The title of the paper is taken from a recent work by the Canadian Anashinaabe scholar, Karl S. Hele, *Lines Drawn Upon the Water: First Nations and the Great Lakes Borders and Borderlands* (Hele xiii–xvii). In this collection of essays edited by Hele the authors explore the legal and cultural issues stemming from the establishment on the Great Lakes of two very recent, from the authors’ points of view, political entities, Canada and the United States of America. The work concentrates largely on historical and legal questions concerning treaties, borders, and movement across borders. Because no natural or cultural impediments to the freedom of movement preceded the foundation of the United States or of Canada, questions of nation and of state come to the fore in Hele’s book. The essays deal primarily with demographic materials, but the historical and cultural aspects of the arguments are of primary importance to those interested in literary and cultural relations among the many peoples of the Great Lakes Basin. The divisions that are emphasized reveal the ways that determine their dependence on historical contingencies as imaginary though seemingly necessary constructions (Anderson 83 ff.).

The stimulus to write this paper proceeded from the days, and now the years, following the earthquake and the tsunami of the 11th of March, 2011, off the coast of the prefecture of Fukushima, Japan. The shock wave caused by that earthquake overwhelmed the protective retaining wall between the sea and the four nuclear reactors managed by the Tokyo Electrical Power Company (TEPCO), destroying in one fell swoop the cooling and backup cooling capacities of the nuclear reactors.
The short and long term effects are in the news every day: a 20 km square exclusion area due to radiation has now become what was the evacuated zone, emptied of inhabitants just as it was when the cooling systems went on the blink. Hundreds of human settlements (156,000 people are displaced) are off-limits because of radiation; agriculture from the area cannot be sold; fishery products in the areas adjacent to the reactors are banned, and the ban has recently been extended by Korea to include fisheries contiguous to Fukushima. Because of the kind of damage done to the reactors and the geological configuration of the land upon which the reactors were built, about three hundred tons of highly radioactive groundwater flows into the Pacific Ocean every day.

What does any of this have to do with American Studies and with the Great Lakes? The answer is that there are more than thirty nuclear reactors in the Great Lakes Basin, many of which are on the shores of the lakes: most of them are of the same type and of the same vintage as the Westinghouse cooled-water reactor at Fukushima: in other words, they are built close to the lakes in order to use the water to cool their radioactive cores. The lakes contain approximately twenty-one percent of the world’s drinking water, and the waters serve thirty-five million people. Thus a very complex set of circumstances, at once cultural, technological, and economic, have determined in Japan a situation that, just as on the Great Lakes, seems to go well beyond any of those particular determining factors.

It may also be argued that the current state of affairs, both in Japan and on the Great Lakes is but the culmination of a long process of extrapolating the tenets of Judeo-Christian attitudes toward the natural world, or “the Baconian creed that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature” (L. White 1203). In this view, natural philosophy in the nineteenth century accomplished the final steps which led to the dominance of the Baconian model of the wedding of the theoretical and of the empirical sciences in order to produce the modern version of technology. The birth of technology in the contemporary sense paradoxically is contemporaneous to the first use of the term ‘ecology.’ The historian of science responsible for describing this state of affairs, Lynn White Jr. is very clear regarding the advantages derived from such a world view: “By the end of the 15th century the technological superiority of Europe was such that its small, mutually hostile nations could spill out over all the rest of the world, conquering, looting, and colonizing” (L. White 1204). This paper thus emphasizes the necessity of considering the cultural and political histories of the lands and waters of the Great Lakes in terms of the purposes to which the Great Lakes Basin was put by the colonizing powers from the times of Verrazzano, Cartier, and Champlain down to the present. It also underlines the degree to which the political boundaries of nations, provinces and states zig-zag, meander, and cut through geological spaces that know no such divisions. It would thus seem rather short-sighted to consider the area in terms of a national literature.

In 1975, as an example, the journalist and author John G. Fuller in *We Almost Lost Detroit* described the near meltdown in 1966 of the nuclear reactor Enrico
Fermi Plant 1 located only a few miles downriver from Detroit: the plant is built on the Detroit River which empties into Lake Erie, which flows into Lake Ontario over the Niagara Falls, and then into the Saint Lawrence River, now called the St. Lawrence Seaway, and into the Atlantic Ocean. A meltdown of the Enrico Fermi reactor would thus have devastated a large part of the Great Lakes Basin and would have affected two sovereign countries and numerous provinces and states. This is certainly not a very heartening prospect, yet it brings into strong relief the tensions between James Fenimore Cooper’s idea of Lake Ontario as a pristine body of water as he describes it in *The Pathfinder* and Margaret Fuller’s vacation ideal of the Great Lakes in *Summer on the Lakes*, in 1843 which stand in contrast to the present state of things that have undergone, since the middle of the nineteenth century, the changes that Lynn White has described so effectively. The question of course, following the example of the critic and historian Bonnie Costello in her commentary on Robert Frost’s “Oven Bird” (Costello 19-21), is what to do with a diminished thing?

In part the question has to do with the capacity of belief and of unbelief on the part of those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. On the 11th of March, the day after the earthquake and the ensuing incident, when I asked a friend, a nuclear physicist, what was happening at Fukushima, if there were indeed reason to worry about a meltdown or about continuing problems with radiation, she assured me that the technologies involved precluded any danger to the environment (meaning fish, plants, humans and other animals), and that everything should be entrusted to the scientists who understood the problems involved. Clearly, this is a question of belief. Belief that may be shaken, belief that may stand rock solid, but belief, nonetheless, in short, a religious question. As White insists, the problems that have been created by science and technology can not be solved by the very ideologies that have created them.

As authors such as Dave Dempsey insist (see Dempsey 195 ff.), the Great Lakes are part of a complex hydrological system that extends for approximately two thousand miles from the Gaspé and the mouth of the St. Lawrence River to Chicago, passing through lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, Superior, and Michigan. And since the system contains around twenty-one percent of the available drinking water in the world it is necessary that it be safeguarded in spite of our culture’s commitment not only to science, but to resolving the problems that science has created with more science.

It may well be important to understand the beliefs, listen to and know the stories (Chamberlin 1-3, 77-78) of those who have lived within the bounds of the two hydrological basins that constitute the Great Lakes and what is presently called the St. Lawrence River. This means being attentive to stories of the Anashinaabe, the Potawatomie, the Odawa, the Mic Mac, the Huron, and the Haudensee, peoples that well precede the presence of Europeans on the North American continent; as well as listening to the stories told by those first explorers, such as Giovanni di Verazzano (1485-1528), Jacques Cartier (1491-1557), Samuel de Champlain (1574-1635).
and many others who believed that the way to the riches of the East, the shortest sea path to China and to India lay not to the north, nor the south, but through the middle of the lands that seemed forever to emerge west of the New Found Land.

Thus, Champlain expatiates in numerous passages describing his travels on the North American continent, in New France, on the lands lying beyond the mouth the St. Lawrence River, the imagined path to the riches of Cathay, la Nouvelle France as a land of plenty, a land that must well have seemed an inexhaustible cornucopia of wildlife, fish, water, and arable land:

The next day we parted, and we continued our journey along the shore of this lake of the Attigouantans, in which there are a great number of islands; and we made about 45 leagues, keeping along the shore of the lake. It is very large, being nearly four hundred leagues1 in length from east to west and fifty leagues wide, and because of its great size I named it the Freshwater Sea. It abounds in many kinds of excellent fish, both those we have and those we have not, and principally in trout which are of monstrous size; I have seen some that were as much as four and a half feet long, and the smallest one sees are two and a half feet. Also pike of like size, and a certain kind of sturgeon, a very large fish and marvellously good to eat . . . Then afterwards we crossed the bay which forms one of the extremities of the lake, and made about seven leagues until, on the first of August, we reached the country of the Attigouantan, at a village called Otoucha, where we found a great change in the country, this part being very fine, mostly cleared, with many hills and numerous streams which make it an agreeable district. I went to look at their Indian corn which at that time was far advanced for the season. (Champlain 237-39)

The descriptions of the landscape, of the richness of the hunting and agriculture, follow on the original purpose of the journey which was to find the shortest route to the East:

This is why many princes have striven to facilitate commerce with the peoples of the East, in the hope that this route might prove shorter and less dangerous . . . But as he [Mons] had made a report to the king of the fertility of the soil, and I had made one upon the means of discovering the passage to China with the inconvenience of the northern icebergs, or the heat of the torrid zone through which our seamen, with incredible labours and perils, pass twice in going and twice in returning, his Majesty commanded the Sieur de Monts to prepare a fresh expedition and again to send men to continue what he had begun. [note 1, ed.: “Monts’ report to the King was no doubt verbal, as was probably Champlain’s upon the new route to China. Champlain had in mind, of course, a route by way of the source of the St. Lawrence, which he understood from the Indians was connected far to the westward with salt water. He is now showing the connection between the Acadian attempts of 1604-7 and the foundation of Quebec in 1608, and is giving the reasons for re-starting the settlement in the interior rather than upon the coast of Acadia]. (Champlain 227–29)

Champlain prefaces his comments with a cursory run-down of the attempts of John and Sebastian Cabot, Gaspar Corte-Real, Martin Frobisher, Humphrey Gil-

1 A league is approximately 5.55 kilometers, thus 400 leagues is about 2220 kilometers.
bert, and Jacques Cartier, to find a route to Cathay; it was Cartier who stopped at the site of Hochelaga, today’s Montréal, stymied by the rapids on the Saint Lawrence. These would not prove to be an impediment to Champlain as he continued his explorations upon the Great Lakes.

The struggle for control of the region would become the lynch-pin to the control of the North American continent. During and long after the time that both the French and the British gave up trying to find a route to the East through the Great Lakes, the tribes of the Council of the Three Fires, the Anashinabe, the Potawatamie and the Oddawa, tried to establish a working relationship with the colonial invaders. Theirs was an effort not only to hold off the belligerent forces of the Europeans, but also somehow to stem the flow of other peoples displaced by the European invaders from the Eastern coasts of the continent, notably the Iroquois and their allies, the vicissitudes of which struggles are described by Richard White in his *The Middle Ground* (50 ff. and 223 ff.). White’s “middle ground” was the site where Indians and European invaders and traders met in a mutually beneficial arrangement, beneficial for reasons of trade as well as of political alliances. This middle ground held sway even through Pontiac’s war following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and up to Tecumseh’s alliance with the British and his eventual defeat during the War of 1812 according to White.

Yet both of these attempts on the parts of Pontiac and Tecumseh to wrest back the Northwest Territory from the incursions of settlers, entrepreneurs, madmen, civil and military authorities, were inspired by a faith in the regeneration of their Ottawa, Ojibwe and Shawnee cultures. Especially prominent in this respect is the role played by Tecumseh’s brother, Tenskwatawa, the leader of a religious movement whose purpose was to re-invigorate the peoples living in the Old Northwest in order that they might resist and repulse the European and Yankee invaders.

The theme of regeneration remains strangely enough one of the rather consistent staples of the Yankee literary representations of the lands and waters associated with the Great Lakes: from James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Oak Openings, or the Bee Hunter*, to Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes*, in 1843, and to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, various types of regenerative transformations occur on the historical as well as on the fictional scene, as if to actuate the belief underlying Champlain’s enthusiastic incursion into the North American Continent, or Pontiac’s and Tecumseh’s ill-starred hopes for restoring to its former state the geographical area bounded by the Great Lakes to the north and the Ohio River to the south. There thus would seem to be an inter-cultural and trans-historical confluence of the thematics mediated by the landscape and the waters themselves.

In what is considered by many to be the Great American Novel, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the moment at which the transformation of James Gatz into Jay Gatsby takes place on the waters of Lake Superior as recounted to the narrator of the tale, Nick Carraway:

Contemporary legends such as the ‘underground pipeline to Canada’ attached themselves to him, and there was one persistent story that he didn’t live in a house at all,
but in a boat that looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore. Just why these inventions were a source of satisfaction to James Gatz of North Dakota isn’t easy to say.

James Gatz—that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career—when he saw Dan Cody’s yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the Tuolomee and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour. (Fitzgerald 62-63)

Of course it may be just a coincidence that Fitzgerald locates his fable of transformation and regeneration on the Great Lakes, as it may be another coincidence that Nick Adams, in his attempt to return to himself, to come alive again, does so on the shores of Lake Superior at the Big Two-Hearted River.

The contemporary writer, Jim Harrison, native to the Great Lakes area, generally situates the action of his novels in the northern part of Michigan, either the Upper Peninsula or the northern part of the lower peninsula. In Returning to Earth, the sequel to True North, the story is told in four parts by four narrators, including the central figure himself, of the inevitable demise of the central character, Donald, Ojibway, doomed by Lou Gehrig’s disease, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. Donald knows he is going to die, but he wants to be buried in sacred ground. One problem with this is that the sacred ground in which he wants to be buried lies across the political border, the border between Canada and the United States. So it is necessary to think up some means by which Donald and family and friends can get to Canada, fooling the border guards.

At breakfast with a forkful of egg and fried potatoes halfway to my mouth the hammer dropped.
“What you intend to do is illegal,” she said.
“I know it.” I wanted to say something smart like “No shit, Sherlock.”
“You could get in serious trouble, all of you.”
“I think of death as beyond paltry legalities. Donald should die in the way he chooses. I simply don’t care what happens afterward.” The idea of civil authorities interfering knotted my stomach and I pushed my plate away.
...You have to register a death both here and in Canada and you can’t just bury anyone where you might wish but since Donald’s an enrolled member of the tribe he’s called a First Citizen in Canada and the civil law thus becomes a bit mushy. First Citizens have different rights.” (Harrison 118-19)

But the trip with Donald across the Canadian Soo (Sault Ste. Marie) goes smoothly, if not to say very easily and:

When we whizzed through Canadian customs with the agent saying, “Good luck fishing” my mind altered his line and began to view the world in black and white despite the bluish-green water of eastern Lake Superior to the left and the high, green forested hills on the right with the conifers a dense green and the hardwoods not totally leafed out this far north, their pale green normally my favorite color. (Harrison 139)
It is springtime, and although the time of regeneration, it seems that the sign of triumphal rebirth will be carried out by the native hero and his friends, who through an act of civil disobedience succeed in burying Donald on the Canadian side of the Soo.

Lake Superior figures in many works of United States literature, from Hemingway to Erdrich, in Underground Railroad stories, and in general in works that tend to represent the North as a place of haven, of release. The Ojibway writer, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (her English name), Bamewawagezhikaquay (her Ojibway name), and which translates into contemporary English as Woman of the Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky, left a handful of poems, many of which have been attributed to her American husband, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, explorer, ethnological linguist avant-la-lettre. Together they make one of the more problematic and fascinating pairs in Great Lakes history and in North American letters. Jane Schoolcraft contributed much of the narrative framework as well as the specific stories to her husband’s work upon which Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* was based, and her highly personal poetry reflects her own sense of Lake Superior’s sea-like, regenerative powers:

**Lines written at Castle Island, Lake Superior**

Here in my native inland sea  
From pain and sickness would I flee  
and from its shores and island bright  
Gather a store of sweet delight.  
Lone island of the saltless sea!  
How wide, how sweet, how fresh and free  
How all transporting—is the view  
Of rocks and skies and waters blue  
Uniting, as a song’s sweet strains  
To tell, here nature only reigns.  
Ah, nature! here forever sway  
Far from the haunts of men away  
For here, there are no sordid fears,  
No crimes, no misery, no tears  
No pride of wealth; the heart to fill,  
No laws to treat my people ill. (Schoolcraft 92)

Schoolcraft in her poem touches on the hard existence of laws, laws imposed by outsiders that disrupt the wellness of her being: the conventionally romantic juxtaposition and contrast of law and nature, of freedom and constriction, of health and sickness, poverty and wealth, resolve not in terms of a mythic nation-state, but unite in the song dedicated to a specific people in a specific place. The possibility of personal regeneration as well as that of the larger group to which she belongs, is given by and through the natural setting.

The frequent recurrence of the theme of regeneration may well be due to the dominant preoccupations of the writers cited here. The distance between Jane
Schoolcraft, F. S. Fitzgerald and Jim Harrison is temporal and social at the least. It may be argued that the three of them rely on the lakes and the lake system to provide a kind of natural and representational backdrop in which the theme of regeneration may be explored. This kind of thematics of regeneration is at once conventional in terms of the representations of lakes and rivers, of fresh waters, found throughout the literatures of the world. Yet it seems to be tied to the very specific and frequently repeated desires found in the earliest and in the latest peoples who have inhabited the area.
WORKS CITED


