanabata tale