

Editorial Ecozon@ 5.2

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Welcome to Issue 5.2 of *Ecozon@*. The subject of the themed part of this number is “Northern Nature”: we are pleased to present five essays, introduced and edited by Werner Bigell. These are followed by three further essays in the General Section, the usual Arts and Creative Writing Section, and book reviews.

In his introduction to “Northern Nature,” Werner Bigell, who lectures at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø, writes of two different approaches to the subject: the first is analysis of the aspirations and anxieties projected onto Northern landscapes by visitors, while the other investigates representations and conceptions of nature in the literature and art of the Arctic peoples—whose way of life and culture are currently facing unprecedented climatic, economic and political challenges. The task of the researcher, he argues, lies in either critically analysing outsiders’ notions of Nordic purity, simplicity and inhospitableness, or complicating and challenging such projections by exploring the region’s history, economy, and changing environment.

In the first essay, Sophie Dietrich discusses the representation of Northern forests in the work of the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, showing how eighteenth-century notions of the sublime shaped public perceptions of the North. In the second, Nicole Merola writes of tensions between different symbolic framings of the North, showing how its perception as a pastoral sphere is undermined by gothic horror elements in Michelle Paver’s novel *Dark Matter*, which is read as an allegory of contemporary resource exploitation. The essay by Allison Athens which follows contrasts contemporary Western animal rights activists’ understanding of animals and our relationship with them with that of the Inuit, as reflected in the depiction of seal hunting in Inuit films. Julia Feuer-Cotter’s essay on contemporary writing about Alaska shows how regional authors such as Velma Wallis and Sheila Nickerson counter external perspectives of a mythical land central to US national identity in their work. Finally, Sigfrid Kjeldaas discusses Barry Lopez’s representation of the North American Arctic, arguing that his 30-year-old text, *Arctic Dreams* has lost none of its relevance: it demonstrates the inherent limitations of common framings of the land, and offers a particularised, ecological understanding in their place.

The General Section opens with an intriguing essay by Ellen Arnold which demonstrates the potential of consideration of premodern sources to contribute to discussions of environmental imagination. Examining the depiction of rivers in the work of three Latin poets from 4th to 6th-century Gaul, she shows how these were used to validate Christian cultural experience, confirm cultural identity, and voice concern over political and social integration. This essay is nicely complemented by the review of her book, *Negotiating the Landscape* (2013) on the landscape of medieval monasteries in the

Ardennes, found in the review section of this issue. The other two essays in the section are concerned with works of contemporary literature: Enrico Cesaretti's article with Silvia Avallone's novel *Acciaio* (2010) and Pippa Marland's essay with the German-British writer W.G. Sebald's travel narrative *The Rings of Saturn* (1995). Cesaretti shows how Avallone's coming-of-age novel depicting the lives of teenage girls growing up in an Italian industrial port foregrounds the interactions between their bodies, the machines used to produce steel, and the plants and shells the girls find on a beach on the site. Drawing on arguments about the mutual connections between the human, the organic, and inorganic matter in the 'material turn' which ecocriticism has taken in recent years, Cesaretti shows how Avallone's novel not only presents a radically different vision of Tuscany's famed "Etruscan Coast," but also hints at the sort of posthuman ecology that regulates this and other industrial places. In her discussion of the "traces of destruction" which Sebald encounters all around in the East Anglian landscape, culminating in his visit to Orford Ness, Marland grapples with a question which has begun to arouse considerable interest, namely the shortcomings of posthumanism and the possible need for a 'new humanism'. She argues convincingly that whereas the material turn in ecocriticism has contributed valuable theoretical tools to the posthumanist project of decentring the human, it has deflected attention too far from the human, and we need a "tentative ongoing humanism" within the posthumanist project, interrogating the specificities of the human animal. An earlier version of this article was awarded the 2014 EASLCE award for the best graduate student essay at the conference in Tartü.

The theme of Northern Nature is taken up again in the Art and Creative Writing section. It opens with an introduction by Serenella Iovino to the plurality of presences, colours and substances (endless winters, obstinate ice, unprecedented postcolonial expansion, painfully melting glaciers, and "gleefully spectral" auroras) which make up the eco-cultural imagery of the North and have inspired the artistic contributions to this issue of *Ecozon@*. There follow 8 striking photographs of the Icelandic landscape by Thorvardur Arnason (one of which we have adopted as cover image for the issue), a short prose piece about the same country in Italian by Luca Bugnone, "Elska", and two poems. The first of these, "Cedevole al tatto" by Paola Loreto, is translated into English as "To Be in Any Form", and the second, Jacob Price's "Space Junk" is accompanied by a Spanish version, "Basura espacial".

The Reviews section which rounds off the issue opens with an essay by Charles Whitney reviewing three of the more important recent publications on the economics of climate change. Climate economics is "too important to be left to the economists", Whitney argues, and the form as well as the content of books such as these, which shape public debates and policy, deserve to be scrutinized, not least by rhetorical and literary scholars. In the reviews which follow, Esther Rey Torrijos, Terry Gifford, Kevin Trumpeter, Nicole Seymour, Reinhard Hennig, Noelia Malla García and Chad Weidner present publications on feminist ecocriticism, ecogothic, waste and contamination in U.S. ethnic literatures, ecological othering in American culture, environment and monastic identity in the medieval Ardennes, Wordsworth and the post-apocalyptic novel.

We are delighted to announce that Serenella Iovino joins the *Ecozon@* editorial team from this issue as Arts Editor. She will of course be familiar to many readers from her publications, and as a former EASLCE President (2008-10). We are grateful to Serenella for placing her wide-ranging contacts and experience in judging the work of writers and artists at the disposal of the journal. As always, the *Ecozon@* editors hope readers will enjoy and profit from this issue. We would be delighted to hear from you.

Introduction: Northern Nature

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When I take the coastal steamer, *Hurtigrute*, down south along the Norwegian coast, I sometimes overhear the tourists' conversations. Whereas some consider themselves to be in some northern Shangri-La, envying the simple lives of locals in their wooden houses, set between fjords and mountains, others wonder how anyone can live in such desolation. Although the landscape the tourists see is the same, and their cultural background may not be different, they reach divergent evaluations. The reason for this phenomenon is that a culture produces a variety of sometimes contradictory projections onto the land. With its low population density, low number of tourists (in comparison with the charter flight destinations in warmer regions), challenging infrastructure, and inhospitable climate, it is no surprise that the North is a region marked more by projection than by experience. The North is not alone in being a screen for cultural projection; the Palestinian author Raja Shehadeh has described the thicket of projections that make his homeland invisible:

Palestine has been one of the countries most visited by pilgrims and travellers over the ages. The accounts I have read do not describe a land familiar to me but rather a land of these travellers' imaginations. Palestine has been constantly re-invented, with devastating consequences to its original inhabitants. Whether it was the cartographer preparing maps or travellers describing the landscape in the extensive travel literature, what mattered was not the land and its inhabitants as they actually were but the confirmation of the viewer or reader's religious or political beliefs. (Shehadeh xii)

The North too is a cultural projection screen, perceived as the last frontier, a space for adventurous explorers, a pure land never touched by industrialization, a treasure chest of resources, a setting of naturalistic tales, and an empty land. While both the North and the Holy Land are heavily invested with meaning, it might appear as if there is less contestation of projections in the North. This, however, is not the case, but the agents involved are less visible. It is the task of criticism to bring them into view, but how? For a critic there are two ways of looking at the North. One is to scrutinize the cultural projections, the cultural, political, and historical conditions under which they emerged, and what they mean for the people and ecosystems of the targets of projection. The other way is to investigate the culture and landscapes of the North directly by observation or indirectly (for example by reading literature written in or about the North), to turn the screen into a place. Both approaches are equally valuable and can be combined. The essays in this selection investigate the cultural origins of the projections as well as the clashes and interactions between outside and inside perspectives.

What is the North? In a wide sense the term includes North America, the Asian part of northern Russia, and northern Europe, but in the context of this selection it refers to the seascape of the Arctic Ocean and its surrounding landscapes of northern Scandinavia, northern Russia, northern Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Iceland. When one looks at the map from a national perspective, the North appears to be a marginal region, far from the centers, inhabited by natives, settled by rough oil towns, and a place of exile and imprisonment (as in the gulags). However, when one looks at it from the vantage point of the North Pole, it becomes clear that the various marginal regions are connected, forming a ring around the Arctic Ocean. This is different in the South, where an uninhabited continent is approached by the southern tips of disconnected continents. This means that the histories and stories of the North are much more interwoven than appears from a national perspective, and there are many common features, also geographical ones. In this light, the phrase “No man can travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below” from Jack London’s short story “To Build a Fire” can be seen not so much as a depiction of a struggling individual in a hostile environment but as a call for company, to see the connection between individuals, peoples, and their environments.

The cold climate means that agriculture only plays a marginal role in the North, and typical landscapes are the taiga (which in Russian is poetically called “the endless green sea of the forest”) and the treeless tundra. In all countries, except Iceland, there are native populations who live off hunting, fishing, or reindeer herding. Because of the absence of agriculture, there has never been the type of mass migration of the American Frontier that led to the extermination of the native population, and consequently various forms of cohabitation between native and European populations are seen. The North also has a history of trading; the Russian Pomors, for example, traded along the coast from Norway to Alaska. Today there are common challenges for all northern regions such as climate change (whose effects for example on the permafrost, on the pack ice, and on flora and fauna differ from those in other regions), the vulnerability of the slowly regenerating ecosystems, the opening of the North-West and North-East passages for container ships, due to climate change, and the exploitation of resources made possible by new technology. The historical, economic, and climatic changes do not affect single nations but the entire region. So far the politics of the North have been those of national hinterlands. However, this is now changing, as there are new multinational regions such as the Barents region, political bodies such as the Arctic Council, and examples of educational cooperation such as the University of the Arctic, stressing the interconnectedness of the region.

Not only geography presents a common frame for the North: also in the projections onto the North there are common features. In Norwegian there is a term, *syden*, literally meaning “the South.” It is used indiscriminately by tourists who are not so much interested in a specific country as in what the South has to offer: sun, beach, wine, sex, and so forth. The perception of the North is less influenced by this kind of hedonistic tourist imagination, but it is not necessarily less reductive. The North is cold and white. Both qualities resonate in Thomas Kastura’s reading of Nietzsche: “Nature becomes an abstract space for testing, where there are no irritations: no comfort

through religious promises of salvation, no declarations of meaning through Enlightenment's epistemologies, no humiliations through emotions such as pity or bourgeois humanist morality" (Kastura 38, my translation). Kastura describes how some travelers to the polar regions seek to abandon the difficult, ungrateful, and unfinishable project of the Enlightenment, and rather experience something that needs no explanation (Kastura, 83). For the painter Wassily Kandinsky the color white has the connotation of openness: "White, therefore, has this harmony of silence, which works upon us negatively... It is not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities. White has the appeal of the nothingness that is before birth, of the world in the ice age" (Kandinsky, qtd. in Facco). This Northern imaginary of white emptiness is seen in painting, photography, literature, in the polar journeys and explorations, and also in tourism marketing.

The role of the researcher is to color the whiteness, to show the complex stories contradicting the imagination of simplicity, to investigate the economic, historical, and ecosystemic interactions. Like in the case of the Holy Land, this implies seeing through the manifold projections and identifying the different framings of the North. This is what the articles in this collection do.

In "Der nordische Naturraum und das Erhabene—Eine Fallstudie," Sophie Dietrich analyzes such an external projection, the representation of Northern forests in the work of the German painter Caspar David Friedrich. Using the philosophers Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, she shows how the idea of the sublime has shaped the perception of the North. She looks at the mechanisms and landscape features that make Northern landscapes correspond to the idea of the sublime.

Nicole M. Merola, in her essay "for terror of the deadness beyond': Arctic Environments and Inhuman Ecologies in Michelle Paver's *Dark Matter*" looks at the conflicting symbolic frames of the North, showing how gothic and horror elements undermine the pastoral mindset. This conceptual ambivalence is then seen in an economic context of whale, walrus, and seal hunting. Merola finds that the violent hunting of marine animals is not just an economic enterprise but spills over, in the form of a *gengångner*, "one who walks again" haunting the modern imagination and resonating with ecological sensibilities. The story can also be read as an allegory of modern resource exploitation, which, in many ways is a continuation of the *gengångner* theme.

Also Allison K. Athens, in "Saviors, Sealies, and Seals: Strategies for Self-Representation in Contemporary Inuit Films" investigates animals in an economic context. She discusses the role of the animal rights movement in the West, linking it to the evolution of ethical considerations and a criticism of exploitative capitalism. However, she also shows the cultural limitation of this Western understanding, presenting animal rights from an indigenous perspective. The Inuit see animals differently, and their seal hunting is part of a different cultural configuration, reflecting back on unstated assumptions and false universals of the Western animal rights activist. In her essay she switches between Western and native perspectives, negotiating their conflicting conceptualizations of animals.

Julia Feuer-Cotter's essay "The Unreliability of Place Construction in Contemporary Alaskan Regional Writing" investigates the relation between geographical isolation and myth creation. Outside and inside perspectives are engaged in a struggle over spatial meaning. Feuer-Cotter uses the regional authors Velma Wallis and Sheila Nickerson to highlight the unreliability of representation and to debate the role of Alaska as part of US-American national identity.

In "Barry Lopez' Relational Arctic," Sigfrid Kjeldaas discusses Barry Lopez' representation of the North American Arctic. Lopez challenges the grand narratives and aims at a particularized understanding of the land, implying also going beyond a quantitative and scientific understanding. The now almost 30 year old text also examines the effects of resource extraction and therefore is as up-to-date as ever. Kjeldaas shows how Lopez makes visible the various frames with which the Arctic is usually perceived and demonstrates their inherent limitations, aiming at a more comprehensive ecological understanding of the region.

The association of the North with the color white could literally be seen as a representation of a Northern winter landscape. However, if referring to cultural imagination, it is the product, to use a photographic metaphor, of an over-exposure. There are countless, often negative, projections onto the North in the sense that the North is what the civilized world is not. The North has been described as pure and empty, but the absence of civilization is a double-edged myth. The authors of this collection do not, of course, attempt to fill in all missing frames, but they show the way for criticism: the North is not empty but filled with peoples, stories, animals, and ecosystems. It is not simple but highly complex; the authors show this complexity both on the conceptual level in terms of cultural projections, of different framings of the natural world, which leads to different understandings of the human interaction with their environment. The articles also show the material and narrative interaction with the world south of it. Too often the North is perceived in what Kenneth Olwig calls a spatial perspective, a view from a singular perspective from the outside, focusing on the static visual elements. The authors here evoke what Olwig calls a platial perspective, seeing the North and its complicated interactions from the inside, from the perspective of the people living there as well as seeing people as part of ecosystems. In their systemic perspective the authors show also how the different frames interact and engage in a geographical imagination beyond the myth of whiteness. As the Holy Land, the North is more material than holy, and a complex story, not a simple narrative.

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Der nordische Naturraum und das Erhabene: Eine Fallstudie

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Zusammenfassung



Im vorliegenden Artikel wird die künstlerische Darstellung der für den Norden Europas charakteristischen, ausgedehnten Nadelwälder anhand eines Fallbeispiels aus der Kunstgeschichte untersucht. Bei dem ausgewählten Kunstobjekt handelt es sich um Caspar David Friedrichs (1774 – 1840) Gemälde *Der Chasseur im Walde* aus dem Jahre 1814. Zunächst erfolgt eine Bildanalyse unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Darstellung des Waldes. In diesem Kontext wird erörtert, wie der Künstler dieses Landschaftselement dargestellt hat und inwiefern jene Darstellungsweise mit der symbolischen Bedeutung korrespondiert. Ferner wird dargelegt, inwiefern das Fallbeispiel als Darstellung einer nordischen Landschaft aufgefasst werden kann. In einem weiteren Schritt wird untersucht, ob das Gemälde den Eindruck der Erhabenheit, der sich angesichts von Naturschauspielen einstellt, verbildlicht. Dies geschieht unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Friedrich Schillers Aufsatz *Vom Erhabenen. Zur weiteren Ausführung einiger Kantischer Ideen* aus dem Jahre 1793 und von Edmund Burkes *Philosophischer Untersuchung über den Ursprung unserer Ideen vom Erhabenen und Schönen*, die in einer ersten Fassung 1756 und dann 1759 erschien. Dabei liegt der Fokus auf der Frage, ob der im Bild dargestellte Nadelwald im 18. Jahrhundert für die Erweckung der Idee des Erhabenen als geeignet erachtet wurde.

Obgleich sich von den entsprechenden philosophischen Traktaten keine Präferenz für eine geographische Region ableiten lässt, bediente man sich in der europäischen Malerei des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts häufig nordischer Landschaften, um die Idee des Erhabenen bildlich darzustellen. Da der Vorzug nordischer Landschaften in diesem Kontext bisher nicht restlos geklärt ist, wird abschließend diskutiert, inwiefern das behandelte Fallbeispiel zum Verständnis dieses Phänomens beitragen kann.

Stichworte: das Erhabene, Wald, Gefühl, Caspar David Friedrich, der Norden

Abstract

This article focuses on the artistic representation of dense conifer forests as a feature characteristic of the landscape of Northern Europe. Caspar David Friedrich's (1774 – 1840) *Chasseur in the Forest*, painted in 1813-14, serves as the case study for this article. In the context of the analysis of this painting, particular attention will be paid to the depiction of the forest. It will be investigated if the manner of representation corresponds to any symbolic meaning perceived in the depicted landscape. Furthermore it shall be examined, if the depicted landscape is of its nature a characteristically northern landscape. The analysis will take into account Friedrich Schiller's essay *Vom Erhabenen. Zur weiteren Ausführung einiger Kantischer Ideen* on the question of the sublime, which appeared in 1793, as well as Edmund Burke's work *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the first version of which appeared in 1756, in order to discern if, during the early 19th century, the forest depicted in the case study was considered to be expressive of the idea of the sublime.

During the 18th and 19th century, especially Northern landscapes were often considered to be suitable to visualize the idea of the sublime. So far this phenomenon remained unexplained to some degree. Hence the article deals carefully with the relevance of the case study to this question.

Keywords: the sublime, forest, emotion, Caspar David Friedrich, the north

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la representación artística de los densos bosques de coníferas como particularidad del paisaje del Norte. El cuadro de Caspar David Friedrich (1774 – 1840) pintado en 1813-14, *Chasseur in the Forest*, sirve como caso de estudio en el que la imagen se analiza prestando especial atención a la representación del bosque. Este trabajo investiga si la forma de representar el paisaje se corresponde con su significado simbólico. Además, se investiga si el paisaje reproducido es, por su naturaleza, un paisaje del Norte. El análisis tendrá en cuenta el trabajo de Friedrich Schiller *Vom Erhabenen. Zur weiteren Ausführung einiger Kantischer Ideen* (1793) acerca de la cuestión de lo sublime y el ensayo de Edmund Burke *Indagación filosófica sobre el origen de las ideas acerca de lo sublime y lo bello*, publicado en 1756, para descubrir si el bosque representado en este caso de estudio hubiera sido considerado adecuado como representación de la idea de lo sublime a comienzos del siglo XIX.

Los paisajes del Norte se consideraban especialmente apropiados como forma de visualización de la idea de lo sublime durante los siglos XVIII y XIX. Este artículo concluye analizando la relevancia de este caso de estudio en lo que respecta a un fenómeno que a día de hoy permanece inexplicado.

Palabras clave: lo sublime, bosque, Caspar David Friedrich, el Norte

Die Aussage "Die Kunst tritt als Mittlerin zwischen die Natur und den Menschen. Das Urbild ist der Menge zu groß zu erhaben um es erfassen zu können" (Friedrich 32) stammt von Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), dem Künstler, der das im Nachfolgenden behandelte Fallbeispiel geschaffen hat. Was die im Zitat erwähnte "Mittlerin" uns bezüglich der Verbildlichung der Idee des Erhabenen und im Hinblick auf die Darstellung des nordischen Naturraumes mitteilen kann, wird anhand des Gemäldes *Der Chasseur im Walde* aus dem Jahre 1814 untersucht. Zum besseren Verständnis des nachfolgenden Textes erfolgt an dieser Stelle zunächst eine Erläuterung der Begriffe *nordisch* und *erhaben*. Zudem werden in aller Kürze mögliche Zusammenhänge zwischen dem nordischen Naturraum und der Idee des Erhabenen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert skizziert.

Sprechen wir von dem *nordischen Naturraum* oder dem *nordischen Wald*, muss zunächst festgelegt werden, was wir unter *Norden* beziehungsweise *nordisch* verstehen. Bereits an dieser Stelle tun sich erste Schwierigkeiten auf. Die Eingrenzung des Nordens auf ein konkretes geographisches Gebiet würde der Intention und der Wirkung vieler Kunstwerke nicht gerecht werden. Persönliche Erfahrungen, Bildung und kulturelle Prägung sind von zentraler Bedeutung, wenn es darum geht, eine künstlerisch dargestellte Landschaft als Verbildlichung eines nordischen Naturraumes zu erkennen oder aufzufassen. In seinem Buch *The Idea of North* geht Peter Davidson auf diese Problematik ein und kommt zu der Erkenntnis, dass es keine allgemein gültige

Definition für *den Norden* gibt. Es verhält sich ihm zufolge vielmehr so, dass jeder Mensch eine eigene "idea of the north" besitzt (Davidson 8–9). Was als *Norden* oder *nordisch* aufgefasst wird, hängt demnach immer vom eigenen Standpunkt ab. Demzufolge wäre der Norden keine bestimmte Region, sondern ein Konglomerat aus unterschiedlichen Vorstellungen. Da die individuellen Auffassungen eng mit der kulturellen Prägung verknüpft sind, gibt es innerhalb eines bestimmten Kulturkreises stets Ideen, die von mehreren Menschen geteilt werden. Peter Davidson geht in seinem Buch den zwei zentralen Kerngedanken vom Norden nach, die sich in Europa seit der Antike bis in das 19. Jahrhundert hinein nachweisen lassen. Einerseits wurde der Norden mit Dunkelheit und Mangel assoziiert und sich als Ort des Schreckens vorgestellt, an dem das Böse haust (21). Andererseits hatte sich die Vorstellung von einem Ort jenseits des Schreckens, der Finsternis und der Kälte etabliert, an dem Frieden und Überfluss herrschen. So glaubte man in der Europäischen Antike, dass hinter dem Ort, an dem der Nordwind seinen Ursprung hat, die Zivilisation der Hyperboreer existierte. Damit einher ging die Vorstellung einer Art paradiesischen Oase im hohen Norden (22–24). Im Folgenden werden die Begriffe *Norden* beziehungsweise *nordisch* im Sinne von Davidsons Definition gebraucht. Diese hat sich insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Diskussion um den *nordischen* Charakter der im Fallbeispiel dargestellten Landschaft als hilfreich erwiesen.

Die Beantwortung der Frage, was unter dem ästhetischen Begriff des Erhabenen zu verstehen ist, gestaltet sich ebenfalls äußerst komplex, da der Begriff im Laufe der Geschichte auf unterschiedliche Phänomene angewandt wurde. Er diente fast ausnahmslos dazu, Grenzphänomene, Grenzerfahrungen oder Grenzüberschreitungen zu bezeichnen (Grave, *Das Erhabene* 113–117). In der Antike verwendete man den Ausdruck im Rahmen von Dichtungs- und Rhetoriktheorien. Jene antiken Theorien wurden im 17. Jahrhundert wiederentdeckt. Dabei bereitete in erster Linie die von Boileau übersetzte Pseudo-Longinus-Schrift die Konjunktur des Erhabenen vor (Hinrichs 56). Bereits seit dem späten 17. Jahrhundert verwendeten englische Autoren den Begriff des Erhabenen vermehrt, um ungewöhnliche Naturobjekte und -phänomene zu charakterisieren. Zeitgleich entwickelten sich neue Formen der Landschaftserfahrung. Die wilde Natur und das Hochgebirge fanden nunmehr allgemeines Interesse. Dabei beschrieb das Erhabene jedoch nicht ausschließlich die Qualität bestimmter Naturobjekte, sondern wurde zunehmend auf die Disposition des Betrachters bezogen. Im 18. Jahrhundert setzten sich Burke, Kant und Schiller mit dem Begriff auseinander. Im Zuge dessen wurden das Erhabene und das Schöne zu Grundbegriffen der Ästhetik (Grave, *Das Erhabene* 113–117). Die Rhetorik behandelte man in den Theorien des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts nicht mehr primär. Stattdessen gewannen Naturphänomene und deren Wahrnehmung durch das Subjekt immer mehr an Bedeutung (Hinrichs 56). Aufgrund der philosophischen Theorien von Burke, Kant und Schiller verbreitete sich die Vorstellung, dass die Empfindung des Erhabenen durch die Konfrontation des Subjekts mit der übermächtigen Natur ausgelöst werden kann. Allerdings herrscht bei den drei Gelehrten keine Einigkeit darüber, was erhaben ist, beziehungsweise wodurch das Gefühl des Erhabenen evoziert werden kann (56–57).

Ein Vergleich jener unterschiedlichen Auffassungen ist jedoch nicht Thema des vorliegenden Artikels. Der nachfolgende Text bezieht sich auf Burkes und Schillers Konzepte vom Erhabenen. Schillers Theorie wird berücksichtigt, da mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit davon ausgegangen werden kann, dass Caspar David Friedrich Schillers Konzept kannte. Grave führt an, dass Christian Gottfried Körner, der Vater von Caspar David Friedrichs gutem Freund Theodor Körner, ein enger Bekannter Schillers war. Dieser lebte bis 1815 in Dresden. Schiller hatte 1785–87 im Hause der Körners gewohnt und pflegte auch später noch den Kontakt zur Familie. Somit kommen Christian Gottfried Körner und sein Sohn Theodor als Vermittler der Ideen Schillers durchaus in Frage (Grave, *Caspar David Friedrich* 52–53). Im Gegensatz dazu gibt es keine konkreten Anhaltspunkte, welche die Vermutung nahe legen, dass Friedrich Kants Ideen vom Erhabenen kannte beziehungsweise vertrat und diese mit seinen Werken verbildlichen wollte. Die erhaltenen Selbstzeugnisse des Künstlers lassen weder auf einen kritischen Umgang mit Kants Konzept vom Erhabenen schließen, noch werden in ihnen mögliche bildliche Umsetzungen von Kants Theorien benannt (Hinrichs 72). Zudem können Friedrichs Kunstwerke das Erhabene im Sinne Kants nicht evozieren, da die Kunst bei Kant, anders als bei Schiller, ausschließlich im Bereich des Schönen fungiert. Kant zufolge ist nur die Natur dazu in der Lage, beim Betrachter erhabene Empfindungen auszulösen (76). Im Vergleich zu Schillers und Burkes Theorien, scheinen die kantischen Ideen vom Erhabenen im Hinblick auf Friedrichs Schaffen somit weniger relevant zu sein. Daher wird im vorliegenden Artikel von ihrer weiterführenden Betrachtung abgesehen. Burkes Überlegungen beziehen sich ebenso ausschließlich auf konkrete Naturwahrnehmungen. Allerdings wurden die Eigenschaften, welche er Objekten zuschreibt, die zur Evokation des Erhabenen geeigneten sind, im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert fast ausnahmslos herangezogen, wenn es galt, das Erhabene zu definieren oder darzustellen (Eco 290). Der Einfluss, den Burkes Theorie auf künstlerische Darstellungen des Erhabenen ausübte, die aus dem gleichen Zeitraum wie das im Folgenden behandelte Fallbeispiel stammen, macht ihre Erläuterung im Kontext dieses Artikles daher unumgänglich. Darüber hinaus lassen sich erstaunlich viele Parallelen zwischen der im Fallbeispiel dargestellten Landschaft und der Idee des Erhabenen nach Burke feststellen. Burke äußert sich über das Erhabene wie folgt:

Alles, was auf irgendeine Weise geeignet ist, die Idee von Schmerz und Gefahr zu erregen, das heißt alles, was irgendwie schrecklich ist oder mit schrecklichen Objekten in Beziehung steht oder in einer dem Schrecken ähnlichen Weise wirkt, ist eine Quelle des Erhabenen; [...]. (Burke, zit. n. Strube 72)

Worin besteht nun der Zusammenhang zwischen Objekten, die Furcht und Schrecken evozieren, und dem Erhabenen? Burke zufolge bewirken Objekte, die von einer bestimmten Beschaffenheit sind, im Betrachter eine übermäßige Anspannung der Nerven. Die Nervenanspannung, so Burke, rufe einen schmerzlichen Zustand, einen Schrecken oder ein Erschauern hervor. Diesem *horror* mische sich ein Frohsein bei, sobald der Betrachter realisiere, dass er selbst nicht unmittelbar gefährdet sei (Grave, *Das Erhabene* 113–117). Demnach ist es für das Empfinden des Erhabenen entscheidend, dass das Subjekt sich nicht in Gefahr befindet (Burke, zit. n. Strube 73).

Alles was in dem soeben erläuterten Sinne froh macht, nennt Burke erhaben (86). Im Gegensatz zu Burke, der sinnlich-subjektiv bei der Erläuterung der Begriffe des Erhabenen und Schönen vorgeht, erklärt Schiller diese sinnlich-objektiv (Strube 23–26). In dem Punkt, dass das erhabene Objekt zwar furchtbar sein muss, ohne dabei wirklich Furcht zu erregen, stimmt Schiller mit Burke überein. Auch Schiller geht davon aus, dass Dinge wie Schmerz und Gefahr nur dann froh machen, wenn wir die Idee von ihnen haben, ohne selbst in entsprechenden Umständen zu sein (Schiller 177–179). Allerdings unterscheidet er, anders als Burke, zwischen dem Theoretisch-Erhabenen und dem Praktisch-Erhabenen. Praktisch-Erhaben ist Schiller zufolge “Die Natur, vorgestellt als eine Macht, die zwar unseren physischen Zustand bestimmen kann, aber auf unsern Willen keine Gewalt hat, [...]” (173). Weiterhin unterteilt Schiller das Praktisch-Erhabene in das Kontemplativ- und das Pathetisch-Erhabene (Hinrichs 59). Ihm zufolge ist das Praktisch-Erhabene die Wirkung von drei aufeinanderfolgenden Vorstellungen. Zunächst muss es eine objektive physische Macht geben. Darauf folgt unsere subjektive physische Ohnmacht. Die dritte Voraussetzung besteht in unserer subjektiven moralischen Übermacht. Durch Beziehung auf die moralische Person wird das Objekt der Furcht in ein erhabenes Objekt verwandelt. Im Gegensatz zum Pathetisch-Erhabenen, wo das Subjekt mit der Furchtbarkeit des Objekts für den Menschen konfrontiert wird, hat es beim Kontemplativ-Erhabenen die objektive Ursache des Leidens, nicht das Leiden selbst, vor Augen. In diesem Fall erzeugt das “urtheilende Subjekt” die Vorstellung des Leidens in sich und verwandelt den gegebenen Gegenstand in ein Objekt der Furcht. In einem zweiten Schritt, durch die Beziehung auf seine moralische Person, verwandelt das Subjekt den gegebenen Gegenstand schließlich in ein Erhabenes (Schiller 185–186). Nina Hinrichs zufolge besteht die Essenz der von Schiller beschriebenen, erhabenen Empfindung in der moralischen Selbstbehauptung des Menschen durch die Idee der Vernunft. Darin besteht ein maßgeblicher Unterschied zu Burkes Theorie.

Die Betrachtung einer Landschaftsmalerei aus dem 18. oder 19. Jahrhundert unter Berücksichtigung von Burkes und Schillers Ideen vom Erhabenen bietet sich an, weil in der Kunst jener beiden Jahrhunderte die als erhaben konnotierte Natur zunehmend Gegenstand bildlicher Darstellungen wurde. Zu den gängigen Topoi des Erhabenen in der Malerei gehörten Berggipfel, herabstürzende Wasserfälle, Lawinen, Vulkanausbrüche und Schiffbrüche. Verbunden mit dem Konzept der Unendlichkeit sind zudem der Blick in den Sternenhimmel, sowie der Blick auf die Weiten des Ozeans zu den als erhaben konnotierten Naturphänomenen zu rechnen. Nina Hinrichs hat in ihrem Buch *Caspar David Friedrich - ein deutscher Künstler des Nordens. Analyse der Friedrich-Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert und im Nationalsozialismus* die Theorien der Erhabenheit von Kant und Schiller im Hinblick auf die Darstellung nordischer Landschaften untersucht. Hinrichs begründet ihre Überlegungen auf dem Sachverhalt, dass innerhalb dieser beiden Jahrhunderte in der europäischen Malerei häufig eine Gegenüberstellung von *erhabenem Norden* und *klassizistischen schönen Süden* erfolgte. Demnach wurden im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert für die Darstellung der als erhaben konnotierten Natur vorzugsweise nordische Landschaften verwendet. Derartige Landschaftsbilder sollten

im Klassizismus moralische Empfindungen bei dem Betrachter wecken. Als dem Gefühl im Zuge der Romantik ein höherer Stellenwert als der Vernunft zugeschrieben wurde, kam es jedoch zu einer Abschwächung jener moralischen Komponente. Zutreffend bemerkt Hinrichs, dass die philosophischen Theorien von Kant und Schiller keine geografische Verortung von Objekten und Zuständen, die Erhabenheit evozieren können, liefern. Viele Naturphänomene, die erhabene Empfindungen anregen können, sind an sich weder nord- noch südspezifisch (Hinrichs 56–63). So nennt Schiller im Zusammenhang mit dem Kontemplativ-Erhabenen folgende Beispiele für Mächte der Natur, die im Widerspruch zu unserer physischen Existenz stehen:

Ein Abgrund, der sich zu unsern Füßen aufthut, ein Gewitter, ein brennender Vulkan, eine Felsenmasse, die über uns herabhängt, als wenn sie eben niederstürzen wollte, ein Sturm auf dem Meere, ein rauher Winter der Polargegend, ein Sommer der heißen Zone, reissende oder giftige Thiere, eine Überschwemmung u. d. gl. [...]. (Schiller 186–187)

Hohe Wasserfälle, reißende Flüsse, Gewitterwolken oder das stürmische Meer können keiner bestimmten Region zugeordnet werden. Es verhält sich vielmehr so, dass das Subjekt sowohl die rauen Winter des hohen Nordens, als auch die heißen Sommer des Südens als furchtbare, übermächtige Natur erleben kann und somit beide Phänomene dazu geeignet sind, die kontemplativ-erhabene Empfindung im Sinne Schillers zu evozieren (Hinrichs 61). Davon ausgehend argumentiert Hinrichs bezüglich Kant und Schiller, dass der Gegensatz *erhaben* versus *schön* nicht von den Philosophen selbst, sondern im Rahmen der Wirkungsentfaltungen ihrer Theorien auf den Nord-Süd-Gegensatz übertragen wurde (57–62). Diese Erkenntnis besitzt auch im Hinblick auf Burkes Theorie *Vom Erhabenen und Schönen* Gültigkeit. Am Ende des vorliegenden Artikels steht somit die Frage nach der Ursache für die Bevorzugung nordischer Landschaften im Hinblick auf die Verbildlichung der Idee des Erhabenen. Mögliche Erklärungsansätze leiten sich in erster Linie vom nachfolgend behandelten Fallbeispiel ab, bei dem es sich um Caspar David Friedrichs Gemälde *Der Chasseur im Walde* aus dem Jahre 1814 handelt.

Das Bild gibt den Blick auf eine Winterlandschaft frei. In einiger Entfernung sehen wir einen einsamen Mann, der die Uniform der napoleonischen Kavallerie trägt (Koerner 184). Er hat uns den Rücken zugewandt und steht vor einem dichten Tannenwald. Als Beobachter der Szenerie befinden wir uns in einer unbestimmten Position. Fast scheint es, als würden wir in einiger Entfernung zum Waldrand auf einer Anhöhe stehen und auf den Franzosen herunter blicken. Auf einem von zwei Baumstümpfen im Vordergrund sitzt ein Rabe. Auch er scheint den verlorenen Soldaten zu beobachten. In der Fachliteratur wird der Vogel für gewöhnlich als Todesbote des Chasseurs gedeutet (Hinrichs 28). Besondere Aufmerksamkeit gebührt den Lichtverhältnissen im Bild. Vom blauen, mit weißen Wolkentupfern durchsetzten Himmel ist nur ein kleiner Ausschnitt zwischen den Wipfeln der gewaltigen Tannen sichtbar. Der schneebedeckte Boden scheint das Tageslicht teilweise zu reflektieren. Allerdings erklären diese Reflektionen nicht das Licht, von dem die dichten Kronen der Tannen angestrahlt werden. Fast möchte man den Eindruck gewinnen, dass ein gewaltiger Scheinwerfer die Szenerie von hinten anleuchtet. Dieser unnatürliche

Lichteffekt muss vom Maler bewusst eingesetzt worden sein, um den Kontrast zwischen der hellen, schneebedeckten Lichtung und dem Dunkel des Waldes zu verstärken. Warum Friedrich Interesse daran gehabt haben könnte, die im Waldesinneren herrschende Finsternis zu intensivieren, wird an späterer Stelle eingehend thematisiert. Die Uniform des Soldaten gibt einen groben Zeitraum und ein vages geographisches Territorium für die dargestellte Szene vor. Die abgebildete Handlung findet in der Zeit der Napoleonischen Kriege (1792–1815) statt und da der französische Soldat verloren wirkt, liegt die Vermutung nahe, dass er sich auf feindlichem Boden befindet. Genaueres lässt sich von den im Gemälde wiedergegebenen Elementen jedoch nicht ableiten. Laut der in der Fachliteratur vorherrschenden Meinung symbolisiert der Nadelwald die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald. Dementsprechend wäre die dargestellte Landschaft in Deutschland zu verorten (Schama 106). In diesem Kontext muss es allerdings verwundern, dass Friedrich keinen Eichenwald, sondern einen Tannenwald gemalt hat. Zwar nahm die Anzahl an Nadelwäldern in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert rasant zu, weil diese schnell nachwuchsen und somit den Bedürfnissen der Holzindustrie gerecht wurden (102). Doch waren es Eichenwälder, die in der Vorstellungswelt der Deutschen die Quelle ihrer Kultur darstellten. In der napoleonischen Besatzungszeit wurde die Eiche sogar zum Symbol der Identität des deutschen Volkes (Nakama 133). Die Darstellung eines symbolisch aufgeladenen Eichenwaldes hätte sich demnach durchaus angeboten. Dennoch entschied Friedrich sich dagegen. Der Wald im Gemälde erinnert eher an den borealen Nadelwald, auch Taiga genannt. Die Wahl des Motives ließe sich möglicherweise mit einer weniger häufigen Auslegung des Bildes begründen, derzufolge das Gemälde die Niederlage des Napoleonischen Heeres im Russlandfeldzug 1812 thematisiert. In dem Fall stünde die Winterlandschaft mit Nadelwald für den harten russischen Winter, der das französische Heer in die Knie zwang. Hinrichs vermutet, dass die französischen Soldaten, die nach dem verlorenen Russlandfeldzug in Dresden haltgemacht haben, den Künstler zu dem Gemälde inspiriert haben könnten (Hinrichs 28). Der an die Taiga erinnernde Nadelwald scheint zunächst tatsächlich für eine Verortung der Szene in Russland zu sprechen. Im Folgenden soll ergründet werden, welche Deutung des Bildes als wahrscheinlicher gelten kann. Da der politisch-historische Kontext essenziell für die Interpretation des Gemäldes ist, scheint es ratsam, ihn an dieser Stelle kurz zu skizzieren.

Im Jahre 1806 zerschlug Napoleon das *Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation*. Während der Nordwesten Deutschlands von Frankreich annektiert wurde, schloss man die mittleren Staaten des deutschen Reichs zum Rheinbund zusammen. In der Zeit der napoleonischen Kriege wurde der Ruf nach einer Deutschen Nation zunehmend lauter. Bereits zu Lebzeiten Friedrichs entwickelte sich das Bewusstsein der kollektiven Identität der Deutschen, daher spricht man in diesem Kontext auch vom *Nationsbildungsprozess Deutschlands*. Im Jahr 1813 kam es zum Ausbruch der Befreiungskriege (Hinrichs 24–25). In diesem Zusammenhang muss Caspar David Friedrichs Gemälde *Der Chasseur im Walde* gesehen werden. Auch Friedrich wurde von der damals herrschenden, anti-napoleonischen Strömung erfasst. Im Rahmen der napoleonischen Kriege und der Befreiungskriege, die im Frühjahr 1813 losbrachen,

organisierte der Künstler in seiner Werkstatt politische Treffen und stand in Kontakt zu Vertretern der patriotischen Bewegung. Ebenfalls im Jahr 1813 erlitt Napoleon in der Völkerschlacht bei Leipzig die endgültige Niederlage (24–28). Kurze Zeit zuvor, am 27. und 28. August 1813 fand die Schlacht bei Dresden statt, woraufhin die Franzosen die Stadt am 12. November verließen (Sala 143). Diese Information ist insofern wichtig, als Dresden die Wahlheimatstadt des Künstlers war (Hinrichs 26).

In Anbetracht der politischen Ereignisse, die sich kurz vor der Fertigstellung des Bildes im Jahr 1814 ereigneten, sowie unter Berücksichtigung von Friedrichs politischem Engagement, kann es als äußerst wahrscheinlich gelten, dass das Bild nicht den Russlandfeldzug von 1812, sondern die Vertreibung der französischen Besatzung aus Dresden beziehungsweise Deutschland thematisiert. Ferner lässt dieser soeben angeführte Kontext darauf schließen, dass der einsame Soldat die französische Besatzung repräsentiert, während der Wald den Widerstand auf deutscher Seite symbolisiert. In diesem Zusammenhang könnten die Stümpfe im Vordergrund für Opfer auf Seiten des Widerstandes stehen. Offensichtlich hat jemand eine Schneise in den Wald geschlagen und sich bis zu dem Punkt vorgekämpft, an dem sich nun der Chausseur befindet. Der einsame Soldat hat das Ende dieses Weges erreicht. Vor ihm baut sich der verbliebene Wald wie ein mächtiges, finsternes Bollwerk auf. Interpretiert man den Wald als Symbol für den deutschen Widerstand, wird der Betrachter des Bildes Zeuge, wie der Überrest des französischen Heeres einem in Größe und Anzahl weit überlegenen Gegner gegenüber steht.

Caspar David Friedrich präsentierte sein Gemälde auf der in Dresden stattfindenden, patriotischen Ausstellung im März und April 1814 zusammen mit dem *Grabmal alter Helden* (Gräber gefallener Freiheitskrieger, Grab des Arminius) aus dem Jahr 1812. Auf dem letztgenannten Bild befindet sich im Vordergrund ein eingestürztes Grabmal mit der Inschrift *Arminius* (Sala 143). Dieser Sachverhalt ist von Interesse, weil er beweist, dass Friedrich die Arminius-thematik kannte und in seinen Kunstwerken aufgriff. Arminius, der zunächst das Leben eines römischen Staatsbürgers führte, wurde sich seiner Stammesidentität bewusst und wechselte auf die Seite der Germanen (Schama 87). Im 9. Jahrhundert besiegten diese unter seiner Führung die Römer. Dies geschah im Teutoburger Wald, wo die Bäume den Germanen Schutz boten und ihnen einen vorteilhaften Angriff auf das mächtige römische Heer ermöglichten (Hinrichs 26–28). Schamas Ausführungen belegen, dass die Arminius-thematik im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert allgemein bekannt war und sowohl Künstlern, als auch Literaten als Inspirationsquelle diente. Im Jahre 1760 publizierte der Dichter und Dramatiker Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock seine drei *Barditen*, in denen er Arminius zum Vorbild für Vaterlandsliebe stilisierte (Schama 102). Ferner erfüllte Arminius in der Zeit der Befreiungskriege, aus der das behandelte Bildbeispiel stammt, eine Vorbildfunktion im Kampf gegen die Besatzungsmacht (Hinrichs 26–28). In Anbetracht dieser Sachverhalte und unter Berücksichtigung der Tatsache, dass Friedrich *Der Chausseur im Walde* auf einer patriotischen Ausstellung zusammen mit einem Gemälde präsentierte, welches die Arminius-thematik zum Bildgegenstand hat, liegt die Vermutung nahe, dass der dargestellte Nadelwald als Anspielung auf die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald gedacht

war und von den Zeitgenossen als solche verstanden wurde. Simon Schama weist in seinem Buch *Landscape and Memory* darauf hin, dass der mit der Arminius-Thematik verknüpfte Nord-Süd-Konflikt zwischen den germanischen Stämmen und Rom im 18. Jahrhundert auf den politischen Konflikt zwischen Frankreich und Deutschland übertragen wurde. Im Hinblick auf Friedrichs Gemälde käme dem Chausseur demnach eine Doppelbedeutung zu. Einerseits symbolisiert er die französischen Truppen, andererseits steht er für das römische Heer, das in der Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald bezwungen wurde. Der Rückblick in die Vergangenheit scheint gleichsam die Zukunft des einsamen Soldaten zu prophezeien. Er wird das Schicksal der römischen Eindringlinge teilen, die einst ihren Tod in den Tiefen des Waldes fanden. Im Zuge der zunehmenden Popularität der Arminius-Thematik im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert wurden in Kunst und Literatur häufig Eichen als Symbol nationaler Identität aufgegriffen. Schama spricht in diesem Kontext sogar von einem "oak-fetish" (Schama 102–106). Wiederum stellt sich also die Frage, wieso Friedrich sich nicht für einen Eichenwald, sondern für einen winterlichen Tannenwald entschieden hat. Eine mögliche Antwort ergibt sich bei genauerer Beschäftigung mit Tacitus' Texten und deren Bedeutung für das deutsche Nationalbewusstsein zur damaligen Zeit.

Schama argumentiert überzeugend dafür, dass Tacitus den Deutschen nicht nur ihre *tribal identity*, sondern auch ihren *Urhelden* Arminius gegeben habe (87). Ab der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts gab es in Deutschland eine neue Generation von Patrioten, die sich auf Tacitus und den Kult um die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald beriefen (102). In diesem Kontext darf die Bedeutung von Tacitus' *Germania* nicht unterschätzt werden. Die dort vorgenommene Landschaftsbeschreibung prägte die nationale Identität der Deutschen grundlegend. Die große Popularität von Tacitus' Werken förderte die Verbreitung der darin enthaltenen Vorstellungen. Insbesondere die aus der *Germania* abgeleitete Idee vom Wald als Geburtsstätte des deutschen Volkes beeinflusste im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert die nationale Identität der Deutschen (81–86). Die in diesem Zusammenhang gepriesenen, idyllischen Eichenwälder entsprechen jedoch nicht den Wäldern, die Tacitus in den *Annales* und in der *Germania* beschreibt. In der Letztgenannten heißt es: "Terra, etsi aliquanto specie differ, in universum tamen aut silvis horrida aut paludibus foeda, [...]" (Tacitus, zit. n. Benario 18). Demnach besteht die deutsche Landschaft aus düsteren Wäldern und unheilsamen Sümpfen (Benario 19). Aus Sicht eines Römers wie Tacitus galt eine Landschaft dann als schön, wenn sie Spuren von Zivilisation und menschlichem Treiben aufwies. Die soeben zitierte Beschreibung der Heimat der germanischen Stämme steht dazu im krassen Gegensatz (Schama 81). Bereits die Formulierung *silvis horrida* deutet an, dass Tacitus mit den deutschen Wäldern etwas Negatives verband. Immerhin waren es jene Wälder, in denen sich die Schlacht vom Teutoburger Wald zugetragen hat. Demnach lauerte aus römischer Sicht in ihnen der Feind. Wer sich in ihre Tiefen vorwagte, verlor sein Leben oder wurde Zeuge unbeschreiblicher Gräueltaten. So berichtete Tacitus beispielsweise davon, dass sich die Angehörigen eines bestimmten Stammes der Germanen aus religiösen Gründen in einem von ihnen als heilig verehrten Wald einfanden. Dort, so Tacitus, würden sie im Zuge barbarischer Rituale Menschenopfer abhalten (Benario 51). Der *Germania* lag demnach

die Idee vom deutschen Wald als Ort des Grauens zugrunde. Zudem gehörte das von Tacitus beschriebene Siedlungsgebiet der Germanen aus seiner Sicht zum Norden. An einer Stelle heie es: "Asia aut Africa aut Italia relictæ Germaniam petered, informem terries, asperam caelo, tristem cultu aspectuque nisi si patria sit?" (Tacitus, zit. n. Benario 14). Es handelt sich bei dem Auszug um eine rhetorische Frage, die impliziert, dass niemand Asien, Afrika oder Italien freiwillig verlassen wre um nach Deutschland zu reisen, es sei denn, es handle sich dabei um sein Heimatland. Tacitus begrndet diesen Sachverhalt mit dem unwegsamem Gelnde und der groen Klte jener Region, in der das Leben der Menschen mit dem tristem Aussehen der Landschaft korrespondiert (Benario 15). Dass lange Winter, schlechtes Wetter, eine lebensfeindliche Umwelt, Barbarentum und damit verbunden die Vorstellung von Mangel an Zivilisation in Europa ideengeschichtlich mit der Vorstellung vom Norden verknpft waren, hat Peter Davidson in seinem Buch *The Idea of North* anhand zahlreicher Beispiele deutlich gemacht (Davidson 21–50). Tacitus schreibt den Siedlungsgebieten der germanischen Stmme demnach viele Eigenschaften zu, die in Europa seit der Antike bis ins 19. Jahrhundert hinein mit einer allgemeinen Vorstellungen vom Norden korrespondieren (Davidson 21). Von seinem Standpunkt aus gesehen, handelt es sich bei der in der *Germania* beschriebenen Region um ein nrdliches Gebiet. Daher ist die Annahme naheliegend, dass Tacitus' eigene, von seinem kulturellen Umfeld geprgte Auffassung vom Norden in die Beschreibung des Naturraumes eingeflossen ist. Diese Vermutung wird dadurch bestrkt, dass es keinen Beweis dafr gibt, dass er Deutschland jemals mit eigenen Augen gesehen hat und es sich somit bei seinen Ausfhrungen mglicherweise um eine Mischung aus Berichten und Vorstellungen handelt (Benario 3–4).

Demnach entspricht die in der *Germania* vorgenommene Naturbeschreibung Peter Davidsons eingangs erluterten Definition vom Norden und stellt Tacitus' Idee vom nordischen Naturraum dar. Dementsprechend wren die von ihm beschriebenen deutschen Wlder fr ihn gleichsam nordische Wlder. Indem er diese mit Gruelthaten verbindet, etabliert Tacitus die Idee vom nordischen Wald als Ort des Grauens. Wie sich gezeigt hat, korrespondiert diese in vielerlei Hinsicht mit der allgemeinen Idee vom Norden als Ort, an dem die Dunkelheit und das Bse herrschen (Davidson 21).

Interessanterweise scheint Friedrich sich im vorliegenden Beispiel eben jener Vorstellung bedient zu haben. Tacitus spricht in seiner *Germania* von einem unwegsamem Gelnde und einem harschen Klima: "[...] informem terries, asperam caelo, [...]" (Tacitus, zit. n. Benario 14). Betrachten wir Friedrichs Gemlde mit dieser Beschreibung im Hinterkopf, scheint es fast als wre Ersteres eine Illustration von Letzterem. Zudem geht von dem im Bild dargestellten Wald aufgrund der in ihm herrschenden Finsternis eine bedrohliche Wirkung aus. Da die Arminiusthematik allgemein bekannt war, kann angenommen werden, dass diese Darstellungsweise vom zeitgenssischen Betrachter mit dem Schrecken der nordischen Wlder aus Tacitus' Werken assoziiert wurde. Diese Wirkung war im Zusammenhang mit der Bildaussage nicht nur willkommen, sondern wurde mit groer Wahrscheinlichkeit willentlich hervorgerufen, da der mit der Arminiusthematik verknpft Nord-Sd-Konflikt zwischen den germanischen Stmmen und Rom auf diese Weise tatschlich auf den

politischen Konflikt zwischen Frankreich und Deutschland übertragen werden konnte (Schama 102). Es wäre demnach durchaus möglich, dass Friedrich sich gegen die Darstellung eines symbolträchtigen Eichenwaldes entschieden hat, weil er an Tacitus' Idee vom nordischen Wald als Ort des Grauens anknüpfen wollte. In diesem Kontext hätte sich die Darstellung einer Winterlandschaft angeboten, da sich der bei Tacitus beschriebene Naturraum unter anderem durch ein harsches Klima auszeichnet. Ein verschneiter Eichenwald wäre der Bildaussage hingegen wenig zuträglich gewesen. Die für die Stimmung des Bildes entscheidende Dunkelheit hätte sich in ihm aufgrund des fehlenden Laubwerks nicht darstellen lassen. Tatsächlich ist anzunehmen, dass ein Eichenwald im Winter eher mit dem Niedergang Deutschlands assoziiert worden wäre. Zudem wäre es in Anbetracht des allgemeinen politischen Klimas und der Kontakte, die Friedrich um 1813 pflegte, durchaus denkbar, dass der Maler mit dem Bild ein Statement bezüglich der nationalen Identität der Deutschen machen wollte. Nicht zuletzt die Bekanntschaft des Künstlers mit dem Patrioten und Dichter Ernst Moritz Arndt, kurz vor der Entstehung des Bildes, könnte derartige Bestrebungen angeregt haben (Sala 143). Tacitus zufolge hatte der lebensunfreundliche Habitat der Germanen einen positiven Nebeneffekt. Aufgrund des schlechten Wetter und des unfruchtbaren Bodens, so Tacitus, seien die Germanen an Hunger und Kälte gewöhnt und würden daher über eine beachtliche Widerstandskraft verfügen (Benario 17). Möglicherweise hatte Friedrich diesen Gedankengang im Hinterkopf, als er sich für die Darstellung immergrüner Nadelbäume entschied. Indem sie der winterlichen Kälte trotzen und sich groß und finster als unüberwindbares Hindernis vor dem Feindbild des französischen Soldaten aufbauen, scheinen sie jene Qualitäten zu verkörpern, die Tacitus den Germanen zuschreibt. Diese von Tacitus angedeutete Verknüpfung zwischen harschen Lebensbedingungen und einer gewissen Widerstandskraft wurde während des Zweiten Weltkriegs von den Nationalsozialisten aufgegriffen und rassenideologisch umgedeutet (Schama 82). Zu Friedrichs Lebzeiten bezogen sich die nationalpatriotischen Vorstellungen vieler patriotischer Gruppen jedoch lediglich auf Einzelstaaten oder beinhalteten keine konkreten politischen Forderungen. Stattdessen strebten sie in erster Linie die Befreiung von der französischen Besatzung an. Auch Friedrichs Patriotismus scheint sich vordergründig durch eine antifranzösische Einstellung ausgezeichnet zu haben (Hinrichs 25). Ein möglicher Rückgriff auf Tacitus' Beschreibung der germanischen Stämme darf daher nicht mit dem rassenideologischen Gedankengut späterer Jahre verwechselt werden, obgleich diskutiert werden könnte, inwiefern die sich hier andeutenden Tendenzen wegbereitend waren. Die daraus resultierende Debatte würde an dieser Stelle jedoch zu weit führen.

Zusammenfassend lässt sich festhalten, dass aufgrund des politisch-historischen Kontexts des Bildes die Vermutung naheliegend ist, dass der Wald im vorliegenden Fallbeispiel den deutschen Widerstand gegen Frankreich symbolisiert. Zudem stellt das Gemälde mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit eine Anspielung auf die Schlacht im Teutoburger Wald dar. Aufgrund der großen Relevanz von Tacitus' Werken für die nationale Identität der Deutschen zur Entstehungszeit des Bildes, kann darauf geschlossen werden, dass Friedrich mit seinem Kunstwerk an Tacitus' Beschreibung der

deutschen Landschaft anknüpfen wollte. Dass Tacitus den in der *Germania* geschilderten Naturraum mit Eigenschaften ausgestattet hat, die ideengeschichtlich mit dem Norden assoziiert werden, könnte daher den aufgrund des winterlichen Nadelwaldes betont nordischen Charakter des Bildes erklären.

Bereits Sala hat angedeutet, dass der Sinngehalt von Friedrichs Gemälde über die soeben skizzierte, politisch-historische Bedeutungsebene hinausgeht. Sehr zutreffend bemerkt er, dass die aufrechte Haltung des anonymen Soldaten überrascht. Fast, so Sala, gewinne man den Eindruck, als würde der Franzose in einem Augenblick des philosophischen Nachsinnens verharren. Auf diese Weise "würde der Chasseur zur Paraphrase des menschlichen Schicksals, zur zeitweiligen Metamorphose des einsamen Wanderers im Angesicht der erhabenen Natur" werden (Sala 146). Den von ihm verwendeten Begriff "erhaben" erläutert Sala im Hinblick auf das Gemälde nicht. Dennoch ist seine Aussage für die vorliegende Untersuchung von Interesse. Zu Friedrichs Lebzeiten stand die Bedeutungsgewinnung von nördlicher Motivik in der Kunst unter anderem in Wechselwirkung mit einer veränderten Naturwahrnehmung. Diese wurde unter anderem durch Burkes und Schillers Theorien zum Erhabenen herbeigeführt, die, wie bereits eingangs erwähnt, die Vorstellung vom *erhabenen Norden* als Gegenbild zum *schönen, klassizistischen Süden* anregten (Hinrichs 13–14). In den westlichen Gebieten Nordeuropas gehören ausgedehnte Nadelwälder in der Malerei des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts zwar nicht zu den gängigen Topoi des Erhabenen (63), doch bemerkt Burke an einer Stelle seiner Ausführungen explizit, dass uns das Erhabene "im düsteren Wald und in der heulenden Wildnis" begegnet (Burke, zit. n. Strube 101). Zudem trifft vieles, was Edmund Burke in seiner Theorie *Vom Erhabenen und Schönen* über das Erhabene sagt, auf den im *Chasseur im Walde* dargestellten Wald zu. Auch Schiller benennt im Kontext des Evozierens von kontemplativ-erhabenen Gefühlen explizit Wälder (Schiller 189–190). Im Folgenden soll zunächst untersucht werden, inwiefern Burkes und Schiller Theorien mit Friedrichs Darstellung korrespondieren. Ferner wird diskutiert, ob die Darstellung der Idee des Erhabenen mit der politisch-historischen Bedeutungsebene des Bildes vereinbar ist.

Der in der Einleitung zitierte Auszug aus Burkes Theorie *Vom Erhabenen und Schönen* macht zunächst deutlich, dass der Philosoph die Idee vom Erhabenen untrennbar mit der Idee von Furcht und Schrecken verband (Burke, zit. n. Strube 72). Demnach muss der im Gemälde dargestellte Wald als Quelle des Erhabenen notwendigerweise schrecklich sein beziehungsweise Furcht evozieren. Als Verbildlichung von Tacitus' Idee vom nordischen Wald als Ort des Grauens erfüllt er diese Voraussetzung. Auch ohne das entsprechende Hintergrundwissen geht von dem Wald eine bedrohliche Wirkung aus. Dies ist unter anderem in der in ihm herrschenden Finsternis begründet. Unter den Beispielen, die Burke für furchteinflößende Objekte gibt, kommt der Dunkelheit ein besonders hoher Stellenwert zu (93). Dass Caspar David Friedrich die im Wald herrschende Finsternis durch gezielte Lichtführung verstärkt hat, wurde bereits im Vorangegangenen festgestellt. Verbunden mit dem Gedankengang, dass Dunkelheit Furcht evoziert, ist die Angst vor dem Ungewissen. Folgendes sagt Burke zwar in Bezug auf die Nacht, es kann jedoch ebenso für die im Wald herrschenden

Lichtverhältnisse gelten: "es liegt in unsrer Natur, daß wir dann, wenn wir nicht wissen, was uns widerfahren wird, immer befürchten, uns werde das Schlimmste widerfahren; und dies eben macht die Ungewissheit so schrecklich" (Burke, zit. n. Strube 122).

Da der Betrachter des Fallbeispiels mit nahezu absoluter Dunkelheit konfrontiert wird, wenn sein Blick den Waldesrand erreicht, bleibt er im Ungewissen über das Schicksal des einsamen Soldaten und über die Gefahren, die in den Tiefen des Waldes lauern könnten. Auch Schiller ist der Meinung, dass die mit der Finsternis verbundene Ungewissheit Emotionen wie Furcht und Schrecken hervorruft. Ihm zufolge begründet sich ihr Schrecken darin, dass sie Gegenstände verbirgt und daher auf den, der mit ihr konfrontiert wird, die ganze Gewalt der Einbildungskraft einwirkt. Dadurch, dass der Sehsinn in der Dunkelheit seine Dienste versagt, wird Schiller zufolge ein Gefühl der Wehrlosigkeit gegenüber der verborgenen Gefahr evoziert. Demnach ist eine derartige Finsternis, wie sie im dargestellten Nadelwald herrscht, schrecklich und somit zum Erhabenen tauglich (Schiller 190). Darüber hinaus gelten Burke zufolge Objekte, die riesig in ihren Dimensionen sind, als erhaben (Burke, zit. n. Strube 166). Dies trifft zum einen auf den Wald im Verhältnis zum Soldaten, zum anderen auf die Ausdehnung des Waldes im Allgemeinen zu. Zwar lässt die Größe des Chausseurs darauf schließen, dass wir uns in einigem Abstand zum Waldrand befinden, doch verwehrt uns der Maler den Blick auf die Spitzen der Baumkronen. Fast scheint es, als seien die immergrünen Nadelbäume zu hoch gewesen, um in ihrer Gänze auf die Leinwand zu passen. Die ungeheure Höhe der Bäume korrespondiert zudem mit der gigantischen Ausdehnung des Waldes, die dadurch impliziert wird, dass er links und rechts über die Grenzen des Bildes hinaus reicht. Indem die Nadelbäume oben und an den Seiten vom Bildrand abgeschnitten werden, wird beim Betrachter die Erwartungshaltung erzeugt, dass sich der Wald außerhalb des vorgegebenen Blickfeldes weitererstreckt, was auf dessen riesige Dimensionen schließen lässt. Dass zwischen dem Eindruck von Größe im Bild und der Idee des Erhabenen auch in Friedrichs Gedankenwelt eine Verbindung bestand, verdeutlicht folgende Aussage des Malers über das Gemälde eines nicht weiter benannten Künstlers: "Groß ist dies Bild, und dennoch wünscht man es immer noch größer; denn die Erhabenheit in der Auffassung des Gegenstandes ist groß empfunden und fordert immer noch größerern Ausdehnung im Raume" (Friedrich 47). Schiller dient "ein einsamer, viele Meilen langer Wald" (Schiller 189–190) sogar als konkretes Beispiel für Vorstellungen, "welche Grauen erregen, und in der Dichtkunst zum Erhabenen zu gebrauchen sind." (189–190). In diesem Kontext schreibt er: "Einsamkeit ist etwas furchtbares, sobald sie anhaltend und unfreiwillig ist, [...]" (189–190). Auch diesbezüglich lassen sich Parallelen zu Friedrichs Gemälde finden. Im Bild gibt es keine Hinweise auf menschliche Zivilisation. Der Soldat ist in der ihn umgebenden, lebensfeindlichen Natur auf sich allein gestellt. Das Grauen, welches von dem Forst ausgeht und die Einsamkeit des Chausseurs bedingen somit einander und führen zu einer Steigerung des jeweils anderen.

Festzuhalten bleibt, dass der im Fallbeispiel dargestellte Wald aufgrund seiner gewaltigen Ausdehnung, der in ihm herrschenden Finsternis und der damit verbundenen Ungewissheit beim Betrachter Furcht und Schrecken im Sinne Burkes

erzeugt (Burke, zit. n. Strube 72). Ferner regt die Dunkelheit im Waldesinneren die Vorstellungskraft an. Somit kann der Wald auch im Sinne Schillers zu etwas Furchtbarem werden (Schiller 190). An dieser Stelle stellt sich noch einmal die Frage, wie ein Objekt, das Furcht und Schrecken evoziert, mit dem Erhabenen verbunden ist. Burke zufolge mischt sich dem Schrecken oder Erschauern, welches ein bestimmter Gegenstand hervorrufen kann, ein Frohsein bei, sobald der Betrachter realisiert, dass er selbst nicht unmittelbar gefährdet ist (Grave, *Das Erhabene* 113–117). Alles was in diesem Sinne froh macht, nennt Burke erhaben (Burke, zit. n. Strube 86). Auf das Fallbeispiel bezogen, ist es demnach für das Empfinden des Erhabenen entscheidend, dass von dem Wald für den Betrachter keine Gefahr ausgeht (73). Demzufolge bleibt der Forst für den Chausseur ein Objekt des Grauens. Ihn, als Eindringling, erwartet in den Tiefen des Waldes das gleiche Schicksal, das einst die römischen Soldaten im Teutoburger Wald erlitten haben. Somit geht für den einsamen Soldaten von dem Wald eine unmittelbare Gefahr aus. Anders verhält es sich mit dem Betrachter des Bildes. In diesem Kontext muss berücksichtigt werden, dass Friedrich das Gemälde 1814 auf der in Dresden stattfindenden patriotischen Ausstellung ausgestellt hat. Somit bestanden die intendierten Betrachter aus deutschen Patrioten des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts. Es ist durchaus denkbar, dass diese den ausgedehnten Nadelwald als etwas Erhabenes wahrgenommen haben. Der Wald, verstanden als Anspielung auf die Arminiusthematik, mag ihnen als Verbündeter im Kampf gegen Frankreich erschienen sein. In diesem Fall könnte die zunächst bedrohlich wirkende Naturgewalt die Empfindung des Erhabenen evoziert haben, da von ihr für die Besucher der Ausstellung keine direkte Gefahr ausging. Es könnte demnach geschlussfolgert werden, dass sich der französische Soldat zwar vor einem erhabenen Objekt befindet, jedoch die falsche Person ist, um es als solches wahrzunehmen. Diese Überlegungen ließen sich auch mit Schillers Definition vom Erhabenen vereinen. Wie eingangs bereits erläutert, hat das Subjekt beim Kontemplativ-Erhabenen im Sinne Schillers die objektive Ursache des Leidens, nicht das Leiden selbst, vor Augen. In diesem Fall erzeugt das „urtheilende Subjekt“ die Vorstellung des Leidens in sich und verwandelt den gegebenen Gegenstand in ein Objekt der Furcht (Schiller 185–186). Da es der Phantasie überlassen bleibt, sich auszumalen, welche Gefahren im dunklen, einsamen Wald lauern, kann Letzterer zum Erwecken von kontemplativ-erhabenen Empfindungen im Sinne Schillers zunächst als geeignet erachtet werden (190). In ein Erhabenes verwandelt das Subjekt den gegebenen Gegenstand durch die Beziehung auf seine moralische Person (185–186). Möglicherweise ist das Innehalten des einsamen Soldaten darin begründet, dass er sich an einem Wendepunkt befindet. Der sich vor ihm auftürmende Wald evoziert Furcht und Schrecken und es wäre an ihm, diesen mittels seiner moralischen Stärke in ein Erhabenes zu verwandeln. Es deutet jedoch nichts im Bild darauf hin, dass den Chausseur im Waldesinneren ein positives Ende erwartet. Sein Todesbote, der Rabe, ist bereits zugegen und selbst die Aussicht auf den Himmel kann keine Hoffnung spenden, weil sie von den Kronen der Tannen verdeckt ist. Demnach darf davon ausgegangen werden, dass dem Chausseur die Umwandlung des furchteinflößenden Objekts in ein Erhabenes nicht gelingen wird. Aus den bereits genannten Gründen ist es jedoch

durchaus vorstellbar, dass die Besucher der patriotischen Ausstellung im März und April 1814 den dargestellten Wald anders wahrgenommen haben. Sie sahen in ihm aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach die *Geburtsstätte des deutschen Volkes*, die sich dem Eindringling als etwas Schreckliches präsentiert, jedoch ihnen, ebenso wie ihrem Nationalhelden Arminius, Schutz bietet (Schama 81–86). Verbunden mit diesem Gedankengang würde der Wald trotz seiner furchteinflößenden äußeren Gestalt keine Gefahr darstellen und könnte bei den entsprechenden Betrachtern das Erhabene im Sinne Schillers evozieren.

Nina Hinrichs ist der Ansicht, dass Friedrich die Gedanken von Kant und Schiller bezüglich des Erhabenen nicht übernommen hat und diese nicht mittels seiner Kunst verbildlichen wollte (Hinrichs 72). Ob er Burkes beziehungsweise Schillers Theorien kannte und diese im Hinterkopf hatte, als er das im vorangegangenen behandelte Gemälde schuf, muss letztlich offen bleiben. Allerdings eignet sich der dargestellte Wald für die Verbildlichung sowohl von Burkes, als auch von Schillers Erhabenheitstheorie, was, wie sich gezeigt hat, in erster Linie den als nordisch konnotierten Elementen im Bild geschuldet ist.

Abschließend ist der Frage nachzugehen, wieso in der europäischen Malerei des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts häufig eine Gegenüberstellung von *erhabenem Norden* und *klassizistischen schönen Süden* erfolgte. Dieser Umstand war, wie eingangs bereits erläutert, nicht den Erhabenheitstheorien selbst, sondern ihrer Wirkungsentfaltung geschuldet. Möglicherweise suchte man in Nordeuropa im Zuge nationaler Identitätsfindung nach einer der heimatlichen Landschaft inhärenten, ästhetischen Qualität. Das es zur damaligen Zeit nördlich der Alpen Bestrebungen gab, sich von der Vorbildfunktion der italienischen Malerei zu lösen, beweist folgendes Zitat von Caspar David Friedrich:

[...] Vielleicht könnte er da auf den glücklichen Einfall kommen auch einmal ohne Brille zu mahlen wo ihm dann die Gegenstände erscheinen würden wie anderen ehrlichen Leuten so nicht in Rom gewesen und gesunde Augen haben und die Natur nach der Natur und nicht nach Bildern studiren. (Friedrich 21)

Die Aufforderung an seine Kollegen, ohne Brille zu malen, die ihnen die Dinge erscheinen ließe, als seien sie in Rom, kann als Aufforderung aufgefasst werden, sich von der Vorbildfunktion zu emanzipieren, die die italienische Malerei zur damaligen Zeit für die nordeuropäische Malerei hatte. Demnach wurde im Zuge des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts nicht nur der *erhabene Norden* dem *schönen Süden* gegenübergestellt, sondern die italienische als Vorbild für die nordeuropäische Kunst abgelehnt (Kent, *Triumph of Light* 10). Zeitgleich gab es insbesondere in Dänemark und in den skandinavischen Ländern Bestrebungen, die Ebenbürtigkeit von nord- und südeuropäischer Kunst und Kultur zu belegen. In diesem Kontext wurde unter anderem der nordischen Mythologie großes Interesse gewidmet, weil man in ihr das Gegenstück zur griechischen Mythologie sah (Kent, *Soul of the North* 238-39). Demnach würde es dem damaligen Zeitgeist entsprechen, dem Süden die Schönheit als ästhetische Qualität zuzusprechen, jedoch das Erhabene für sich zu beanspruchen. Der erhabene Norden in der nordeuropäischen Landschaftsmalerei wäre demnach dem Bestreben geschuldet,

die ästhetischen Qualitäten der heimatlichen Landschaft als denen der südeuropäischen Landschaft ebenbürtig darzustellen. Das man diesbezüglich Bedarf verspürte, verdeutlicht folgendes Zitat: "Denen Herrn Kunstrichtern genügt unsere teutsche Sonne, Mond und Sterne; unsere Felsen, Bäume und Kreuter, unsere Ebenen, Seen und Flüße nicht mehr. Italienisch muß alles sein um anspruch auf Größe und Schönheit machen zu können" (Friedrich 28). Hinter der Kritik an den Kunstrichtern, die den deutschen Motiven keine Schönheit und Größe zuschreiben wollen, könnte zudem der Ruf nach einer nationalen Identität, die sich auch in der Malerei manifestiert, vermutet werden. Darüber hinaus hat sich anhand des behandelten Fallbeispiels gezeigt, dass der nordische Naturraum aufgrund von ideengeschichtlich mit ihm verknüpften Eigenschaften mit Attributen assoziiert wurde, die mit der Idee vom Erhabenen verbunden sind. Folgende Quellen aus dem 19. Jahrhundert verdeutlichen diesen Sachverhalt nochmals. Es handelt sich dabei um einen Brief von Johann Gottlob von Quandt mit Erläuterungen bezüglich eines Gemäldes, welches im Jahre 1821 bei Caspar David Friedrich in Auftrag gegeben wurde. Quandt schrieb Folgendes:

In Rohdens Bild ist alles vereint, was eine südliche Natur Freundliches darbietet und in Friedrichs, was der Norden Ungeheures und Erhabenes zeigt. Schroffe Felsen oben mit Schnee bedeckt, an welchen kein armes Gräschen Nahrung findet, schließen einen Meerbusen ein, in welchem Stürme Schiffe verschlagen und durch ungeheure Eisschollen zerdrückt haben. (Quandt, zit. n. Hinrichs 71–72)

Dieser Beschreibung zufolge sind es insbesondere Eigenarten des nordischen Wetters, wie Schnee und Eis, durch die das Bild erhaben wirkt (Hinrichs 63). Bei Friedrichs *Chasseur im Walde* sind es neben dem harschen Klima Größe im Sinne von Weite oder Ausgedehntheit einer Landschaft und Dunkelheit, die dem Bild einen nordischen Charakter verleihen und die dargestellte Landschaft darüber hinaus zu einem potenziell erhabenen Objekt im Sinne Burkes machen, beziehungsweise zu einem Gegenstand, der eine erhabene Empfindung im Sinne Schillers evozieren könnte. Dass in Europa seit der Antike bis ins 19. Jahrhundert hinein die Vorstellung vom Norden als Ort, an dem Dunkelheit und Schrecken hausen, nachweisbar ist (Davidson 21–50), scheint diesen für die Darstellungen des Erhabenen im besonderem Maße zu prädestinieren. Schließlich sind Furcht und Schrecken, wie im vorangegangenen erläutert wurde, die Voraussetzungen für das Erhabene.

Da Friedrichs künstlerisches Schaffen als wegbereitend für die Kunst Nordeuropas gelten darf, wurde sich für eines seiner Werke als Ausgangspunkt für die im Vorangegangenen ausgeführten Überlegungen entschieden. In einem weiteren Schritt würde es sich empfehlen, als erhaben konnotierte Landschaftsmalereien skandinavischer und russischer Künstler des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts im Hinblick auf nationale Identitätsfindung zu untersuchen und zu ergründen, inwiefern in ihren Werken ideengeschichtlich mit dem Norden assoziierte Elemente der künstlerischen Darstellung der Verbildlichung der Idee des Erhabenen zuträglich sind.

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'for terror of the deadness beyond': Arctic Environments and Inhuman Ecologies in Michelle Paver's *Dark Matter*¹

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Abstract



In this essay I examine Michelle Paver's 2010 novel *Dark Matter*, a ghost story, for how her use of the gothic and horror contributes to undermining pastoral and romantic fantasies about the Arctic. Drawing on the history of whale, walrus, and seal hunting in Svalbard, the site of the novel's 1937 scientific expedition, and my own experience there, I look at the tension Paver creates between the beauty of the Svalbard environment and its long history as a location for human violence against nonhuman animals. I suggest that, through the figure of the *gengångner*, or "one who walks again," and the built environment and relics in Svalbard, Paver works to transmit both the violence of harvesting marine mammals and the violence men perpetrate against each other in the name of resource extraction. In this essay I engage in dialogue with recent environmental humanities work on ecophobia, dark ecologies, and the ecocritical uses of fear, and argue for the consideration of the ghost story, a genre little studied by ecocritics. Through highlighting the novel's focus on violence linked to extractive practices, I suggest, finally, that *Dark Matter* performs two important functions: it records past inhuman ecologies and it opens out onto a reading of contemporary Arctic geopolitics.

Keywords: Arctic, ecophobia, ghost story, gothic, resource extraction, violence.

Resumen

Este ensayo analiza cómo el uso de narrativas góticas y de terror en la novela de Michelle Paver *Dark Matter* (*La materia oscura*, 2010), un cuento de fantasmas, debilita las fantasías bucólicas y románticas del Ártico. Recurriendo a la historia de la caza de ballenas, morsas y focas en Svalbard, el emplazamiento de la expedición científica de 1937 de la novela, así como mi propia experiencia allí, analizo la tensión creada por Paver entre la belleza del medio ambiente de Svalbard y su larga historia como lugar de violencia humana contra animales no-humanos. Sugiero que, a través de la figura del *gengångner*, o "el que anda otra vez," las reliquias y el medio ambiente construido de Svalbard, Paver intenta transmitir tanto la violencia de la cosecha y comercio de mamíferos marinos como la que perpetúan los hombres contra sí mismos en nombre de la extracción de recursos. En este ensayo entro en diálogo con el trabajo reciente de las humanidades medioambientales sobre la ecofobia, las ecologías oscuras, y el uso del miedo en la ecocrítica, y propongo el estudio del cuento de fantasmas, un género que ha recibido poca atención de los ecocríticos. Al destacar el foco de la novela sobre la violencia relacionada con las prácticas de extracción, sugiero, finalmente, que *Dark Matter*, tiene dos funciones importantes: graba ecologías inhumanas del pasado y abre una lectura de la geopolítica del Ártico contemporánea.

Palabras clave: Ártico, ecofobia, historia de fantasmas, gótico, la extracción de recursos, la violencia.

¹ My travel to Svalbard was generously supported by my institution's Professional Development Fund and its Humanities Fund. I would also like to thank two of my fellow travelers in Svalbard, Bec Hanley and Fiona Sommerville, who gifted me a copy of *Dark Matter*.

I first experienced the high northern latitudes in the summer of 2013, on an 11-day commercial cruise in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, located between 74° and 81° north latitude and 10° and 35° east longitude.² During the cruise we circumnavigated the two largest islands of Svalbard—Spitsbergen and Nordaustlandet—and made stops at the islands of Edgeøya, Barentsøya, and Kvitøya. Entangled personal and professional reasons catalyzed my travel to Svalbard: a mild obsession with nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century polar exploration and the journals, narratives, novels, and poems that result from or reimagine those expeditions and scholarly research on climate change and literature and visual art. During the trip I found myself oscillating between two different positions. On one hand I experienced tremendous aesthetic pleasure, reveling in the scenery and the sight of Arctic flora, birds, and mammals in their natural habitat. On the other, my environmental humanities training tempered my aesthetic delight. That is, in addition to being amazed at the synchronized movement of a pack of Atlantic walrus in the water or the deliberate way a polar bear travels through the pack ice, my experience of these and other events was tinged with a melancholy awareness about the impacts of climate change on Arctic environments. Likewise, while marveling at the enormity of the Bråsvellbreen ice sheet edge, I was reminded of the history of tourism in the region and of how my experience of the region was framed by conventional landscape and pictorial traditions: the pastoral, picturesque, and sublime. And finally, although it often felt as if our ship was remote, my experience of isolation from the world was undercut by the knowledge that the cruise industry around Svalbard is carefully managed; ships coordinate their schedules to avoid being in the same place at the same time, thereby preserving a wilderness fantasy for passengers.³

Magdalenefjorden, located on the northwest coast of Spitsbergen, and a typical stop for cruise ships since the advent of tourism in Svalbard in the late nineteenth century, produced my most intense moment of cognitive dissonance.⁴ Magdalenefjorden stuns the senses. Dark mountains flank Waggonwaybreen, a tidewater glacier at the fjord's head, and depending on atmospheric conditions, the fjord's water turns various shades of green, turquoise, grey, or blue. For me, however, Magdalenefjorden's beauty is complicated by its history as a site of resource extraction and death. Trinityhamna, a

² Prior to the Svalbard Treaty of 1925, the name Spitsbergen was commonly used to refer to the archipelago. In this essay I follow contemporary usage, even when anachronistic, employing the name Svalbard to refer to the entire archipelago and Spitsbergen to refer to its largest island.

³ Preserving the fantasy of remoteness is not the only reason for tight control over cruise itineraries. Weather, ice, safety, and moorage conditions dictate where ships can anchor and onshore excursions can occur. Concerns about the environmental impact of tourism, a well-regulated industry in Svalbard, also play a role. See the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act ("Act"), passed in 2002 and updated in 2012, for its mandates regarding the protection of flora, fauna, and cultural remains. For additional information on the responsibilities of tour operators in Svalbard see "Guidelines." Our ship's crew and expedition staff were incredibly sensitive to the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) environmental and safety regulations.

⁴ Polar exploration laid the groundwork for leisure travel to the far north. By the early nineteenth century, as John M. Snyder notes, a "very few curious and intrepid persons" had traveled north as the first Arctic tourists (15). On tourism in Svalbard see also Conway *No Man's Land*, Laing, Reill, and Viken and Jørgensen.

harbor on the southern side of the fjord, and the small promontory that shelters it, Gravneset (Grave Headland), served as a whaling station in the seventeenth century, one node among many that supported and reproduced a program of synchronous and serial slaughter that lasted from the early seventeenth century through the early twentieth century.⁵

Bloodletting marks the very discovery of Svalbard. While searching for a northern route from Holland to China in 1596, Dutch explorer Willem Barentsz and his crew made the first confirmed discovery of the archipelago now known as Svalbard. They sighted the southernmost island of the archipelago on 9 June, killing a polar bear there and naming the island Bjørnøya (Bear Island) after this event.⁶ Within a decade of Svalbard's discovery, natural resource exploitation was underway. The hunting of Atlantic walrus in Svalbard began in 1604, on Bjørnøya, and continued through the end of the nineteenth century, effectively decimating the population.⁷ Whaling in Svalbard began in earnest in 1611, and recent archaeological field research along the western coast of Spitsbergen has unearthed an extensive network of whaling stations (Hacquebord 171). The most famous of these stations was located on the southeastern cape of the island of Amsterdamøya (off the northwestern tip of Spitsbergen). First occupied in 1614, the Dutch established the whaling station of Smeerenburg (Blubber Town) there in 1617. At Smeerenburg and other land-based whaling stations (including Gravneset in Magdalenafjord), whales were harpooned near or inside the fjord and flensed on land, where tryworks (blubber ovens) were used to render the blubber into oil. However, as whale populations close to land were depleted, the hunt moved offshore, making onshore tryworks obsolete. Although short-lived as rendering stations, Smeerenburg and Gravneset also functioned as storage stations for whale products, until improvements in offshore whaling technologies superseded even that role. Gravneset, famously, was also used to inter human corpses. The whaling cemetery there, one of the largest in Svalbard, comprises approximately 130 graves dating from the early seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. Today the Gravneset burial mound and

⁵ I borrow the phrase serial slaughter from Kjell-G. Kjær, who uses it to describe successive waves of hunting conducted between 1859 and 1909 by the sealing industry of northern Norway. Using data from customs' returns and ships' logs, he describes this period as one "in which one species was replaced by another in a sequence indicative of serial slaughter to the point of overharvesting. The 'bust' which followed the gory pools of each bloody 'boom' drove owners and skippers to seek new hunting grounds" (1). To characterize the longer period of walrus, whale, and seal hunting, and onshore trapping, which runs from the early seventeenth to the early twentieth century, however, I expand Kjær's formulation to the phrase "synchronous and serial slaughter," which better describes the simultaneity and extent of hunting and trapping practices.

⁶ Sailing to the north, Barentsz and his crew eventually discovered more land, characterized by sharp peaks that engendered the name they bestowed: Spitsbergen (Pointed Mountains). They explored the western coast of Spitsbergen, visiting the locations now known as Raudfjorden, Magdalenefjorden, Prins Karls Forland, Isfjorden, and Bellsund. See De Veer (74-85) and Conway (*No Man's Land* 11-19) for more details on the discovery of the Svalbard archipelago. For the first published chart with part of the coast of Spitsbergen included, see *Deliniatio cartæ trium navigationum etc.*, which was drawn by Willem Barentsz, engraved by Baptista van Deutecum, and published, in 1598, by Cornelis Claesz.

⁷ According to Louwrens Hacquebord, by 1870 the Atlantic walrus population had been completely eliminated from Svalbard (171). Though the number of walrus killed is difficult to estimate, he puts the total at approximately 25,000 (176). On the walrus hunt see also Conway (*No Man's Land* 20-37), Gjertz and Wiig, Greville, and Richards (574-616).

remains of the tryworks are a popular tourist destination.⁸

I open with this brief travel narrative, tempered by a short history of walrus and whale hunting in Svalbard, because the tension between beauty and horror that suffused my experience at Magdalenenfjord also animates Michele Paver's novel *Dark Matter* (2010), the subject of this essay. Set in 1937 in Svalbard, the novel centers on Londoner Jack Miller, who joins a scientific expedition to Gruhuken, a fictional promontory in the northeastern part of Spitsbergen. In her author's note, Paver carefully distinguishes her fictional setting from Gråhuken (254), a location made famous by the overwintering of Christiane Ritter, which she details in *A Woman in the Polar Night* (1955). In my reading, the importance of Paver's Gruhuken derives not from possible confusion with Gråhuken, but rather from its location of relative proximity to the historical whaling sites of Smeerenburg and Gravneset. I elaborate this idea below. For Jack the expedition represents an escape from an ordinary life marked by failure, poverty, feminized work, and an urban environment he finds stifling. Although he knows little about the Arctic, Jack positions Svalbard, mistakenly, it turns out, as a pastoral space for adventure. He believes that in the remote wilderness of Spitsbergen he will have the chance to "breathe with both lungs" and "to see clearly for the first time in years. Right through to the heart of things" (41). Paver's novel is a ghost story, so what "the heart of things" turns out to be terrifies Jack. Accidents and illness befall the other expedition members, and, left alone at a remote research station, Jack is menaced by something he cannot identify, something dark, malevolent, and inhuman. This nameless *gengånger*, or "one who walks again" (204), is the victim of unspeakable acts of torture and murder, acts linked to the staking of land claims and mining. It ultimately drives Jack from Gruhuken and kills another expedition member, Gus, the object of Jack's affection.⁹

In *Dark Matter*, Paver employs the far northern natures of Svalbard as a site for troubling mid-twentieth-century British discourses about the Arctic. In other words, she uses conventions of the ghost story, the gothic, and horror to produce a dark aesthetics of the Arctic; question the traditions of polar exploration and its narratives; interrogate interwar models of British masculinity; examine the physical and psychological responses of humans to a remote and unforgiving environment; probe the boundaries of what counts as material or immaterial; and investigate themes such as place memory, darkness, possession, control, concealment, violence, the unspeakable, and the porous

⁸ For additional information on Smeerenburg and Gravneset, see Conway (*No Man's Land* 124-38), "Cruise," and "Polar." On whaling history and practice see Hacquebord, Hoare, Mowat, Richards (574-616), Sanger, and Wheeler (171-204). As with the walrus hunt, whaling activity around Svalbard annihilated the whale population. Although seventeenth-century catch records are irregular, scholars have estimated that approximately 15,000 whales were killed between 1610-1699. From 1699-1800, a period during which catch records were annually recorded, 86,644 whales were killed and harvested from the Greenland Sea. Taking into account the statistic that approximately twenty percent of whales hit by harpoons were lost, Hacquebord estimates the total number of whales killed at 122,000 (177). Today the Svalbard-Barents Sea (Spitsbergen) Bowhead whale subpopulation is listed as critically endangered ("*Balaena*").

⁹ For reasons that are unclear, Paver uses the Danish word *gengånger* rather than the Norwegian *gjengånger*. Thanks to the anonymous reader who offered this clarification. To remain consistent with the novel, I retain Paver's usage of the Danish.

boundaries between the rational and the irrational.¹⁰ In what follows I first focus on how Paver takes up discourses of Arctic beauty, sublimity, and emptiness in the men's reactions to their natural and built environments. I then argue that the built environment at Gruhuken, which Paver invests with a grotesque, eerie, and persistent liveliness, and the presence of the *gengångner* index particular forms of violence that have underwritten resource extraction in and around Svalbard since hunting began there in the early seventeenth century.

These networks of violence, which include both the harvesting of marine mammals and conflict between men that is linked to resource extraction, coalesce in the novel into more than just an inhumane system characterized by death. Were Paver primarily concerned with mapping the inhumane qualities of marine mammal harvesting she could look to historical records such as ships' records and logs or seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Arctic travel narratives, many of which contain detailed scenes of the danger and bloodiness of the hunt.¹¹ However, the addition of the *gengångner*, the strange enfoldings of time wherein violence from the past persists into and haunts the novel's present, and Paver's linking of violence against marine animals with violence against men, points to her concern with both discrete and terrible incidents of violence and the structural violence that underlies and bolsters resource extraction. While the term inhumane partially describes Paver's terrain, the more capacious phrase inhuman ecologies, a neologism I have not seen used elsewhere in the environmental humanities, better describes her concerns. This phrase evokes a Latourian framework in which the human and nonhuman assemble into a network. It coheres the structural violence of resource extraction with the technologies that make it possible (men, ships, hooks, knives, guns, tryworks, trade networks) and highlights the confusion of natural, unnatural, and supernatural that animates the novel. In other words, in addition to energizing the intended slippage between inhumane and inhuman, the phrase inhuman ecologies invokes and echoes the novel's materialization of the undead. I suggest, finally, that through its focus on conflict and violence linked to resource extraction and on material and immaterial persistence, a motif that alludes to persistence in the atmosphere of the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change, *Dark Matter* performs two important functions: it records past inhuman ecologies and it opens out onto a reading of contemporary Arctic geopolitics.

The ghost story, gothic, and horror each have long and sometimes overlapping literary histories, literary strategies, and critical traditions. An extended discussion of these concepts is not my aim. However, since Paver declares her generic allegiance by subtitling her novel *A Ghost Story* and using gothic and horror as subsidiary modes, I here briefly sketch the understanding of the ghost story that informs my reading of *Dark Matter*.¹² In *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story*, Simon Hay characterizes the

¹⁰ For texts that discuss the Arctic discourses Paver tropes see, for instance Bloom, Hill, Loomis, and Spufford.

¹¹ See, for instance, Barrow, Brown, Conway *Early*, Laing, Lamont, Leslie, and Scoresby.

¹² For other novels that combine Arctic settings with the gothic and horror see, for instance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Marcel Theroux's *Far North* (2010), and Dan Simmons's *The Terror* (2007). *The Terror* reimagines the last days of Sir John Franklin's 1845 expedition. As in *Dark Matter*, something

ghost story as a form “concerned with suffering, with historical catastrophe and the problems of remembering and mourning it” and a “mode of making narratively accessible historical events that remain in some fundamental sense inaccessible” (4). Hay’s approach to the ghost story, though it foregrounds the centrality of trauma to the genre, cautions against privileging a psychoanalytic framework. Rather, with Roger Luckhurst, who argues against a generalized “spectral turn” in critical theory that follows the publication of Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (“Contemporary”), Hay proposes a historicized and politicized methodology. He suggests we read ghost stories as “engaged in a project of teaching us how to think about [...] the social forces that make up our everyday reality” (22). I align with Luckhurst and Hay in my approach to *Dark Matter*. For, even as Paver explores psychological realms, for instance in the challenge the *gengångner* presents to rational understanding and in the shattering of Jack’s sense of subjectivity during and after his encounters with the *gengångner*, she equally emphasizes what Luckhurst calls “the demand of [the ghost’s] specific symptomology and its specific locale” (“Contemporary” 542).

Although scholars in the environmental humanities have not yet turned much attention to ghost stories, the following trends in recent scholarship suggest the timeliness of focusing on this genre: work that argues for the importance of considering non-realist and genre fiction (Philips, Trexler, Trexler and Johns-Putra), that examines ecophobia (see below), that features the excavation of dark ecologies (Morton “Dark” and *Ecological*, Thacker “Black” and *Dust*), that investigates the ecogothic as a mode (Hillard, Smith and Hughes), and that aims to articulate the ecocritical potential of fear (Mackenzie and Posthumus and Taylor). Of these trends, the concept of ecophobia has generated the most robust debate among ecocritics. Below I sketch my investment in ecophobia, but readers interested in the entire debate should consult Simon Estok’s essays “Theorizing” (the debate’s opening salvo), “Narrativizing,” “Ecophobia,” and “Ecocriticism,” and his book *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*; S. K. Robisch’s essay “Woodshed,” a direct response to “Theorizing”; essays by Greg Garrard (“Ecocriticism”) and Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus (“Reading”), which contextualize and assess what Garrard terms the “Estok-Robisch controversy” (46); and essays by Matthew Taylor (“Fear”) and Tom Hillard (“Deep” and “Salem”), which critically examine and refine how we might understand and use the concept of ecophobia.

Estok defines ecophobia broadly and in a variety of ways: as an “irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world (“Theorizing” 208, *Ecocriticism* 4); as a generalized “fear of nature’s perceived or imagined unpredictability (*Ecocriticism* 13); as a fear of the loss of human agency when confronted with nature (“Ecocriticism” 4); as a spectrum condition linked to, for instance, racism, speciesism, and sexism (“Ecophobia”

supernatural menaces the humans. However, for one protagonist in *The Terror*, the outcome of this encounter with the supernatural has a positive valence. For an assessment of *The Terror*, see Leavenworth. For discussions of gothic as mode, which is how I use the term here, see, for example, Hendershot (1-2), Hogle (73-75), Luckhurst “Gothic,” and Townshend (xxxviii-xli). My take on horror, derived from Eugene Thacker’s work, is described in more detail below.

74); and as a range of material practices through which humans try to exert control over nature (*Ecocriticism* 6-7). He also uses the term to designate the myriad ways that “prejudice against the broader category of nature” (“Theorizing” 206) underwrites our relationships to and suffuses our representations of the natural world. In keeping with the assessments of Garrard and Mackenzie and Posthumus, I see both limitations and merits to how Estok conceptualizes ecophobia.¹³ What I want to do with the concept here is activate its productive potential by pursuing a “theoretically informed historicist” (*Ecocriticism* 12) mode of ecocriticism that highlights “the cultural, intellectual, and environmental history of a given text” (“Theorizing” 211) in order to unpack the specific “ways that narratives carry ecophobia” (“Narrativizing” 157). That is, I use the concept of ecophobia “tactically,” as Mackenzie and Posthumus suggest (761), to examine what particular fear-based encounters in *Dark Matter* reveal about how humans encounter the nonhuman and the inhuman.

Paver, who went to Svalbard during both summer and winter seasons to research her novel, weaves familiar Arctic tropes in *Dark Matter*. By setting the novel after World War I, Paver selects a period when exploring remote places and gathering scientific knowledge is not overshadowed by war as a vehicle for the display of British masculinity and exercise of imperial power. The premise of the novel, a scientific expedition to “study High Arctic biology, geology, and ice dynamics” and gather meteorological information (8), echoes expeditions to Svalbard conducted by Oxford University in the 1920s and 1930s. It also evokes a long history of British polar exploration and the imperial, scientific, and cultural ideologies that underwrote and were reinforced by those expeditions. The persevering, stoic, self-sacrificing hero is the primary trope Paver borrows from British traditions of polar exploration. This model of masculinity attaches to British polar expeditions such as Sir John Franklin’s 1819-1822 expedition, Sir Ernest Shackleton’s 1914-1916 *Endurance* expedition, and Robert Falcon 1910-1913 British Antarctic (*Terra Nova*) Expedition, as well as to the narratives they engender.¹⁴ Before they head north, and at the beginning of their time in the Arctic, the attitudes evinced by Jack and his fellow expedition members—Gus, Algie, Teddy, and Hugo—reproduce typical early-twentieth-century British, romantic, masculinist, scientific, and aesthetic ways of thinking about the Arctic. For them, it primarily represents an escape, an adventure, a sublime alien environment, a site over which to gain scientific mastery, and a personal proving ground. For Jack, who is keenly aware of his lower class status relative to the others, the trip takes on additional resonance; having failed to finish his physics degree, he aims to redeem himself in the realm of science and thereby improve

¹³ See, for instance, Garrard’s critique that the capacious way Estok defines ecophobia might exist in an “inverse relationship” to “real interpretive torque” (47) and Mackenzie and Posthumus’s point that when Estok thinks ecophobia together with other forms of oppression he too often sees convergence where divergence might prove a better framework (760-761).

¹⁴ In the question and answer section in the back of my edition of the novel, Paver notes that details of the expedition in *Dark Matter* are based on the 1935-6 Oxford University Arctic Expedition to Nordaustlandet (“Dark” 12). For reports on this expedition see Balfour, et al; Glen “North”; Glen “Continued.” For details on earlier Oxford University expeditions to Svalbard see Cox, et al; Frazer; Frazer, et al; Glen *Young*; Glen, et al; and Gorton. For accounts of British polar expeditions and their role in the national imaginary see Bloom (1-14, 111-135), Hill (1-67), and Spufford.

his future job prospects. Right from the outset, however, Paver employs foreshadowing to make it clear the men's expectations will go unfulfilled. The novel opens with a letter Algie sends to a doctor writing a monograph on "phobic disorders." Without going into detail, Algie declares something terrible, and real, took place at Gruhuken. Paver's foreshadowing continues apace: on his way home after meeting the others for the first time, Jack sees a corpse being pulled from the Thames. Ultimately, only four of the five men leave for Svalbard, only three make it to Gruhuken, they gather very limited scientific data, one expedition member is killed, and the two who survive their ordeal are permanently scarred by the experience.

When the men arrive in the Arctic, their responses to the environment focus on its simultaneous beauty and strangeness. For instance, in the Barents Sea, their ship encounters drift ice, which Jack describes thus: "It was eerie, peering through the fog at the sea turned white. Huge, jagged floes like pieces of an enormous jigsaw, dotted with pools of meltwater, intensely blue. I hadn't expected it to be so beautiful" (33-34). When the fog lifts and the men get their first glimpse of Gruhuken, the language is rapturous. "Dazzling snow-capped mountains enclosed a wide bay dotted with icebergs." The water, "still as glass," reflected the peaks. And at the western end of the bay, "shining pavements of pewter rock sloped down to the sea, and a stream glinted." Behind the beach the "greenish-grey slopes" contrast with the "harsh white glitter of the ice cap." In addition to the spectacular scenery, Jack is taken by the quality of light and the purity and clarity of the air. The entire place seems, at that instance, "like heaven" (52). At these and other moments of description, Paver deploys the conventions of the spectacle and the sublime, playing up the Arctic environment's immensity of scale, unnatural clarity of light, and intensity of color, and evoking romantic paintings such as Frederic Edwin Church's *The Icebergs* (1861) or Caspar David Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice* (1823-24).¹⁵ However, what is most interesting about these descriptions is the way they disrupt conventionally romantic Arctic descriptive practices through the inclusion of gothic brushstrokes. That is, in her descriptions Paver includes details that fracture the beauty of the scene: "something [that] slid through the water and under the ice" (37), "cliffs the color of dried blood" (52), dwarf willows "scarlet, like splashes of blood" (89), northern lights "utterly indifferent to what lies beneath" (96). These gothic gestures augur the emergence of the *gengångner* and remind the reader of the novel's genre: ghost story, not adventure narrative.

Paver reiterates the motif of barely hidden disquiet in the way Jack's assumptions about the emptiness of the Arctic are eroded. Sailing along the coast of Spitsbergen, he muses that the Arctic is not, as he had anticipated, a pristine or empty land.¹⁶ Rather, he

¹⁵ On the Arctic sublime see Loomis. For a broader discussion of the Arctic and visual culture see Potter. For a cross-cultural examination of how the Far North is conceived in a range of literary and visual texts, see Davidson.

¹⁶ In the United States context, proponents of oil and gas exploration, who want to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska to resource extraction, repeatedly characterize the Arctic as a frozen wasteland. See, for instance, Banerjee, and debates about ANWR in the *Congressional Record* from 18 March, 19 March, and 9 May 2003. Cheryll Glotfelty uses the phrase "place bashing" to describe rhetoric that discursively constructs a place as malign, empty, and/or a wasteland.

notes its fullness. The environment teems with life—birds, foxes, walruses, seals, reindeer, polar bears (39-41)—and is littered with relics. While the appearance of wildlife energizes him, he is disturbed by the human relics, which corrode his sense of himself as a pioneering adventurer entering untouched territory. The relics at Gruhuken include a claim sign, “roughly painted in Swedish,” the ruins of a mine, “a tangle of wire and gaffs and some large rusty knives,” a bear post, and an old trapper’s cabin, “crouched among the boulders in a blizzard of bones” (55). While the others seem unaffected by these traces of past human activity, a perception Jack later discovers was erroneous, as the novel progresses they increasingly disturb Jack. The gothic undertone present in the descriptions of the environment also marks the descriptions of the relics. When Jack ventures inside the old cabin to investigate its fitness as a doghouse, it smells like death (64) and he experiences “a wild plummeting of the spirits (65). The bear post, which delights Algie, who wants to test its use as a tool for luring bears, unsettles Jack. Made of driftwood “bleached silver, except for a few charred patches, and some darker blotches which must be blubber stains,” to him the post seems unearthly. When he impulsively touches it, the bear post feels “smooth and unpleasantly cold” (70). Jack calls it “a killing post” (70), though he does not know until later the extent of killing the post enables. In the pile of bones surrounding the hut, Jack and Gus find the “big, man-like frames of bears” and seal skeletons with “short limbs and long toes that look unsettlingly like human hands” (63). The suture of human and nonhuman animals here functions both as a moment that foregrounds evolutionary homologies and one that, by suggesting the ease with which violence perpetrated against nonhuman animals might also be turned against humans, portends the death of the *gengångner*.

Each facet of the built environment in *Dark Matter*—the claim signs and other remains of defunct mines, the trapper’s hut the expedition members dismantle so they can build their own cabin on the site it occupies, the converted sealing ship that conveys the expedition to Gruhuken, the rusty knives on the beach, the pile of bones surrounding the cabin, and the bear post—performs a role in mapping the kinds of violence done in the name of resource extraction. Gruhuken and its relics, that is, comprise a palimpsest of environmental traumas small and large. The old trapper’s hut evokes the long history of subsistence hunting and trapping on Svalbard. In the conflict between the presence of the old trapper and the mining syndicate that finds coal at Gruhuken, backdates its claim, and kills the old trapper because he refuses to leave, Paver scripts both the overtaking of subsistence living by industrializing capitalism and the ruthlessness of men’s lawless encounters when resources are at stake.¹⁷ Although the new cabin built by the expedition members is not imbricated in historical violence like the rest of the built environment, their razing of the old cabin enacts its own violence by effacing part of the site’s history. And their construction of the new cabin instantiates a different mode of possessiveness of the region, an attempt at mastery through scientific instruments that presages both the geopolitical importance of the region during the Cold War and

¹⁷ For historical accounts of mining in Svalbard see Brown and Dole.

contemporary attempts to use new technologies to exploit previously inaccessible resources.

Taken together, the sealing ship, the rusty knives, and the pile of bones are metonyms for one capitalist endeavor in Svalbard, the harvesting of animal life. The ship functions as an especially potent figure for materializing this harvesting. Unlike ships' logs or customs' records, which denote death through rational, mathematical, disembodied means, the ship itself registers death viscerally and intimately, for it is infused with the smell of sealing. Jack's cabin, which is "only slightly bigger than a coffin," "stinks of seal blubber" (25). The "rancid, oily smell has soaked into the woodwork" of the entire ship and has adulterated the taste of the water (25-26). The way Paver activates a specific material quality of wood—the porosity that makes it responsive to humidity and temperature and allows it to capture, retain, and release odor and texture—underlines its role as an example of what Jane Bennett calls vibrant matter: "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii). The dissolution of "binaries of life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic" (x) at work in how Bennett conceptualizes vibrant matter is clearly operative in the relationship of Jack to the ship, its woodwork, and the water he consumes. Contrary to the usual ways capitalism works to elide its rendering of and dependence on animal life (Shukin), the details of smell and taste Paver highlights here inscribe an inescapable sensory reminder of the ship's role in a network of slaughter. Through the strange synesthetic conflation of drinking water that tastes like the smell of seal blubber, Jack incorporates, though he cannot metabolize, the violence of marine mammal deaths.

The bear post, a tool trappers use to lure bears close to their cabins so they can kill them for food and for their skin, for subsistence and for trade, is the only remainder of the trapper's hut the men leave intact. It is imbricated in the networks of harvesting detailed above and further overdetermined by two additional roles. One, the bear post functions as a location for examining how the novel dramatizes ecophobia and its consequences. This role becomes clear when considering Algie's fascination with the bear post, which is a metonym for his embrace of killing for sport, and his use of it to display what he has killed. In a move that disturbs Jack, Algie strings a fulmar he shot to the bear post. The wind catches its one free wing, making the dead fulmar flap in "a parody of flight" (85) and turning it into a grotesque flag, one that commemorates this bloody conquest of a particular animal and recalls all genocide engendered by colonialist activity. Paver underlines Algie's attitudes toward nonhuman animals in two other scenes. In one he starts to skin a seal, realizes it is still alive, and then waits to kill it until he has finished the skinning (98-99). In the other, he attempts to render the expedition's dogs more compliant by pulling some of their teeth (100-101). Algie's treatment of the fulmar, seal, and dogs, all of which exist for him as objects of control, exemplifies a mode of ecophobia in which a desire to exercise power and control is linked with the "looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources" (Estok, "Theorizing" 208). And while Algie's propensity for killing animals predates his arrival in Svalbard, the novel

suggests that the destabilizing effects of the Arctic environment contribute to his treatment of the fulmar, seal, and dogs. Paver juxtaposes the attitudes of Algie and Jack not only in relation to the bear post or to questions of cowardice and commitment to the expedition's goals, but also in relation to their treatment of the dogs. Although initially indifferent to them, Jack intervenes to stop Algie from pulling Isaac's teeth, an action that cements their bond. Paver scripts Jack's affection for Isaac as both a counterbalance to Algie's ecophobia and as some measure of protection against the *gengångner*, but she ultimately posits the structural violence that produces the *gengångner's* existence as more powerful than any interpersonal or cross-species bond. Two, in a gothic twist on the novel's theme of transmission and its particular concern with ways scientific data and emotion get communicated or blocked, the bear post, and Gruhuken more generally, operate as repositories of place memory, vehicles for transmitting the horror of past events. When Bjørvik, a trapper who lives in an isolated cabin twenty miles from Gruhuken, visits Jack, he elliptically reveals some hearsay details about the old trapper's death (199-204). But it is not until the end of the novel, when Jack has a nightmare, that he comes to know the truth, for he experiences the terror of the trapper as he is chained to the bear post, attacked with flensing knives, soaked in paraffin, and set alight (223-25). In accumulating this second function, the bear post materializes not only human violence against nonhumans, but also the violence men perpetrate against each other "when they know they won't be found out" (225, emphasis original).

Like the ship, the bear post represents an important locus for mapping Gruhuken's inhuman ecologies. However, while the ship exists only as a node in the rational, material world, the bear post, together with the *gengångner*, the darkness of the Arctic winter, and Jack's isolation, cohere into a supernatural web of horror that is both immaterial and material. In the first of three proposed meditations on horror, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol 1.*, Eugene Thacker defines horror not as fear, but rather as a confrontation with the unthinkability of the world (1-2). More specifically, Thacker defines horror in terms of limits and constraints, as the "moments in which thinking enigmatically confronts the horizon of its own possibility" (2). This horror, writes Thacker, can be uttered only "via a non-philosophical language" (2). Thacker goes on to theorize horror vis-à-vis three forms of relationship between humans and the world. The "world-for-us" is an anthropocentric one in which we interpret the world in our terms, even when it "resists, or ignores our attempts to mold it into the world-for-us" (4). We fashion the "world-for-us" from the material world, or "world-in-itself." As Thacker notes, scientific inquiry is a primary tool for shifting the "world-in-itself" to "world-for-us" (5). Thacker's third form of human-world relationship is the "world-without-us," a "spectral and speculative" "subtraction of the human" that enables us to conceptualize the "world-in-itself" (5). These three human-world modes enable Thacker to further refine his definition of horror. Rather than privileging anthropocentric human fear, he posits horror "as being about the limits of the human as it confronts" the world-without-us (8). Thacker argues that genre horror, which deploys "a whole bestiary of impossible life forms" (8), plays a central role in exposing and critiquing our

assumptions that the world exists for us. Paver's *gengångner* is one such impossible life form.

In a convention common to the best works of horror, neither Jack, nor the reader, can clearly apprehend the *gengångner*. When he first sees it from afar, on the day of first dark, Jack initially mistakes it for one of the ship's crew. However, as it turns to face him and Jack gets a fleeting glimpse, all he sees is a "dark figure" with odd physical characteristics; his hands are at his sides, one shoulder is higher than the other, and his head is strangely tilted to the side (83). The *gengångner* does not reappear in physical form until two months later, when the sun disappears for the winter. This time Jack gets a better look. The *gengångner* has hauled out from the sea. Despite its wetness, "the stillness was absolute. No sound of droplets pattering on snow." The figure stands and faces Jack; silhouetted by the last "crimson glow" of the sunset fading "like embers growing cold" (105-6), it is "dark, dark against the sea." When Jack sees its "wet round head" he knows immediately that "it wasn't a trapper from a nearby camp, or a polar mirage, or that hoary excuse, 'a trick of the light.' [...] I knew what it was. I knew, with some ancient part of me, that it wasn't alive" (106). Jack's instinctive reaction to the *gengångner* registers in a shift of pronouns from the masculine to the neutral. His first description of the figure employs "he," while this one employs "it." At other moments in the novel the *gengångner* menaces Jack via non-visual means; it engenders bad dreams, it walks on the boardwalk around the cabin, it opens the door to the doghouse and drives away the expedition's pack of huskies. Whether it is physically present or not, Jack can feel it waiting and watching, sending its "intense, unwavering, malign" will toward him. He characterizes the *gengångner* as "belonging to the dark beyond humanity. It was rage without end. A black tide drowning" (176).

Jack's encounters with the *gengångner* represent the primary way Paver animates a tension between the rational and the irrational, the empirical and the ineffable, the natural and the supernatural. Following Thacker, the *gengångner* is an impossible life form for conveying the limits of knowledge. The horror it spectralizes materializes our disavowal of the violence we know underwrites life and its reproduction. And although Thacker delinks fear from horror in order to focus on a nonanthropocentric mode for horror, there is, I think, something important to be gained by examining the contours of the fear the *gengångner* produces. As the novel progresses, Jack is increasingly unable to dismiss the thing as merely an immaterial echo of the past. The *gengångner*, in concert with the harshness of the Arctic winter and Jack's isolation, comes to interfere not only with the scientific aims of the expedition, and by extension the project of mastering the Arctic environment through knowledge, but also with his sense of subjectivity. Paver scripts Jack's deterioration through his periodic failure to recognize his reflections in the mirror or window, the dysfunction and failure of the technologies used for gathering scientific data, the dissolution of his daily routine, his temporal disorientation, and the increasingly deranged handwriting in his journal. In other words, the natural, built, nonhuman, and inhuman elements of Jack's environment cohere into what Matthew Taylor, writing about Edgar Allen Poe, fear, and ecology calls a "field against which discrete selves disappear" (364). Taylor, who draws upon and critiques Estok's

theorization of ecophobia, examines how “some forms of ecophilia—from late-eighteenth-century romanticism to early-twenty-first-century posthumanism—represent not a solution to ecophobia, or even a real difference, but rather an extension of the same problem under a different name” (354). In other words, Taylor argues that the same reiteration of “humanist boundaries that would separate us from the world” (362) is operative across some forms of ecophilia and ecophobia. In contrast to this separation, Taylor employs the work of Edgar Allen Poe to argue for a very particular kind of ecocritically-oriented fear, fear that foregrounds its suspension in a vulnerability that “recognizes the self’s integration into its environment without the ability to overcome it, that takes ecological systematicity and the attendant loss of individual subjectivity literally, thereby precluding reactionary, destructive attempts at mastery.” Furthermore, Taylor writes, such comportment would refrain from “reinscribing a defensive dualism between one’s self and one’s context.” Instead, this type of fear “would be the inhabitation of a radically uncertain openness to the world” (362). While Paver’s novel submits Jack to an experience of radically uncertain openness to the world and to forms of historical violence in Svalbard, ultimately Jack cannot fully inhabit the kind of suspension Taylor sees in Poe’s work; in fact, he barely survives the inhuman ecologies of Gruhuken.

The heart of things as made perceptible to Jack in the far north is experience he cannot slough. It affects him physically and emotionally; he loses a foot to frostbite, is plagued by persistent nightmares, seeks treatment in a sanitarium, and, finally, moves to Jamaica, where he works as a botanist at a research station. And although Jack notes the many differences between the ecosystems and climates of Svalbard and Jamaica, he also remains acutely aware that the two regions are connected: the sea in Jamaica is “nothing like Gruhuken [...] But it’s the same sea” (251). Here Paver explicitly ties together two distant regions, Jamaica and Svalbard, through the medium of water. And although she does not make this move in the novel, given the connection it scripts between the warm waters of Jamaica and the cold waters of Svalbard, it is interesting to note that global ocean circulation does, over long time scales, literally connect these two regions. Caribbean and Gulf Stream currents feed into the North Atlantic current, which eventually branches off into the Norwegian Atlantic Current and then the West Spitsbergen Current (WSC), which tempers the climate of the southern and western sides of Spitsbergen. Implicitly, by setting the final scene in a Jamaica subject to British colonial rule, and assigning Jack the work of collecting specimens for the Botanical Gardens, Paver echoes historical forms of harvesting, particularly whaling, in which the British engaged in Svalbard in the early modern period.

The late-1930s setting of *Dark Matter* predates sustained scientific study of the causes and effects of climate change, which means Paver’s characters undertake their meteorological, geological, and glaciological data-gathering as part of a general project of scientific mastery, not within the context of larger climatological or paleoclimatological studies like those being conducted today in both the Arctic and Antarctic. However, reading the novel in 2013, at the end of a summer in which the extent of Arctic sea ice was again well below average, made me acutely aware of the resonance between

the contemporary moment and the novel.¹⁸ Svalbard is the only area in the Arctic without an indigenous population, which means discussions about climate change and its effects on the archipelago and its waters focus primarily on impacts to nonhuman animals and their ecosystems, the extent to which glaciers are receding and ice sheets melting, and the wisdom of pursuing resources made newly accessible by climate change. The Norwegian oil industry currently exploits an offshore zone that extends from “under 60° North to well above the Arctic Circle” (Emmerson 245). However, fields in both the North and Norwegian seas are declining in productivity and, although new technology can extend the lifespan of these areas, without opening new areas to exploration, production will continue to taper. The area the industry wants to open, the northern part of the Norwegian Continental Shelf, juts much further into the Arctic than the industry's current extent, potentially encompassing Svalbard.¹⁹ Although the resources sought by the contemporary oil and gas industry are different than those pursued in *Dark Matter*, Paver's suggestion that violence, whether to the surface of the earth, to nonhuman animals, or to humans, is an inherent, if often ignored, element of resource extraction, should give the reader pause. To ignore this violence is to risk its continual reappearance, its haunting of the future.

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¹⁸ For regularly updated data and analysis regarding Arctic sea ice see “Arctic.” See also “Sea.”

¹⁹ Emmerson 250. See Emmerson (245-259) for a more detailed discussion of the Norwegian oil and gas industries and their plans for development and Gauthier, et al (1176-1177) for maps that estimate the amount of undiscovered oil and gas in the Arctic. See also the Norwegian government's plan for managing development in the Barents Sea (“Integrated”).

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Saviors, "Sealfies," and Seals: Strategies for Self-Representation in Contemporary Inuit Films

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Abstract



The legibility of the inter-relationships between human and seal is what is at stake when Inuit present themselves within administrative discourses at international assemblies in defense of their ontology and the right to hunt seals. In the language of administration and in the narrative practices of international animal rights, seals can only appear in a predetermined categorical framework for what constitutes human ethical responsibility to nature. The seal in animal rights discourse is one type of object that needs saving in the form of protective measures to keep her safe from the rapacious greed of capitalism. However, in Indigenous cultural practices, the seal is another relative, a relation whose presence makes all certainties about hierarchies, use-value, moral exemptions, and human exceptionalism impossible. Using the trending social media phenomenon of the "sealfie" and three contemporary northern Indigenous films, this essay argues that the Inuit use of these media formats showcases their cultural and economic dependence on seal hunting and restructures debates around authority, self-representation, and one-sided environmental protection activities.

Keywords: Animal Rights, Inuit, Inupiat, "sealfie," self-representation, food security.

Resumen

El entendimiento de las interrelaciones entre ser humano y foca está en juego cuando los Inuit usan el lenguaje institucional en foros internacionales para defender su realidad y el derecho a cazar focas. En el lenguaje administrativo y en las prácticas discursivas de los derechos internacionales de los animales, las focas únicamente pueden aparecer como un marco categórico predeterminado de lo que constituye la responsabilidad ética del ser humano con la naturaleza. La foca en el lenguaje de los derechos de los animales es un objeto que necesita salvarse mediante medidas protectoras que las salvaguarden de la avaricia agresiva del capitalismo. Sin embargo, en las prácticas culturales indígenas la foca es percibida como un familiar, un pariente cuya presencia hace imposible nuestra certitud sobre jerarquías, el valor de uso, la impunidad moral, y la excepcionalidad humana. Usando la moda de las redes sociales en auge, el "sealfie" y tres películas contemporáneas indígenas del Norte, este ensayo argumenta que los usos inuit de estos formatos mediáticos ponen de manifiesto su dependencia cultural y económica en la caza de focas, y reestructura debates en cuanto a la autoridad, la autorepresentación, y las actividades de protección medioambiental monodireccionales.

Palabras clave: derechos de los animales, inuit, inupiat, "sealfie", autorepresentación, seguridad alimentaria.

What I hope to come out of all this is for people to maybe think about a different kind of animal rights activism. One that's more custom to each environment; one that's thoughtful and respectful of indigenous peoples in whichever country or region you're dealing with, because they tend to be at the forefront of defending the environment and the wildlife.

-Alethea Arnaquq-Baril¹

Patrick Moore's famous photograph from animal rights activism in the 1970s features Bob Hunter and Paul Watson in front of a sealing ship kneeling next to a baby harp seal. The two men's presence protects the seal pup from the looming threat of the commercial sealing vessel. While an appeal to the environmental consciousness of American and European viewers, the picture also frames a relationship between man and seal that displays the active protective power of the human and the submissive and docile object of that care, the seal. The ship, the reification of a voracious global capitalism, dictates the terms of the interaction between the two species, keeping the practices of care on the part of Hunter and Watson firmly in the realm of subject and object.

Despite the success of animal rights activists with the passing of several bans on selling seal products throughout the 1980s, protectionist efforts are inherently a part, and hence representative, of a late capitalist understanding of the relationship between humans and other animals. Backed by economic and political authority, the commercial sealing industry dictates the terms of the relationship between humans and seals and protectionist and conservationist efforts can only be a reaction to the exploitation of seals by the sealing industry.² In their influential study *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out the complex and often contradictory heart of protectionist efforts within economic and cultural systems that separate humans from other species: "Conservation legislation, and/or the treatment of particular species, often depend on public response to representation rather than to the animals themselves or their environments" (139). Furthermore, "it is the *representation* of animals, rather than the animals themselves... along with consumer capitalism [that] continues to determine and sustain the species boundary to the present day" (138, emphasis in original). Similar to animals caught in exploitative markets, animals within conservation rhetoric are not entities in themselves, nor are they relational with a meaningful connection to human beings beyond a market value.

Seal hunting is both promoted and vilified in the dominant political, economic, and cultural systems of Western nations. This binary back and forth, however, excludes additional voices that describe other modes of dependence, relating, and care for nonhuman animals. More than most people in the nations that seek to dictate how

¹ "Inuit Women Behind 'Sealfies'"

² In her study *Animal Capital*, Nicole Shukin argues that different bodies (human and animal) have uneven access to political power and animal bodies, especially, are made materially powerless in the commodity circulation of late capitalism (7).

northern Indigenous people should survive, Inuit and other Indigenous people in the North are intimately aware of the effects of climate change and the extinction of species, yet their voices are heard the least and their deep knowledge of the land and environment remains unexamined by scientists and lay publics.³ Alaskan ethnographer Ann Fienup-Riordan uncategorically states: “Voice, the right to represent, and the cultural construction of reality are among the most important intellectual issues of our time” (*Freeze Frame* xi). For Inuit in Canada and the linguistically and culturally related Yup’ik and Inupiat in Alaska, the right to represent in animal rights and welfare debates is not only an intellectual issue; it is also an issue about survival for humans and seals in the North.

Alongside other representatives in political and social fora, Inuit artists and cultural workers have been addressing the lack of Inuit voice in these debates. For example, the description of the celebrated filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk’s short film, “Tungijjuq: What We Eat,” reads: “Inuit jazz throat-singer Tanya Tagaq, and Cannes-winning filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk, talk back to Brigitte Bardot and [the] anti-seal hunting lobby on the eternal reality of hunting” (“Tungijjuq”). The film does more than “talk-back” to the discourse of European and North American animal rights activism; it re-envisioned the terms on which the debate rests. In the discourse of the anti-sealing movement, led by organizations such as Greenpeace and celebrities such as Bardot, Paul McCartney, and Ellen DeGeneres, seals only appear as representatives of a wild and helpless nature that is in the process of being destroyed by a violent human interference. The rhetoric of this specific form of animal rights discourse emphasizes human dominion over a helpless animal, a relationship epitomized in the finality of the act of killing.

Most recently, DeGeneres, a popular American talk-show host, found herself in the middle of a controversy around seals, commercial hunting, and Inuit. The conflict was sparked when she raised money from a celebrity self-photograph, or “selfie,” taken at the prestigious 2014 Academy Awards (Oscars) show held on March 2nd. She then gave the funds to the Humane Society International (HSI) to protect baby harp seals from commercial hunting. Her large donation (1.5 million USD) and the resulting outcry from Inuit prompted the HSI to clarify their stance regarding Inuit and the hunting of seals: “Unlike Inuit sealers, commercial sealers almost exclusively target baby seals who are less than three months old. Inuit hunters kill seals primarily for meat” (“Sealfies”). However, Alethea Arnaquq-Baril rebuffs the Humane Society’s overtures given that they have been behind the push for banning the sealskin trade from the beginning: “They failed to mention [in the clarification of their stance vis-à-vis Inuit hunting] this legislation absolutely harms the ability of the Inuit to sell our seal skins, which therefore in turn affects our ability to hunt and feed our families” (“Canadian Inuit”).

In “Tools for a Cross-Cultural Feminist Ethics,” Greta Gaard draws attention to the “hierarchies” in environmental and animal welfare protests that often focus on the

³ Zacharias Kunuk examines the lack of Inuit participation in discussions of climate change in the North and the wealth of Inuit knowledge about this subject in his 2010 film, *Qapirangajuk: To Spear Strangely*.

protection of charismatic fauna in peril from marginalized social and political groups. She writes:

If the ethical question at issue is the hunting, killing, and eating of nonhuman animals, the First World practices of sport hunting, factory farming, large scale cattle ranching and its attendant ecological degradation (deforestation, water loss and degradation, soil erosion, manure disposal) offer enough material to occupy most animal rights activists, environmentalists, and ecofeminists for a few years to come. (9)

Envisioning another type of animal rights discourse that remains attentive to the "contexts and contents" of cross-cultural dietary ethics (Gaard 14), Arnaquq-Baril helped initiate a dialogue between animal welfare advocates and Inuit. Although DeGeneres' action was well intentioned for seals, it could not account for the other lives caught in this nexus of concerns. Acting on her own appeal for a "different kind of animal rights activism," Inuit filmmaker Arnaquq-Baril, poet and artist Laakukuk Williamson Bathory, and musician Nancy Mike launched a counter-social media campaign to DeGeneres' "#selfie" that is at once comedically flippant and completely serious: "#sealfies."

The three women, all residents of Canada's Nunavut Territory, responded to DeGeneres with "sealfies" on social media that are pictures and short films depicting Inuit in sealskin clothing and eating seal meat. According to *Vice* journalist Dave Dean, "Iqaluit resident Laakukuk Williamson Bathory sparked the 'sealfie' hashtag in Canada, a concept that in the past few days [March 28th-31st, 2014] has gone viral on Twitter and in the news. It has people posting photos of themselves (often mentioning @theellenshow) with seal meat, seal accessories, and in their sealskin Sunday best" ("Inuit Women Behind 'Sealfies'"). In Dean's interview, Bathory explains why she chose social media for her protest of DeGeneres' donation and choice of charity: "I wanted to it to be a tongue-in-cheek protest to all these very serious animal rights activists... Many of us Inuit use humour to make a strong point instead of anger" ("Inuit Women Behind 'Sealfies'"). Furthermore, Kate Woodsome and Ryan Kohls report that the #sealfie movement is not just a war of "memes;" rather, the "#sealfie campaign, coupled with new findings about food insecurity and a suicide epidemic, has cast a spotlight on a serious issue. Canada's Inuit are in crisis, and they say seal hunting is one of the few traditions keeping their people and culture alive" ("Canadian Inuit").

While the picture of Watson and Hunter is arguably the first #sealfie, the campaign to take control of the image of seals in the North by Inuit is part of a longer process of self-determination and self-representation.⁴ Bathory explains that, for her, one of the most important aspects of the #sealfie campaign was "a focus on cultural celebration and positive self-esteem" ("Inuit Women Behind 'Sealfies'"). Pertinently for

⁴ I classify the picture of Watson and Hunter with the baby harp seal as a "sealfie" given that it is a staged portrait of a relationship between humans and seals. As previously stated, however, this staged relationship is in marked contrast to the "sealfies" shared by Inuit in the aftermath of the DeGeneres controversy. The former represents the protectionist stance of Western environmental conservation while the latter is more along the lines of what Greta Gaard terms a "heroic ethics" on the part of a marginalized and systemically disenfranchised people that "distills a range of cultural practices down to a single practice" (14-15).

this discussion of Inuit assertion to the right of self-representation and cultural celebration, Gaard notes: "Tribes and nations struggling to reject colonialism and colonized identities often see the reassertion of nationalism and national or tribal identities as a vital strategy in the struggle for self-determination" (16). #Sealfie photos present vignettes of modern Inuit life to those who have access to the Internet—which is to say just about the whole world—challenging stereotypes of northern Indigenous life while connecting to publics across the globe who have little to no access to remote arctic communities. Along with these brief moments of daily life that nonetheless present culturally important aspects of Inuit identity such as the wearing of sealskins, longer narrative portrayals in the form of films and film shorts have also been mobilized to give voice to the Inuit in their struggle for control of representation.

Accessible through the Internet like #sealfies, the following three contemporary northern Indigenous films creatively engage the seal hunting debate that has thus far been discussed in terms set by those from outside seal-hunting regions. "Tungijuk" and *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* are both by Kunuk from Igloolik, Nunavut. All of Kunuk's films can be watched on his Web site Isuma.tv. The third film, *On the Ice*, is the first feature length film by Andrew Okpeaha MacLean from Barrow, Alaska. MacLean turned to the popular crowd-funding Web site Kickstarter to finance the distribution of the film to select theaters around the United States.

These films, while entertaining stories for both Inuit and non-Inuit, also introduce and teach non-Inuit about cultural practices between humans and the animals they eat that are more than exploitative and violent enforcements of species hierarchies. Instead, Inuk director Kunuk and Inupiaq director MacLean offer nuanced portrayals of a northern life that is complex, multifaceted, in transition, modern, and vibrant. The filmmakers make use of modern technologies to showcase this cultural liveliness while also engaging relationships with the environment and other animal species that is non-Western. Fienup-Riordan writes: "Few people on earth have been written about so prodigiously or pictured so often in an exotic light" as the Eskimo (*Freeze Frame* xi). Kunuk and MacLean are each, respectively, offering bodies of work to dislodge the image of Eskimos that others have portrayed in order to give voice to positions that are place, time, and culturally specific and appropriate. Discussing Kunuk's art and media collective, Igloolik Isuma Productions, Katarina Soukup writes: "The films [appropriate] communication tools to transmit an audiovisual form of Inuit oral history and storytelling to a hybrid audience: Isuma's primary goal is to delight other Inuit, and its secondary goal is to connect with a global media audience" (n.p.).

Creatively using the media and new storytelling technologies, Inuit have found the means to reach wider audiences—and potential allies—to reveal their distinct modes of relating to the world. In "Uploading Selves: Inuit Digital Storytelling on YouTube," Nancy Wachowich and Willow Scobie suggest that "through the act of uploading clips and inviting dialogue, Inuit assert their presence in the world and forge new online and offline (transnational and local) social networks. In this capacity, the Internet can be seen as inspiring a new and creative form of technological practice through which Inuit can mobilize themselves and engage different material and

immaterial worlds" (83-84). Similar to how Inuit are using Web sites to distribute short self-made films and #sealfies on social media sites YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, and Facebook, Inuit filmmakers are also using Web sites and social media to distribute and connect to audiences around the world. Circumventing traditional outlets for film distribution and access that have consistently kept out those on the cultural margins, Indigenous filmmakers have successfully utilized the Internet to build and maintain communities around the world while remaining faithful to projects that promote Inuit cultural and artistic practices. Moreover, the Inuit word for Internet, *Ikiaqqivik*, is an "example of how Inuit are mapping traditional concepts, values, and metaphors to make sense of contemporary realities and technologies" (Soukup n.p.). Soukup explains the genesis of the term chosen by Nunavut's former Official Languages Commissioner, Eva Aariak: "*Ikiaqqivik*, or 'traveling through layers'...comes from the concept describing what a shaman does when asked to find out about living or deceased relatives or where animals have disappeared to: travel across time and space to find answers" (Soukup n.p.).

Kunuk's short film "Tungijuk" is an answer of sorts to a question that needs asking: how can non-Inuit animal welfare advocates begin to understand what seals mean to Inuit in an effort to have productive conversations about the conservation of animal species and Inuit culture? Without any dialogue and only the sounds of the ethereal throat-singing of Tanya Tagaq, the film uses jump cuts and stylized imagery in a manner that is graphically interesting to any audience and thought-provoking for non-Inuit. Moreover, to Inuit audiences, the artistic display of Inuit cosmology and cultural identity usually found in traditional stories is recognizable in the visual format of film. The film opens with a creature that is neither human nor wolf, but rather the representation of the "soul" or "personhood" (in Inuktitut, the *inua*) that has taken wolf form.⁵ This person-wolf kills a caribou and through the act of killing, the caribou's *inua* is revealed and released as she sensually fingers her own cut-open abdomen.⁶ The transformed caribou-person staggers to the edge of the ice floe and links the margins of the worlds of land and sea as she falls into the water and becomes a ringed seal. The seal-woman is shot and the next scene is of a man (played by Kunuk) cutting open the seal while a woman (played by Tagaq) looks lovingly down at the seal's body. When the seal's abdomen is opened in a manner similar to the caribou's, the woman reaches down and, in a gesture that mirrors the caribou-person fingering her wound, touches the seal and gently pulls a piece of the meat into her mouth. The mirroring of gestures across species and the patterns of linkages that bridge domains (human-animal, land-sea, male-female) suggests a more complex formulation of the interaction and interrelationship of humans and several of their partners in the North that allow human life to exist.

⁵ Jarich Oosten points out that "[T]he concept of *inua* (or *Yua*) [meaning] 'its person' refers to independent spirits as well as to a particular type of soul. The word is derived from the root *inu-* ('human life') and is best translated as 'its human being' or 'its person'" (186-187).

⁶ The wound on the caribou and seal abdomens is the shape and texture of female sexual organs, again highlighting the dynamism between concepts of life and death in Inuit stories about hunting and eating seals.

"Tungijuk" does not disavow the killing of animals; rather, it is very aware that "[k]illing sentient animals is killing someone, not something" (Haraway 106). Knowing the subjectivity of the one being killed recognizes what Jacques Derrida calls the "becoming-subject of substance" that destabilizes the category of "killable" (280). Both in the Canadian commercial hunts in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and in the rhetoric of animal rights activists, the baby harp seals are made into objects that are killable. For the hunters, the seals are "killable" despite—or because of—the use of a rhetorical strategy that calls their slaughter a "harvest." For the activist, on the other hand, the seal is still other, but as a killable object in need of saving. The rhetorics of saving and killing stem from a similar meaning-making system that keeps humans and seals ontologically separate. "Tungijuk" suggests a move away from focusing on the finality of death: "knowing [killing an animal is killing someone] is not the end but the beginning of serious accountability inside worldly complexities" (Haraway 106). In the film, the complex circularity of the relationships among wolves, caribou, seals, and humans link different environments and seasons, suggesting that all species and their interrelated lives require constant attention and care; to live *well* in this relational system, makes one accountable to all others.

Relationships among humans and between humans and nonhumans are suffused with death, for death is part of the structure of intersubjective relating. Nancy Mike explains (to *Vice's* Dean) how the seal is more than an object within Inuit cultural practice:

When someone like Ellen, or anybody who's a celebrity or is well known, says something like that [the violent killing of seals needs to be ended], it's attacking us as minority groups because we not only use the seal as a practical thing, we use it to build relationships. We eat the meat, we use the bones or the skin—the bones to make little games for children so they can have fun with it. I don't know if these words can even explain what I want to say about the importance of seal, because it's our life. Not only our culture, but our daily living and how we're taught to be good people and to respect others and respect animals. It's much more than the practical use of it, not only seals, but any animal we have up here in the north. ("Inuit Women Behind 'Sealfies'")

"Tungijuk" explores death and killing not as finalities, but as the means by which Inuit express their cultural identity through an environmentally appropriate dietary practice.⁷ Seals are not "killable" as a category of object: rather, every act of killing enacts obligations on the part of the human to ensure that each death is singular and marked with an attention to how the death allows obligations to be performed in the present.

⁷ Woodsome and Kohls report: "Approximately 32,000 people live in Nunavut, a vast, cold territory about the size of Mexico. Getting them food and supplies requires a fleet of ships and planes from southern Canada. Bad weather sometimes thwarts the deliveries, but when they do make it, the shipping costs are exorbitant. The cost is passed on to customers. Despite some government subsidies, shoppers have to pay about \$10 for celery, \$9 for two kilograms of sugar and \$12 for instant coffee. In a community where unemployment is nearly twice the national Canadian average, at 12.5 percent, a lot of families are going without." A complicating factor of relying more on "country food" from subsistence hunting is the high levels of environmental toxins that concentrate in the fatty tissues of animals in the Arctic. The toxins then concentrate further in the mammary glands of Inuit mothers; Inuit, therefore, produce the least environmental pollution while being some of the most effected by environmental pollution. For further reading see Melvin Visser's *Cold, Clear, and Deadly* (2007) and Marla Cone's *Silent Snow* (2005).

Furthermore, in his meditation on animal and human lives in the northeastern arctic, *Sacred Hunt*, David Pelly points out that "Traditionally, the hunt is a pact between Inuit and the seal. The Inuit hunter is not extracting from the environment but creating a bond between his people and their environment. When the seal gives itself to the hunter, it is an act of sharing in which the seal is transformed from animal to human. Being consumed is a form of rebirth or renewal for the seal" (106).

In Pelly's example, for the seal to be transformed into "human" through its death by a human hunter both seems 1) self-serving of the hunter who has now side-stepped the moral implications of the act of killing and eating animals and 2) a good deal for the seal, who now becomes a higher order being. Given that Cary Wolfe suggests in his capacious study, *Animal Rites*, that at least since Descartes, being theorized as "human," if not the "humanist subject," has conferred ontological superiority (5), the metaphysical gymnastics of transforming a seal into a human equivalent and then killing it are truly staggering. Nevertheless, we do not have to claim cultural relativity (the Inuit have a different cultural understanding of human-animal interaction, one that is not accessible to a Western audience) to begin to figure out what is at stake in the encounter between Inuk hunter and seal. By focusing on the interstices of accepted Western relationships between human and animal, Vinciane Despret offers an analysis of interaction that focuses on the "availability" of one to an Other. In her formulation, the animal is "available to some more subtle expectations, the expectations of someone who cares, of someone who trusts, moreover, of someone who was interested, someone it interests (*inter-esse*, to make a link)" (124). To be interested, to be of interest, is to forge a link between two entities.

Tim Agartak explains the "inter-esse" between Inuit and seals: "It is told that even when seals are killed, they do not forget their consciousness. They know the exact manner in which they are handled after they have been caught. For those who handle them carelessly, they know about those people. They would not go to them anymore" (Fienup-Riordan, *Boundaries* 51). Although Agartak's example of inter-esse describes a relationship of care that is only active, and recorded by, the seal after death, the relationship between Inuk and seal (as will be explained in the following discussion of *Atanarjuat*) is forged from birth. "Tungijjuq" creatively demonstrates the linkages between Inuit and seals through the masculine practice of hunting at ice floes while Agartak describes the feminine practices of care and cultural work in the form of how the seal is treated once it is brought into the community. Through binary doubling, metaphor, and analogy, "Tungijjuq" visually displays the care that Agartak discusses, offering a mode of relating between human and animal that Wolfe finds lacking in Western philosophy.

Although in Western ontological practice, human and animal are often brought together in moments in which both parties are interested (à la Despret), in management practices, species are kept separated and in a hierarchical ordering. Huggan and Tiffin echo this species hierarchy when they write: "While the Enlightenment trajectory of humanist essentialism demanded the repression of the animal and animalistic in all its latent and recrudescant forms, it is not until our own century, in the urgent contexts of

eco-catastrophe and the extinction of many non-human species, that a radical re-drawing of this foundational relationship has occurred" (134). The "re-drawing" of the relationship is actually a re-valuation of the animal—representative of a wild nature—that places contemporary humanity as degenerate and lacking and nature as what is pure and authentic (and in need of saving). Conversely, in Kunuk's short film and in his feature film discussed next, seals are considered active partners in a reciprocal engagement that focuses not on active and passive adversaries—or wild nature vs. corrupted culture—but on linkages across difference.

Seals are boundary-crossing animals given that they are air-breathing mammals that live in the sea and on land-like floes of ice. Their ambiguous nature makes the hunt of them uncertain (in regards to outcome) and even dangerous (metaphysically). And yet, seals are closely linked to humans from the west coast of Alaska to the east coast of northern Canada. In her body of anthropological work, Fienup-Riordan looks closely at stories from the Yupiit of Western Alaska, such as "The Boy Who Went to Live with Seals," in order to show the "collaborative reciprocity" between humans and seals (*Boundaries* 50). On the other side of the Arctic, Xavier Blaisel analyzes the still popular traditional story, "The One Who Gets a Mother," which features a wandering human fetus that twice becomes a seal before his birth as a human with special knowledge of the respect necessary to be a good hunter. While these stories are ethnographically relevant to anthropologists and didactically useful for Inuit and Yup'ik elders who teach young community members about proper cultural relations, contemporary storytellers have found ways to translate the traditional stories into increasingly multi-cultural and linguistically diverse modes to which Indigenous youths can connect. The traditional stories teach behavioral manners between humans and nonhumans; contemporary retellings through new media formats do similar projects while acknowledging the pain and increasing anomie of Indigenous youths who suffer from consistent misrepresentation and marginalization.

While Kunuk and Norman Cohn are not essentializing Indigenous people as "other" to the white Western subject in *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*, they know perfectly well the long discursive history of doing just that in art, literature, and film. Arnold Krupat, a postcolonial critic, in his analysis of the *Atanarjuat's* tension between the "epic" and the "ethnographic" states: "I must admit that I got very little out of [*Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*] when I saw it for the first time in a movie theater in New York" (622).⁸ Beyond the "universal" themes of "love, adultery, revenge, murder" (Krupat 617-618), the film consistently refuses to appease, allay, or confirm a suspicious humanist subject like Krupat by explaining what being Inuit means. One scene in particular involving the aftermath of a seal hunt illustrates the nexus of humanist

⁸ Krupat's analysis does move beyond these simplistic categories in order to situate the film in a wider field of relevance as an artistic and political statement. However, I find his insistence on "locating" the film historically and in reference to published material on the myth that subtends the storyline to reproduce the ethnographic standards by which Inuit artistic production is made available for Euro-American consumption. In other words, the critical idiom of his analysis is too heavily indebted to the production of difference he attempts to deconstruct.

subject-Inuit-animal other that brings new questions of interest and availability to the discussion.

Kunuk and Cohn's film explores the potentiality of birth and death in the chapter "The Family Way." In this scene, the eponymous hero, the "fast runner" Atanarjuat, comes close to shore in a kayak with a seal he has caught "way out on the floating ice." As he rows closer to shore, the scene cuts to his wife, Atuat, waiting on shore, and a short pan reveals she is heavily pregnant. While the seal and kayak wait just off screen, a tender moment passes between the two as Atanarjuat kneels down to listen to the fetus kick in Atuat's belly. Atanarjuat's brother and sister-in-law then come down to the beach to help butcher the seal and the next scene is of the ringed seal cut open on the beach and water being put on to boil.

Critics have focused on this film (and the scene between Atanarjuat and Atuat in particular) as "counterethnography" to the staged and "slapstick" nature of Robert Flaherty's "ethnographic" film, *Nanook of the North* (McCall 29-30). Additionally, it has been cast as "practical social power through oral narrative practice," meaning the film's plot originates in stories that are already in circulation in Inuit communities and it is completely in Inuktitut with English subtitles, thereby privileging speakers of Inuktitut who continue to be denied any authority of language or culture (Krupat 607). I read this scene both in the above terms and as having resonances beyond Western postcolonial criticism evident in these analyses. In a sense, Sophie McCall and Krupat are both correct, the kayak scene both re-stages the infamous scene of Flaherty's "documentary" when a whole family of Inuit appears from the inside of a kayak like Russian dolls, and it also "moves the center" by refusing to translate all of the Inuktitut (including cultural norms) into English (Krupat 623). Nevertheless, this scene is not just about "creat[ing] sympathy for the characters [while] further individualiz[ing] them" (McCall 30). I argue that this scene is not about the individual at all. It is not by accident that the successful aftermath of a seal hunt is shown directly before the revelation of Atuat's pregnancy and that the seal is displayed so prominently cut open on the beach with the camp circled around it. The scene is not about making individuals of the characters so that a Western audience will feel more empathy for them. Rather, the scene stages key components to the social make-up and the persistence of cultural continuity for Inuit.

Kunuk stages Inuit and seal relationships in the coinciding events of Atuat's pregnancy and the harpooning of a ringed seal by the edge of the ice. While both events make narrative sense within the world built by the plot, neither of them on their own incites the characters in such a way as to propel the story forward. Instead, the cultural import of this episode goes untranslated given the politics of a "partial translation" that encourages differential viewing experiences between Western and Inuit audiences (McCall 27). Western viewers are given a glimpse of representations of Inuit cultural norms that confirm the individual empathetic nature of the characters even as they are being instructed in how to re-value these norms from an Inuit perspective. Inuit audiences, on the other hand, view a re-valuation of their cultural norms in a context of international and Hollywood artistic standards as they watch the re-translation of familiar cultural norms into film media (McCall 9). How we read the body of the seal

lying between Atanarjuat and Atuat and in the midst of their family unit has repercussions for how Western readers and viewers understand the position of seals and Inuit in the worlds of figural representation and international politics. Privileging only the story of killing and eating seals, even if it is a story meant to empower Inuit, still limits the conceptual framework for how both seals and humans can exist in the world together.

An audience conditioned to view Indigenous people as environmentally naturalized (that is, located in natural, non-built up settings) from films ranging from *Nanook of the North* to *Dances With Wolves* often overlook the technologies at work in *Atanarjuat*. Of course, there are the cameras, lighting, make-up and clothing artists, the writers, editors, translators, and other overt technologies that go into making a film. Alongside these technical aspects, there are also cultural technologies (practices that function as tools for survival) on display that are much harder to recognize and read. In Kunuk's film, these include family structures and displays of kinship (such as the intergenerational relationships between brothers, fathers, sons, and namesakes); seal and caribou hunting (turns in the plot often center around the ambiguous activity of hunting other live souls); cycles of birth and death that connect the human and nonhuman characters; and the storytelling practices evident in the songs (and even in the medium of film itself) that tie these practices together.

Kunuk goes even further to remind his viewers that *Atanarjuat* is a contemporary film about Inuit in the modern world, even though it stages a traditional story and the sets and costumes appear to be pre-contact. During the rolling of the final credits, several of the actors are shown in their modern clothes, some have headphones on, and the modern film equipment is conspicuously present. Kunuk deliberately chooses Inuit artists and historians to make authentic sets and costumes that promote Inuit skin-sewing techniques and animal harvesting in order to bridge traditional skills with a modern means of teaching Inuit and non-Inuit about the specifics of Inuit relationships to their environment, culture, and history. The origin of the film is a retelling of a traditional story from Igloodik that was first written down by Knud Rasmussen when he passed through the community in the 1920s and spent many days discussing oral tales and beliefs with the influential Inuit shaman, Avva (sometimes written as Awa). Kunuk uses Rasmussen's ethnographic collections as source material along with versions of the tale that are still told in the community.⁹ He keeps the narrative in a past, almost mythic time, and yet there are still hints to the transitions and upheavals that will preoccupy Inuit in years to come (McCall 20).

MacLean, however, sets *On the Ice* squarely within the contemporary reality of Barrow, an Inupiat town on the most northern tip of Alaska. The music of the film's characters is hip-hop, the art is graffiti, the language is mostly English, and the religion is Christianity. The film is a complex meditation on a social system that persists even as it transforms under pressure; a community and a culture that resists being subsumed and erased by cultural depictions that call them inauthentic or degraded or spiritually and

⁹ His use of Knud Rasmussen's ethnographic collections is more overt in his 2006 film *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. For further discussion, see Katarina Soukup's "Travelling Through Layers."

culturally less than they used to be in some imagined past. Beyond popular traditional stories still in circulation in northern and western Alaska, this recent film utilizes the ambiguous parallel between killing your closest relative (the seal) and killing your closest human relative. As previously discussed, Kunuk's *Atanarjuat* showcases a successful seal hunt alongside a welcomed pregnancy, but it also mirrors this event with a failed seal hunt at the *aglu* (or seal breathing hole) that ends in the death of the group's leader by the hand of his son. Similarly, in *On the Ice*, it is the activity of going on a seal hunt that sets the stage for the conflict on and off the ice.

Unlike *Atanarjuat*, who comes to his pregnant wife after having killed a seal, the teenage boys Qalli and Aivaaq, of *On the Ice*, return to their community having failed to catch a seal, but having managed to kill their friend, James. The failure of the hunt out on the ice is more than a stage for the death of James; it reveals an unraveling of environmental and cultural connections for the present generation of Inupiat men. Qalli's father, a renowned hunter, figures out the truth of the events that unfolded on the ice through his knowledge of seal behavior, weather patterns, and ice conditions. The boys live in a post-colonized present filled with alcoholism, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, and suicide. Although it seems fragile in comparison, to counter this legacy of violence, the community maintains ties to their environment (displayed in the intimate knowledge of Qalli's father and the other older hunters), the animals they depend on for food security (a scene of Qalli's family eating caribou), and each other (every greeting includes an asking after other relatives). The lack of a seal in the film is a profound absence that brings our attention to what is present in its place, a "culture in shock" ("Canadian Inuit").

Inuit cultural activist Aaju Peter points out that "As climate change happens, the culture is changing because of imposed customs... [and the] transition period... has become very stressful. You have to be 100 percent good in Inuit culture, and you have to be 100 percent good in Western-imposed culture, and finding your way as a young person is hard enough to start with" ("Canadian Inuit"). MacLean does not offer an easy solution for navigating the shifting terrain of Inupiaq culture. Instead, he portrays aspects of the loss of cultural identity and pride in Inupiat youths and he seems to indicate that the loss is not just about structures of representation or having a voice to determine one's position within culture and history. Rather, it is also about the separation of a culture from the landscape and animals that make living both possible and meaningful.

The film interrogates the Western myth of the individual, or the myth of the freedom of choice, that is the basis of most Western legal, social, and economic systems. While each character is developed as a fully functioning and desiring human being with personal motivations, the connecting thread of the film is that there is no freedom to choose just for or as oneself. Each character has a history that connects him to the past and the past actions of other people. Each character lives in a world marked by his or her proximity to the other people in the community. Phrases like "it's expected we go," "I left the party to visit aaka [grandmother]," and "he considered you a brother," reference the connectivity of the community through the tissues of relationships. None of the

choices the characters make in the film are made in a vacuum; the tragedy is that the social glue which should aid the functioning of the community through adversity reveals a dark side when violence in the form of drugs and alcohol enters from outside and intervenes in social relations. It is not just the worst of Western material culture that disrupts social functioning, it is also the influence of Western cultural values around the protection of animal bodies that doubly others Indigenous youths—not only are animals no longer a part of social consideration, their lives now hold more value than Inupiat lives.¹⁰

In the stories of "Tungijjuq," *Atanarjuat*, and *On the Ice*, human and seal ontologies are set up as equivalent, if also dynamically different. Fienup-Riordan explains in the context of the Yupiit of Western Alaska, a people culturally and linguistically related to the Inupiat and Inuit:

[Yupiit] extended personhood beyond the human domain and applied it as an attribute of animals as well. They did not view themselves as dependent on or subordinate to animals. In contrast, they viewed the relationship between humans and animals as collaborative reciprocity by which the animals gave themselves to the hunter in response to the hunter's respectful treatment of them as nonhuman persons. (*Boundaries* 50)

The status of seal and human ontology, a thematic concern of each film, has direct bearing on the current ecological, political, and social controversy that surrounds the ban on the importation of sealskin products into Europe and the United States. The original language of the 1983 European Economic Union Ban on sealskin products places heavy emphasis not on humans and seals as equivalent beings, but on the rather nonspecific "balance of nature" and "traditional" way of life as it is "traditionally" practiced by Inuit.¹¹ The issue at stake in the original directives becomes clearer the further one reads. It is not the balance of nature or how Inuit conduct their lives; it is the protection of the innocent and vulnerable seal pup, whose endearing gaze was immortalized by Watson and Hunter.

The recent updates to the ban have become more market oriented in the intervening years, regulating which communities can hunt seals for the market, how they can access a sealskin market, and what constitutes a saleable sealskin (it must be partially processed in the community according, again, to "traditional practices"). Like Watson and Hunter's original #sealfie, the seal remains an object within the discourse of protection and relations between human and nonhuman such as found in the Yupiit

¹⁰ Gaard reflects on this impasse between white environmentalists and Indigenous groups around animal advocacy in the case of the Makah Tribe of the Pacific Northwest and their decision to begin hunting whales again. Advocates for whale hunting view animal welfare activists as attacking legally protected Makah cultural rights while environmentalists see the hunt as an infringement on the rights of the whale, which supersedes the Makah's right to hunt given they have other food sources. She writes: "Yet both of these ethical perspectives take a dualistic approach to framing the ethical question: one must choose either the whale or the Makah in the first narrative; one must choose either the Makah or the white environmentalists in second. But ecofeminism's critique of dualistic thought and 'truncated narratives' suggests that rather than seeing these different perspectives as competing, a more holistic approach would be inclusive of all these layers of relationships, examining the interrelationship between the ethical context and the ethical contents" (9).

¹¹ "Seal Ban Directives"

worldview, where "The difference between [animals and humans] is...an 'activity rather than a state'," go unseen and unheard (Fienup-Riordan, *Boundaries* 49).

Gaard reminds us of the importance of the multilayered contexts of contemporary Indigenous life crosscut with political, social, and environmental insecurity. Instead of promoting animal welfare over Inuit cultural identity or the rights of Inuit self-representation over the well being of seals, both of which are false dichotomies, Gaard suggests something else altogether:

The strategy of distinguishing between the different relationships inherent in the contexts and contents of ethical considerations will also aid antiracist feminists in addressing ethical problems. Without this strategy, it is too easy to set up false dualisms [Inuit vs. seals] and to forget the various layers of ethical relationships, historical and environmental contexts, and the ways that these variables are constantly in flux. (22)

Gaard suggests the need for "border-crossers" who are able to "move freely between the dominant cultural context of the non-native environmentalists/animal rights activists and the marginalized cultural context of the [Inuit], translating the ethical voices and beliefs of each so that they can be heard by the other" (19). The need for such dialogue is apparent given the precarious state of the Arctic in terms of melting ice and environmental toxins harming both humans and animals; environmental justice for Inuit and seals depends on relationships formed inside and outside northern cultures. Using new storytelling forms such as film and social media to reach audiences outside of the Arctic while connecting Indigenous youths with their heritage offers possibilities for cross-cultural interactions around the difficult and complex topic of seal hunting. Arnaquq-Baril knows that Inuit culture is neither static nor isolated, although she "expects the solutions to her community's problems to come from within" ("Canadian Inuit"). Furthermore, Arnaquq-Baril states: "Inuit haven't survived for thousands of years in the Arctic by not being able to adapt" ("Canadian Inuit"). If the mechanisms for storytelling can adapt across genre and media, can we also not change our perspective and see that the boundaries between human and animal are "dynamic and transitional, and passages between worlds are, for better or worse, always a potentiality" (Fienup-Riordan, *Boundaries* 49)?

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The Unreliability of Place Construction in Contemporary Alaskan Regional Writing

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Abstract



Alaska's geographic isolation results in the fact that most people experience the Far North only second-hand, commonly from the narratives of visitors. Those representations, overshadowed by myth, define Alaska as a region and reflect on the literary imagination of the 49th state. This paper analyses the reader's image of Alaska and its inhabitants by tracing how regional narratives are perceived by scholars and reviewers, paying attention to the historically different transatlantic perceptions of indigenous peoples and Arctic nature. It becomes clear that Alaska as a setting, as described by its inhabitants, relies on imposed qualities that depend on the self-perception of the outside observer and not on the narration. The contested narrations of Velma Wallis and Sheila Nickerson help to position Alaska as a stage for the struggle over the spatial meaning carried out between outsiders. Conscious of this power struggle and its importance, these contemporary regional authors engage in the discourse over Alaska's representation by narrating its unreliability. These authors produce texts that invite different readings to foster a cultural discourse about the meaning of the Alaskan place within the national identity and policies.

Keywords: Alaska, place and space theory, geographical imagination.

Resumen

El aislamiento geográfico de Alaska se debe al hecho de que la mayoría de las personas experimentan el extremo Norte sólo de segunda mano, normalmente a partir de los relatos de visitantes. Esta representación, eclipsada por una larga tradición de mitos, define a Alaska como región y se refleja en la imaginación literaria del estado 49^º. Este artículo analiza el paradigma del lector de Alaska y de sus habitantes a través del estudio de cómo los estudiosos y críticos no-académicos perciben las narrativas acerca de dicha región, prestando atención a las percepciones transatlánticas históricamente diferentes de los pueblos indígenas y la naturaleza ártica. Es evidente que Alaska, como lugar descrito por sus habitantes, se basa en cualidades impuestas que dependen de la auto-percepción del lector foráneo y no en la narración. Los escritos de Velma Wallis and Sheila Nickerson colaboran en posicionar a Alaska como un escenario para la lucha sobre el significado espacial producido por los observadores foráneos. Conscientes de esta lucha por el poder y su importancia, estas autores regionales contemporáneas participan en este discurso narrando la falta de fiabilidad de la memoria, el lenguaje y la representación. En lugar de escribir en contra de la imaginación espacial, producen textos que sugieren lecturas que fomentan un discurso cultural acerca del significado de Alaska.

Palabras clave: Alaska, teoría del espacio y lugar, imaginación geográfica.

Alaska's geographical imagination owes significantly more to associations than to its physical reality. This is due to its geographical isolation, which is often neglected within the American collective identity and memory (Kollin, *Imagining Alaska* 6–8). Power relations dictate that the Alaskan landscape is defined by those who visit the 49th state and not the people who inhabit it (David 6–7; Riffenburgh 11; McGhee 10). The result is an imposed understanding of Alaska which is reflected in the framing of regional literature by reviewers. This paper situates the unreliability of Alaskan landscape representation by observing how regional authors narrate human interaction with the Alaskan place and how outside reviewers reflect on this relationship. The essay argues that the contemporary Alaskan authors Velma Wallis (1993) and Sheila Nickerson (1996) engage in the discourse of image-making by emphasising the unreliability of place perception and representation. The locally produced texts seek a variety of different interpretations to foster a cultural exchange about the meaning of the Alaskan place: Wallis initiates a cross-cultural conversation about place representations whilst Nickerson traces failed survival attempts as coordinates outlining a map of Alaska which invites the reader to interpret the landscape as well as history. By emphasising the unreliability of interpretation, both writers urge their readers to form a view of the Alaskan place which is aware of the employed meta-perspective that constructs Alaska as Other.

The discursive construction of Alaska is the result of a desire to posit the Far North outside American cultural demarcations. Edward Said (1995) explains that by creating arbitrary geographical distinctions like “designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ours and an unfamiliar space beyond” derives identity from those boundaries; consequently the outside becomes associated with fictionalised qualities (54). The constructed distinction between insiders and outsiders is similar to the suggestion that place-attachment can be understood as concentric circles; with the familiar as a centre, the further away, the more exotic the surrounding will appear (Chawla 66). Indeed, Stephen Haycox (2001) comments on the image which outsiders have when visiting: “most Americans regard Alaska an exotic venue [...] not unlike [...] a curiosity” (146). Consequently, this collective understanding of the landscape reflects on the Alaskan self-image but also on the reader’s imagination.

The most prominent features attributed to Alaskans by outsiders are that they “cling to the conviction that the North is different” (Haycox 141). However, the first impression is that most Alaskans live in an urban setting and have access to infrastructure, education, medical facilities, entertainment and most other comforts similar to people in the lower 48 states. At first glance, the life of most Alaskans does not differ significantly from that of any other American town. However, the exaggerated tales about life in the North, mostly written by visitors, establish a discourse of frontier and civilisation, and margin and centre, which brings those dichotomies together and provides a stage on which to re-imagine the American nation. Hence, the purpose of Alaskan regional writing is, in this context, the urge to locate a naturalised version of the American nation (Kaplan 253). At the same time the framing of literature by Alaskan authors highlights environmental anxieties through the foregrounding of natural

plenitude, which may well be interpreted as frontier nostalgia by the reader. For the outside observer, frontier nostalgia reflects a space which can be economically developed—just like the American frontier. But for Alaskans it is a way to reconnect with the lower 48 states by reconnecting with its history.

This discourse over their identity defines Alaskans, who like to see themselves as rough individualists, as the archetypical American Adam on the Last Frontier. However, instead of demonstrating frontier independence, Alaskan resources are exploited by outsiders similar to a colony (Haycox 156). But the construction of Alaska's characteristics as Last Frontier fosters an image of the landscape which Anne McClintock (1995) terms anachronistic space—a space out of touch with time (41). Indeed, the perceived landscape had seemingly not changed, even for some visitors who directly experienced it. In 1879, an American expedition, led by John Muir (1988 [1915]), found “untouched” and “unnamed wilderness” (103). The Gold Rush undoubtedly shaped the physical space, as did the search for copper and oil, but left the image of Alaska untouched. The writings of Jack London and Rex Beach imagined Alaska as an anachronistic space which functioned as frontier adventure setting. In 1992 Chris McCandless noted in his diary that it was an “uncharted country [...] a blank spot on the map” (Krakauer 173). Thus, the imagined qualities of Alaska as anachronistic space infiltrate the public imagination in a way which geographies never could. These images reflect on contemporary Alaska—and also on its regional writings—and create a place which might appear out of touch with time and the world.

David Harvey (1996) realises the concept of place as an unreliable point of reference. Intrigued by the concept of a gated community he observes the need to secure place as *inside* and against “uncontrolled vectors of spatiality” by creating an *outside* (292). Harvey argues that spatial rootedness and local identity are requirements to face our contemporary and globalised world context. Understanding the Alaskan place perception as a process which shapes social interactions provides not only regional place identity to local readers but also identity to outside readers. Thus, regional placeness is achieved by exclusive or inclusive subjective acts of perception. Equivalent to real locations, this process is employed to create imaginary places in literature. The communicated *sense of place*, that is, the impression that the reader knows what a certain place is like, evokes and fosters associations (Cresswell 8). Because Alaska as real world-place and as place in the literature exist simultaneously, the unavoidable clash of the perceived places determine the relationship between locals and the outside world. The author Wallis, for instance, clearly claims her stake and shows that there was no empty space: conscious of the Euro-American vision of Alaska, she explains that “[t]his story [...] is from a time long before the arrival of the Western culture” (xiii).

A Cultural Conversation about the People's Land

Wallis's *Two Old Women. An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival* is based on a Gwich'in oral legend of two elderly women abandoned by their tribe during a winter famine. The two women miraculously survive as they attempt “to die trying,”

manage to gather enough food for the next winter, and rejoin their still desperately hungry group (16). By sharing their supplies, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak help the group gather new strength to outlast the winter. Wallis's narration promotes a view of the world based on her indigenous upbringing whilst incorporating contemporary Euro-American elements to define the Alaskan place. However, as I argue, the latter elements are ignored in the narration's responses. Instead, the reader's remarks on the framing of the book and its contents paint the author and place as exotic and lacking connection to the contemporary world. As described earlier, humans understand the world as concentric circles around home, and with each step away from the familiar spot, the world seems increasingly different and therefore unfamiliar habits can be understood by explaining the outside world through one's own terms, creating a fantastic blend of the imagined and the observed.¹

The image of the indigenous people relies mostly on snap-shots of encounters recorded through the eyes of Euro-Americans, whose cultural paradigms define the recollections. When discussing indigenous literature, history, and culture, the focus used in the reader's interpretation is usually based on his or her already constructed cultural filters and depends on what appears important to him or her. Unfortunately, no analysis can rid itself from its own cultural lens; and it is only recently that indigenous people have started to share their history with Euro-Americans. Wallis is the first Alaskan Gwich'in to engage in a conversation with the outside world about her traditions, having written several critical essays and three books. The Gwich'in are a traditionally nomadic group who speak the Athabascan dialect. There are very few insights into Gwich'in culture, as they consider it taboo to share their customs with outsiders (Childers and Kancewick 8). *Two Old Women* is Wallis's first book and, somewhat astonishingly, is highly critical of her people, thus showing that the author is eager to engage in self-reflective discourse about her people's perspective of the contemporary world and their history. The critical voice shows the tribe not as victims in the frontier process but as confident people with a strong connection to the land which is now endangered by resource extraction.

As observed by Joy Porter (2005), indigenous writers tend to "bemoan [the] scholarly resistance to Native perspectives both in literature and criticism" (184). She states that this accounts for situations in which indigenous material was cut from publications, as it did not match the Euro-American merit and was categorised as "fish tales that grow with telling" (184). Wallis reaches out and approaches our cultural framework, as she engages in our language and place names whilst making concepts understandable. If we look closely, her narrative is a portrait of her culture and, at the same time, a cultural conversation which bridges the different knowledge-frames between Alaskans and outsiders. The fact that Wallis herself prepared and polished the story is a unique opportunity to study what she wants her reader to know about the Gwich'in and Alaska. In traditional cultures which depend on the migration of animals, information is often conveyed through stories. These stories are more than just

¹ I rely in parts on theories of oral history from contiguous America, and refer to writings about the indigenous peoples in North Canada, who share a similar knowledge-frame as Alaskans.

entertainment; they provide a sense of identity by placing the listener within a tradition that transports a knowledge system structured by interaction and dialogue (Ruppert, "Survivance"). Hence, the narration communicates and discusses tradition whilst adjusting it to the contemporary situation.

In her story Wallis chooses to refer to Euro-American place names as well as Gwich'in names. The provided maps are hand drawn, out of scale, with little caribou symbols and images of hunters scattered all over them. Interestingly, one map has a compass needle which marks out North. This is pointless in Alaska but useful for the outside reader. The conventional geographic markings make no sense in the Far North, as the Earth's magnetic field prevents a compass from showing the North accurately. Thus, the map is a hybrid and combines cultural elements; it accurately shows Wallis's current knowledge which is informed by both paradigms. For instance, on one map there is a small black cross between a lake group and a river; the cross might denote either Wallis's birthplace, Fort Yukon, or the place where her mother introduced her to the story. Either way, she imprinted something about herself onto this map, as she is part of this story just like the reader, for whom she marked North and the Arctic Circle.

Ruppert (2005) evaluates the works of Wallis as invaluable for the teaching of American literature, as her books deconstruct the boundaries between genres in the Euro-American sense. Wallis contributes to oral traditions, aiding the evolution of traditional indigenous cultural values. By recording oral history in writing, the stories themselves are altered to survive. But, the question must be asked, how does the meaning change for the Euro-American reader who is unfamiliar with the place described? One imagines the Gwich'in group gathering around a fire in the dim winter lights and listening to ancient stories. What happens to the information when a reader is curled up on the couch, sheltered from the elements and reading the same story? As the tale is removed from its context, it appears to create a window into indigenous culture framed by the cultural values of the Euro-American reader. In the original context, the people had the option to ask questions, as oral story telling is a dialogue. This process allows the indigenous culture to adjust to the timely situation and the interaction between listener and storyteller creates a self-understanding of both. Wallis remembers being intrigued by the story "because it was a story about [her] people and [her] past—something about [her] that [she] could grasp and call [hers]" (xii).

When reading the published story, readers gain access to this process, and the story becomes identity-forming for the readers whilst also establishing boundaries of self and the Other. Similar to Harvey's observers of the gated community or Said's outsiders, the reader is bound to the limited information on the pages and his or her cultural knowledge to create a mental picture of the communicated story and landscape. This transformation is an important factor in transcultural conversation. As Wallis provides a lot of additional information in her book, she answers the assumed questions of the reader. The maps tell of the location, whilst the drawings show what the protagonists looked like, what they wore, and how their shelter was built, and the book has additional information at the front and back regarding the Gwich'in and the Athabascans. This information details their territory and lifestyle, and it provides

explanations of social practices, contemporary life, photos of the author and her family, her biography, and the biography of the artist who illustrated the book. Wallis anticipates questions by the reader similar to the dialogue in the oral tradition when she provides guides and answers to the questions the reader might have. The book includes a table of contents which points out maps and details; she offers information on a golden plate; something very similar to a textbook. Assigning the story of the *Two Old Women* to common categories such as *novel* and *fiction* would fictionalise the information given in the book and deny its value as a usable past for the Gwich'in. The ongoing discourse about the fictional character of indigenous narrations suggests that written oral stories only fictionalise by bridging text and interpretation. Instead, a narration could be considered as an ethnographic collection (Ruppert, "Why We Should Teach"). In an interview with her publisher HarperCollins, Wallis explains that telling stories in written form is "a new way of getting stories out to the younger generations." By adjusting the story and the way it is told it becomes part of contemporary American culture and, thus, more than history or ancient myth. Wallis is well aware that she is able to negotiate between cultures. Understanding Wallis only in the context of an excluded static indigenous culture would imply that she should not be allowed to be part of this time, and it would enforce the reading of her as Other.

The dangers of ignoring the conversation between indigenous and Euro-American cultures sparked by the book is highlighted by underlying interpretations of reviewers and scholars, which frame the book. These readings appear anticipated by the author, when paying attention to the skilful framing of the book by the editor. The reviews illustrate how this reading leads to the misinterpretation not only of the narration but also Alaska and its population. A "responsible feminist-tribal reading" is offered by Genie Babb (1997), who argues that the use of the English language and a classic Aristotelian narrative structure consisting of conflict, crisis, and resolution transforms the story into a European tale with indigenous protagonists (306). Babb's reading illustrates the parallels of the plot and the debate surrounding the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The Gwich'in rely on the migration of the porcupine caribous who calve in ANWR, which is threatened by oil exploitation. In Babb's reading, Wallis's narration reassures the tribe that they should continue trying to resist the imposed power that threatens their subsistent life. This victimisation appears simplistic when considering that some Gwich'in representatives are in favour of drilling, as they are shareholders of the oil industry thanks to the Native Claims Settlement Act. In contrast, Babb's understanding supports a story line in which those who depend on the land will not harm it.

Since its publication, the book has sold nearly two million copies and has been translated into 17 languages. It has been reviewed by many mainstream American newspapers; the reviews are well-meaning and enthusiastic, but they make sense of the book in their own terms, mostly by emphasising the individual human experience and its apparent universal moral. In addition, the reviews emphasise the Otherness of the story, mostly in terms of its location. The blend of universality and Otherness conceals the power relation in the interaction between Alaska and the lower 48 states to make

the story accessible. For instance, the review by author Ursula Le Guin, quoted on the cover, emphasises that “this story seems to come from a place and people utterly different from modern America.” The review focuses on the “utterly different” Other that communicates universal wisdom which, despite its Otherness, is accessible. Most reviews follow this pattern and fail to look at the cultural roots of the book. Instead of mentioning the indigenous nature of the book, the reviewers place it in a canon of fictional representations of Alaska, sublime nature, and individualism. John Murray’s review (1993) talks of a “Jack-London-like tale” where the protagonists “triumph over adversity.” The reviewer Margaret Saraco (1994) admits that the story caters to her longing for “rugged country and gentle souls,” which she knows from her “weekly doses of TV’s Northern Exposure” (66). Flo Whyard’s (1994) review calls it a “real breakthrough” for American literature (135). For the Canadian writer, it is important to let the reader know that this book was “written, edited, illustrated and published by Alaskans” to install regional pride (135). The review illuminates the struggles of the publication more than the contents of the narration.

According to these reviews, the book’s appeal stems from the fulfilment of the romantic perception of the Alaskan landscape and the fight for survival in an unforgiving environment. Thus, the narration appears to satisfy Euro-American expectations of a conflict-centred plot and a universal moral. It is unsurprising that Gwich’in organisations are critical of Wallis’s publications and have tried to prevent them (Wallis 143). The afterword in the *Two Old Women* tells the reader about the struggles author and editor had to face. Both earned harsh criticism and were told “[they] would make Athabascan people look bad” (143). As a result, Wallis became “decidedly unpopular” (143). Readers also learn that the editor and University of Alaska Fairbanks instructor Lael Morgan started raising money for the book together with her students (144). This unexpected information in the afterword frames the author as innocent but also rebellious: In the introduction, Wallis confesses to be still enjoying her mother’s bedtime stories as a grown woman. The reader learns that Wallis did not know where to use commas, so that she left them out completely, and that she fell in love for the first time whilst working on the book (144–145). The mental image of Wallis “with a pepper shaker full of commas” patronises her (145). This discourse helped to construct circumstances to ease the reader’s imagination of the naïve but well-meaning women with little literary skills, who only with the help of Euro-American money was able to convey her story. It turns out that the book was supposed to be financed through student funding only, although Epicenter Press was eventually able to raise enough money. Indeed, not only do the introduction and the afterword create the image of the child-like naïve women, but the design of the book itself also aids the illusion. The page design of the Epicenter Press edition consists of very large writing, sizeably spaced with few lines on a page and an abundance of illustrations printed on thick paper. The outline underlines the framing of the author as innocent and naïve.

In contrast, the book’s content focuses on strength and on the fact that its author had been “taught from childhood that weakness was not tolerated among the inhabitants of this harsh motherland” (4). A close reading reveals that it was not tribal

politics which demanded the abandonment of the women, but rather the land. The day the decision was made to leave the two old women behind, the chief justified the decision as “the starkness of the primitive land [...] demand[ed] it” (5). The tribe was “forced to imitate some of the ways of the animals [...] Like the younger, more able wolves who shun the old leader of the pack, these people would leave the old behind so that they could move faster without the extra burden” (5). Every time the women remember the people, the wolf-people metaphor guides their memory. Animalistic features appear to suggest cruelty to a Euro-American reader but clearly underline the connection to the land. The women fear other groups and their own people who might “do desperate things to survive”; for example, they hide whilst on the move and disguise their tracks (34). Wallis reveals an understanding of humans as part of nature, exposing them as a threat similar to animals or the cold. Survival is not possible by conquering nature, but is instead achieved by respecting it. For instance, the two women interact with the land, as is illustrated by an agreement with a stalking bear. They start leaving food for it and are not harmed in return (82). Instead of the victory over isolation and the ethics of frontier individualism, the circumstances of living off the land become apparent. Detailed descriptions on the making of snowshoes, the interpretation of weather phenomena, the use of snares, or the transportation of coals in hardened moose skin sacks are included. What might have once been Gwich’in traditional trades becomes a demonstration of knowledge and entertainment for the reader.

When the two women finally reached the camp spot where they planned on spending the long winter, they were overwhelmed by the feeling of coming home (52). Inspired by the Christian notion of paradise, it is a classic American western belief that nature offers human nature self-connectedness. However, no romantic notion of nature is found: “all depended on the land, and if its rules were not obeyed, quick and unjudgemental death could fall upon the careless and unworthy” (43). What reminds the Gwich’in of survival and their connectivity to nature invites the Euro-American reader to see nature as a place to prove oneself. When the women discuss their fear of death, they emphasise the physical pain they had to endure while their mental horror is played down. In a similar fashion the narration fosters an emotional reader response rather than describing emotions in the text. Wallis’s narrative strategy makes the women appear brave, and together with the author, they turn into heroic, empowered feminine figures—but only for Euro-American readers. In the interview with her publisher HarperCollins, Wallis explains that the Gwich’in language knows no gender and that she never attempted to empower women in her story. She explains that gender is not important to her people, as long as one proves oneself skilled for a task and follows traditions—a world view which appears controversial in the gendered Euro-American understanding.

Wallis’s book addresses the tradition of senicide as a central issue. Although assisted suicide rates amongst the elderly indigenous peoples in Alaska are high, there are very few studies on this controversial topic. The only paper on this topic, Alexander Leighton’s *Notes on Eskimo Patterns of Suicide*, dates back to 1955. Leighton underlines the cultural value of suicide. His study concludes that senicide and suicide are mostly

non-ritualised, motivated by the feeling by the elderly of being no longer useful, and commonly carried out by their dutiful children (328–329). Leighton tries hard to communicate the functional aspect and the economic and social motivations behind the killing of the elderly to the Euro-American reader. According to Leighton, the task of “ridding the society of unhappy people” as well as the ‘entertainment factor’ of senicide, apparently similar to European public executions during the Middle Ages, signify a functioning society and are of bonding quality (337–338). Whilst there is no recollection of this practice in recent studies, one is bound to think that senicide is a myth, but interestingly enough, it is the topic addressed by Wallis. All reviews manage to avoid talking about this major event of the book. Another example of the denial of senicide can be found in the archives of the online open source encyclopaedia Wikipedia, where the authors of an article on Inuit culture have a heated discussion about whether senicide should be mentioned. In 2008 one unnamed author suggests including the practice, as *Two Old Women* addresses the issue. Another author writes, it “is a parable, it is not a history” and another writes, “it is fiction.” Ruppert, who participated in the discussion, refers to the book as a “primary document” which therefore proves senicide as a cultural practice. However, his assumption is said to “denigrate” indigenous culture, and as a result, the reader of the encyclopaedia article is left in the dark. Thus, for the reader of *Two Old Women* Alaska is shaped by the Otherness of the landscape as well as its inhabitants—a representation in flux where everything is possible, but nothing can be definitely pinned down.

Mapping the Landscape of the Lost

Maps are both records and symbols of the changing perceptions of the world; they express the knowledge of the cartographer as well as the perspective of the user of the map. Nickerson recognises Alaska as a uniquely mapped landscape shaped by a long tradition of unsuccessful attempts to map the North. In her memoir *Disappearance: A Map* the social construct of the Alaskan landscape is the primary marker which helps to trace the author’s own imprint onto Alaska and recovers other marks left behind. At the same time, she narrates different versions of the same place by looking at different maps. The multi-layered narration begins with her personal journey and her attempts to come to terms with her upcoming retirement, the impending move away from Alaska and the disappearance of her colleague Kent Roth. By interweaving her own path with disappearances of humans, animals, resources and cultures throughout history she establishes a connection between her own life and Alaska’s history. However, Nickerson chooses not to track the lost people, but, instead, the memories and artefacts left behind. The tracking of things and thoughts left behind relies on a subjective interpretation as these things have to be put into context to understand them. Nickerson uses these interpretations to narrate unreliable information and also to connect Alaska to the contemporary outside world.

To describe her terror about what is lost to the land and its people is an impossible task; instead of pursuing it, she warns her readers that words are unreliable

“monuments of fear” and are marked by timely emotions (118). She shows how recorded memory, such as newspapers, maps or books, is only a small part of what remains. The limitations of language and memory are central to her project; she exposes both as untrustworthy. However, they are her only means of communication. Memory and words therefore also function as her guide. “Incorrect maps led [the explorers] beyond imagination to what we might say was real” (175). This struggle over the unreliability of sources dominates *Disappearance*—and so does the dependence on the written word. The self-reflection of the limitations of the author results in a critical discourse about the reliability of documents that demonstrates the subjective nature of communicated information. As a result of Nickerson’s struggle, the novel is simultaneously marked by trust and distrust in her own narration. To counteract this unreliability, Nickerson offers a cartographic text that assigns historic events as guide points. These events are interpreted according to Nickerson’s personal reflection and invite the intended reader to connect and position him- or herself in relation the events. This gives the outsider a chance to connect to Alaska and local events while at the same time exposing place as an unreliable point of reference.

The appeal to freely interpret the narrative is further fostered by the structure of the book. Nickerson’s text conjoins and interweaves diary entries, anecdotes, poems and historical narrations. Each chapter is titled ‘records’ and is accompanied by latitude and longitude coordinates, similar to a logbook. Nickerson’s search for coordinates and spatial rootedness shows a need for stability and a *sense of place* that at a closer look falls apart as *simulacra*. She emphasises that the interpretation of place through maps relies on how others saw and see Alaska. To document the *sense of place* and counteract unreliable sources, she attempts to create a timely memory map in the second part of the book that might help to remember those memories lost during her last Alaskan summer. At the same time, she ties herself up amongst the lost as it is time for her retirement and to disappear from the Alaskan stage.

For Nickerson, the possible multitude of place interpretations is a burden, as she is insecure about the best way to narrate her story (23). She alarms the reader about the subjectivity of the text: narrated maps “can be made from any perspective, used for any bias, for any purpose, but they can never be totally objective” (24). In *Disappearance*, anecdotes and legends are used to illuminate a cultural map of Alaska in addition to a geographical space. This strategy reflects a deep map, named after the subtitle of William Least Heat-Moon’s *PrairieErth. A Deep Map* (1991). According to Lawrence Buell (1995), a deep map is a memoir genre that requires a cartographic reading of landscape, culture, and history (273). Combing empirical and formal knowledge as a deep map provides a bridge between the subjective place and the objective space (Roorda 257). The book describes and captures the temporary *sense of place*, “a thick layer of history, memory, association, and attachment” that helps outsiders to experience Alaska in the small window of time Nickerson describes (Ryden 38). Thus, deep mapping provides a chance to read self-reflective landscape that joins layers of images between outsiders and insiders.

To create her deep map Nickerson forces connections between herself, history and place by tracing coincidences. For instance, she remembers a friend, Wilkie Collins, who shared the name with the author of *The Moonstone*. Nickerson was left a moonstone necklace by her great-aunt, and she starts identifying with the protagonist of Collin's novel (192). These "translucent bands of names and connections" allow her to narrate her personal story as well as history (192). Those references attest to a wide general knowledge but they also assume that the reader is able to keep track at the same time. To back up her personal deep map, Nickerson includes a bibliography, definitions of terminology, long indented quotes and references to other literature that result in a well-researched text that is almost academic in its appearance but remains dominated by her poetic choice of words. The deep-map approach allows her to reflect on the Alaskan landscape without claiming to objectively define it. She describes her relationship with nature as fearful, admitting "[she] live[s] in fear of the cold" (14). Nickerson recognises nature mostly as threat; she tells of wildlife attacks and never mentions her admiration for nature. Instead she describes Alaska by employing adjectives that are commonly used to express pain; for instance, "tortured land" or the "assaulted terrain" (32; 40). This personification of landscape allows the author to communicate her anxiety about the powerful natural world and at the same time those phrases have a second meaning that implies environmental and cultural violations by outsiders. Consequently Nickerson makes it clear that the quest to find oneself in Alaska is fruitless as those voyages search "for what exists only in imagination" (175). Visitors search for a construct they created themselves:

those who come to Alaska, the land of promise, come to find that which is lost only to themselves—money, power, position, authority—or a wilderness they think will save them from the evils of a more crowded world. They come with hope, because the spaces within Alaska are very large. The horizon, often obscured by range after range of rock—or fog—has not quite been pinned down. Boundaries are vague. (44)

As Nickerson concentrates on waypoints left behind by those who were defeated by nature, rather than people who returned and could tell their story, she indicates that most knowledge depends on interpretations of recovered artefacts. She refers to Sir John Franklin's expedition and the marks and anecdotes it left on the landscape. The faith of Franklin and his 129 well-equipped men, leaving England in 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage for a trip that evidently came to an end in the Alaskan Prudhoe Bay is, to this day, uncertain (Riffenburgh 25). All indications of what happened to Franklin are based on recovered visual fragments such as, for instance, buttons or silverware (Robinson 55). The interpretation of those artefacts is shaped by the collective memory and hopes of the outside observer and illuminates the different modes of knowledge that manifest themselves in the geographical image of Alaska.

When the British explorer John Rae returned from his search for Franklin, he was the first to report the evidence of cannibalism amongst the desperate crew. Victorian England was outraged and, in shock, the British blamed the indigenous peoples for stealing from Franklin's crew and possibly killing them. The reason for the British disbelief was based on the military honours that expedition members had received.

Franklin and his men were decorated with the highest ranks in the Royal Navy and therefore were of “the highest character of British people” (Robinson 55). The British public questioned Rae’s sources, which relied on indigenous reports. The “testimony of savages, they argued, had to be weighed against the far more reliable attributes of British character” (Robinson 56). The famous response by Charles Dickens to Rae’s report champions Franklin and his men who “outweigh[...] by the weight of the whole universe the chatter of a gross handful of uncivilized people” (qtd. in Robinson 55–56). The perception of the found artefacts could not have been more different in America. The American explorer Captain Charles Francis Hall, who also participated in the search for Franklin, is remembered for his friendship with indigenous Arctic peoples (57). He was convinced that they must have aided the survivors of Franklin’s party, who would have probably preferred their new life amongst the indigenous peoples to the British existence. Both extreme scenarios seem unlikely, and countless other outcomes could be possible but as the example shows, the two different interpretations of the found artefacts are based on imagined qualities; they depend on character and morals. The ‘British interpretation’ relied on the connection between military honours and good character, whereas Hall believed in the noble qualities of the Arctic people. Obviously other qualities, such as political revivalism, the growing interest in the lives of indigenous peoples and the opportunity to overturn captivity narratives influenced the perception of Franklin’s faith. There is to this day no conclusive proof in this matter.

The second part of the book is a diary of the months before Nickerson’s retirement; it is a repetitive listing of disappearances. The many names result in confusion for the reader but allow Nickerson to demonstrate that all parts of society are affected, all ethnicities, gender and ages. She includes accounts of indigenous people who disappear and exemplifies the faith of Ada Blackjack, an Inuk who was recruited for an ill-planned colony on Wrangel Island (111). In contemporary times, Nickerson argues, indigenous peoples lost contact with the land and, therefore, their knowledge to survive. This is a direct result of a geographical imagination imposed by outsiders who had changed, for instance, place names. The comprehension of the disappearance of people and places translates into the loss of power over the own environment for the Alaskan society. When Nickerson remembers her lost colleague and the glacier where he disappeared she observes “a huge white area” on the map that is not blank after all (276). Alaska appears like an empty place—but it is a place with a long history, that is—like the people in Nickerson’s story—only covered by meta-narratives symbolised by snow and ice.

The interpretations of the book re-imagine Alaska as exotic Other and outside place that is understood through the lens of post-colonialism. For Susan Maher (2004), *Disappearance* describes “Alaska’s hybridizing contact zone” lacerated by permutations and cultural clashes (379). She argues that the image of Alaska stems from modern colonial history “dramatizing the dissonance of competing cultures and ideologies within a contact zone” (366). Consequently, Maher assesses Nickerson’s dispute with the male white colonizer as she reads the book in the canon of post-colonial literature and concentrates on Nickerson’s domestic life. Maher adopts the understanding of humans

as intruders and, for her, the natural space itself “adds to the devastation humans have brought to themselves and others” (372). Her knowledge of history is erroneous when she argues that “Europeans introduced [...] trappers [and] whalers” as those are traditional hunting methods that have been used before the Europeans set foot in North America (371). For Maher, seemingly all evil was introduced by Alaska’s visitors “aiding the colonizer’s desire,” who unarguably brought diseases and forced religious beliefs onto the indigenous peoples, and appropriated natural resources (371). Whilst for Maher *Disappearance* supports the colonial myth, Susan Kollin (2007) understands Nickerson’s writing to be the “underside of heroic adventure narrative” that questions the survival discourse within a place constructed as exotic (“Survival” 146). Kollin observes an emerging backpacker and outdoor culture in the lower 48 states that is fostered by narrations like Nickerson’s *Disappearance*. The visit to the exotic Other shows Alaska as a place of faraway adventures that has little to do with contemporary American culture.

As the book’s contents are emotionally disturbing, it is no surprise that there are only a handful of reviews. Those, however, demonstrate the forced connection of *Disappearance* to demonstrate an exotic travel destination—a reading which follows Kollin’s approach that illustrates the importance of the used cultural lens and how it influences the perception of the reading. According to Georgia Jones-Davis’s review in the *Los Angeles Times* (1996) the book was triggered as an answer to the publicity gained by Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* (1996). The critic argues that Nickerson demonstrates that “experienced bush pilots” also vanish. Critic Donna Seaman (n.d.), discusses Nickerson’s obsession with the disappearance of Euro-American explorers that, according to Seaman, motivated Nickerson to leave Alaska as long as she still could. Craig Medred (2010) discusses the book fourteen years after its publication in the regional *Alaska Dispatch*. The occasion is that his friend, Kent Roth, who triggered Nickerson’s mediation, has not been found and yet another one of his friends has just disappeared. The review grieves his friends lost in “a torturous wilderness.” He argues that Nickerson paints the picture too narrowly by focusing on specific regions and that instead “the whole friggin’ state is one big Bermuda Triangle.” He continues Nickerson’s narration and shows that *Disappearance* is neither about a post-colonial landscape nor about criticism of gendered adventures, but that instead the disappearance of people and places is a large part of Alaskan identity.

This identity relies on information that might have been the truth to the writer at the time; however, the truth is always shifting. Narrations are artefacts of the timely *sense of place* that might be outdated by the time they are read. To make sense of a story, the narration has to be backed by the imagination, which depends on the mindset of the reader. In the end, how we read the stories tells more about ourselves than about the narration. The reader reconstructs his or her vision of the landscape and focuses on the complex interplay arising from the dichotomy of repulsion and attraction between place and the protagonists. As the reviews of both books demonstrate, the Alaskan place and its inhabitants are mostly observed through a (post-)colonial lens as exotic Other, whilst both authors aim to demonstrate long-standing connections between Alaska and the

lower 48 states. By inviting the reader to become part of a cultural conversation or to add his or her own meaning to a map, Wallis and Nickerson offer a chance to establish a connection between the outside world and Alaska that might influence further discussions about the use of the place, especially with regard to recent environmental debates.

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Barry Lopez's Relational Arctic

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Abstract



Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape (1986) can be read as American nature writer Barry Lopez's attempt to evoke a more profound and ecologically sound understanding of the North American Arctic. This article investigates how *Arctic Dreams* uses insights from Jacob von Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory, in combination with what Tim Ingold describes as a particular form of animism associated with circumpolar indigenous hunter cultures, to portray the Arctic natural environment as a living and *lively* space. Doreen Massey has described such spaces as recognizing plurality and allowing encounters. By highlighting networks of relationship and trajectories both human (historical) *and* animal (evolutionary), *Arctic Dreams* recognizes human and animal cultures that not only exist *upon* and can lay claim to this land, but that in a fundamental way *is* the land. In this way the text dismisses previous conceptions of the North-American Arctic as an empty space awaiting colonization and modernization, while on a deeper level it also questions the modern nature/culture dichotomy that allows nature to be perceived as the mere substratum of culture.

Keywords: ecocriticism, Arctic, space, animals, hunting

Resumen

El libro *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986) puede considerarse un intento por parte del escritor de la naturaleza americano Barry Lopez de evocar un conocimiento más profundo y ecológicamente sensato del Ártico norteamericano. Este artículo analiza cómo *Arctic Dreams* utiliza la teoría *Umwelt* de Jacob von Uexküll, combinada con lo que Tim Ingold describe como una forma particular de animismo asociada con las culturas de los indígenas cazadores circumpolares, para retratar el entorno natural ártico como un lugar vivo y *vivaz*. Doreen Massey ha descrito dichos lugares como capaces de reconocer la pluralidad y permitir encuentros. Al destacar las redes de relaciones y de trayectorias tanto humanas (históricas) como de animales (evolucionarias), *Arctic Dreams* reconoce culturas humanas y animales que no sólo existen *sobre* y puede reclamar esta tierra, sino que también estas culturas *son* de una manera fundamental la tierra. De esta manera el texto desestima las concepciones previas del Ártico norteamericano como un espacio vacío pendiente de colonización y modernización; mientras que en un nivel más profundo también cuestiona la dicotomía moderna naturaleza/cultura que permite que la naturaleza se perciba como un mero sustrato de la cultura.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica, Ártico, espacio, animales, caza

Barry Lopez' *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* is a text that expresses its environmental concern for the wilderness of the North American

Arctic. The text itself explicitly aims to draw the reader “back to the concrete dimensions of the land” in the hope that the key to “devis[ing] an enlightened plan for human activity in the Arctic” lies in “a *more particularized understanding* of the land itself—not a more refined mathematical knowledge but a deeper understanding of its nature, as if it were, itself, another sort of *civilization* we had to reach some agreement with” (12; my emphasis). Originally published in 1986, the text’s focus of environmental concern is with the detrimental effects of human activities connected to the extraction of natural resources. However, under global warming’s current threat to the landscapes of this region, Lopez’s text has gained renewed relevance.¹ It remains provoking for the way it implicates modern Western culture’s conceptions about the natural world in general, and about the Arctic in particular, in the environmental problems now facing the region. Hoping to move beyond a depiction of wilderness as scenery that serves to deprive wild landscapes of intrinsic value by “relegate[ing them] to the categories of space and use, to the canons of taste” (Shepard 148), *Arctic Dreams* offers its readers a complex ecological vision of the Arctic wilderness.

The North American Arctic Lopez travels and depicts in *Arctic Dreams* constitutes a region of large open spaces dominated by water in liquid and solid form. Soil and vegetation is sparse, if at all present (37). “The overall impression, from the South,” writes Lopez, “would be one of movement from a very complex world to a quite simplified one”; to one in which the bare land “would seem to have run out of the stuff of life” (24–25). The very bareness of the landscape causes him to assert that “[a]nimals define much of the space one encounters in the Arctic because the land, like the sea, is expansive and there are so few people about” (162). For those with “no interest in the movement of animals,” like the early British explorers or travelers in the Arctic, the apparent lack of animals confirms the notion of the Arctic as wasteland (383). When present in their narratives, animals are generally described in terms of nuisances, threats, or as obstacles to their colonial projects. As *Arctic Dreams* makes apparent, these animal observations lack realism and are colored by irrational emotional responses and cultural preconceptions. Thus Lopez communicates to his readers that a true image of the Arctic can emerge only when a sensibility toward animals and the way they conduct their lives is coupled with an acknowledgement of the particularities (of space and time in particular) of the Arctic ecosystems. Accordingly, the text responds to Neruda’s call for literature to “take animals regularly from the shelves where we have stored them, like charms or the most intricate of watches, and to bring them to life” (*Dreams* 129). In reworking what must be understood as a distinctly modern Western cultural conception of animals, *Arctic Dreams* also alters our conception of space. I will in this article give some examples of how this is done, and how the two projects mentioned are interconnected.

In order to clarify the effect of Lopez’s animal portrayals on his representation of the North-American Arctic landscapes, I will open by introducing some theoretical reflections on modern Western conceptions of space. In *For Space*, Doreen Massey

¹ This is reflected in the recent (February 2014) publication of *Arctic Dreams* as a Vintage Classic.

argues that our present conceptions of space are hampered by a long-standing tradition of associating the spatial with representation—and “the fixation of meaning” (20). “Representation,” writes Massey, “is seen to take on aspects of spatialisation in the latter’s action of setting things down side by side; of laying them out as a discrete simultaneity. But representation is also in this argument understood as fixing things, taking the time out of them” (23). This association with spatialization has made space the antithesis of life, in the sense that space becomes that through which processes of development are arrested. What remains is space in the form of a synchrony of isolated entities whose structures of relationship may be investigated. This, Massey argues, is structuralist space, “a coherent closed system” which “tells of an order in things” (106). The main argument in *For Space* is for the re-association of the dimension of time with space. Accordingly, the structuralists are critiqued for the way they “equated their a-temporal structures with space” and “rob[bed] the objects to which they refer[red] of their inherent dynamism” (37, 38). Yet despite this, Massey does not simply dismiss the spatializations of the structuralists. Rather, she finds them useful for the way they imply that space should be understood as that which holds and enables relationships (39). And once sophisticated modern sciences—in collaboration with philosophers and ‘voices from the margins’—have reinserted time and a variety of histories into space, the disruptive qualities of the relational nature of space can surface. Precisely through the juxtaposition of “previously unconnected narratives/temporalities,” space emerges as open and always in the process of being made (Massey 39). To recognize this radical openness and dynamism involves a repositioning in relation to space: from imagining space as a (textualized) representation “at which one looks,” toward imagining it as that from “within” which one partakes of “continuous and multiple processes of emergence” (Massey 54; emphasis original).

Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*, like Massey’s *For Space*, strives toward depictions of ‘the space of the world’ that do not fall prey to the traditional constraints of representation. As already mentioned, one of the ways in which the text seeks to circumscribe these constraints is by advancing an environmental sensitivity that makes difficult the conception of an Arctic space of blank surfaces of ice and snow. When seen in light of the project of advancing a more complex and true understanding of animals, it is both peculiar and in an odd way natural that this environmental sensitivity is associated with the activity of hunting. *Arctic Dreams* presents the idea of the hunter in its first chapter on large Arctic mammals: “Banks Island *Ovibos moschatus*.” As Lopez watches the muskoxen in the Thomsen River valley from a distance, he feels stirring within himself “an older, deeper mind” that holds his “predatory eye... riveted” (43). By thus introducing its many and detailed animal portrayals, *Arctic Dreams* can be read as part of a tradition of hunting philosophy in which hunting is regarded as an activity through which a reconnection with the natural world is still possible.

Lopez's Method: A Hunter's Sensitivity to Animals and Their *Umwelten*

Thinkers who have examined the role of the hunt from different points of view have emphasized the hunter's environmental awareness. Because the world of the hunt is one of unpredictable events, the hunter's attention needs to be sensitive to all possible clues of *what* might go on *where* (Shepard 146). In the words of José Ortega y Gasset: "Articulated in that action which is a minor zoological tragedy, wind, light, temperature, ground contour, minerals, vegetation, all play a part; they are not simply there, as they are for the tourist or the botanist, but rather they *function*, they act. [...] each intervenes in the drama of the hunt" (142). The hunter perceives the environment in terms of actants² which must be read and understood, and which must determine the hunter's actions, if the hunt is to be successful. In this manner the hunter becomes involved in detailed study of the manifold elements of the environment, and takes on a state of alertness toward, and active interaction with, the environment otherwise associated with animals. In so doing, he places himself in relation to the animal. This expresses a fundamental idea associated with Western philosophies of the hunt: that hunters are no mere tourists exploring surfaces, but people aiming at full integration into the environmental present (Franklin 106; Ortega y Gasset; Shepard). Yet aiming at full integration does not guarantee actually attaining it. Lopez consciously recognizes the implications of his own position as a mere modern visitor to this land, and states that: "I am aware that I miss much of what I pass, for lack of acuity in my senses, lack of discrimination, and my general unfamiliarity" (260). Accordingly, he emphasizes that he can achieve a deeper understanding of the Arctic wilderness only *in* the land and "in the presence of well-chosen companions," such as the local Eskimo hunters (40).

In circumpolar hunter cultures, anthropologist Tim Ingold informs us, hunters are perceived as "immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical, and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world" ("Hunting" 34–35). Relying on Alfred Schutz's definition of sociality, Ingold claims that the engagement between hunter and prey in these cultures figures in the form of social relationships manifested through non-verbal communications ("Hunting" 46–47). In Schutz's definition, sociality is seen as "constituted by communicative acts in which the I turns to the others, apprehending them as persons who turn to him, and both know of this fact" (qtd. in Ingold, "Hunting" 47). The activity of hunting activates the communication between human and animal. Its success depends upon the hunter's skill in engaging with and understanding how this other (animal) person attends to the environment according to its own modes of perception and action (Ingold, "Hunting" 46).

But animal sociality is not restricted to hunter-prey relationships. Northern indigenous hunters recognize that animals form social groups, and that each animal has a communicative point of view; each is a person. As Lopez points out, "[f]or Eskimos, most relationships with animals are local and personal. The animals one encounters are

² The term *actant*, coined by Bruno Latour, is used by Jane Bennet in *Vibrant Matter* to describe agentic capacities "differentially distributed across a wider range of ontological types," including non-living as well as living 'agents' (9).

part of one's community, and one has obligations to them" (201). In contrast to modern Western culture(s), in which persons are understood as autonomous subjects defined by their inner qualities, northern hunter cultures regard persons to be *relational* entities defined by their positions within a relational field (Ingold, *Perception* 149). The person or being represents a locus of self-organizing activity, which "exists, or rather becomes, in the unfolding of those very relations that are set up by virtue of a being's positioning in the world, reaching out into the environment—and connecting with other selves" (Ingold, *Perception* 103). In this animistic perception of the world personhood is intricately bound to life's manifold relationships, and "life, rather than being an internal property of persons and things, is immanent in the relations between them" (Ingold, *Perception* 149). The relational field is no abstract category or purely intersubjective field, but the land itself (Ingold, *Perception* 40). Neither separate nor changeless, it takes the form of an "all-encompassing rhizome—which is continually raveling here, and unravelling there, as the beings of which it is composed grow, or 'issue forth', along the lines of their relationships" (Ingold, *Perception* 149–150).

Because Lopez recognizes his own outsider position in the Arctic, he does not try to emulate an indigenous communal relationship with its animals. Instead he engages advanced modern field biology and Jacob von Uexküll's *Umwelt* theory. Regarded as the father of biosemiotics (Lestel 388), von Uexküll aimed to move away from a mechanistic perspective on animals by arguing that any living being who "perceive[s] and act[s]," should be considered a subject (Pobojewska 323, 325). While ecology and its concept of the niche accept the premise that the physical world represents a neutral and objective basis of existence for all organisms, *Umwelt* theory refuses this. Instead it argues that an "'environmental niche' is merely the physical part of a larger [...] not purely physical whole which is [...] fully comprehensible only from the perspective of the particular lifeform whose world it is" (Deely 129–130). Accordingly, *Umwelt* theory requires researchers to shift their perspective away from what is meaningful for *them* to what is meaningful for the animal under study (Winthrop-Young 231). It involves the biological sciences' attempts to engage with the world 'from within', and in this manner resembles the mode of engagement involved in hunting. That is how Lopez can claim "[t]he discovery of an animal's *Umwelt* and its elucidation" to be part of the "Eskimo hunter's methodology" (268).

Ecological psychologist and philosopher of science Edward S. Reed argues that sociality is a natural phenomenon in humans and animals (116–117). (Sociality is figured here in terms of the individual's realization that the natural environment is shared with animate Others). This phenomenon has "evolved as a refinement of ... perception of, and action in, the environment" (Reed 123). The idea of a fundamentally social natural environment not only changes the notion of the subject (which becomes shared rather than private), but also of perception. Because perception already includes socialized awareness, it *precedes* interpretation and reference to socially constructed categories or meanings. In this manner a social-ecological understanding of the natural environment opposes the social constructivist one in which, according to Ingold, the environment must be "'grasped' conceptually and appropriated symbolically" before it

can be understood ("Hunting" 34). As an alternative the social-ecological model proposes that knowledge of the world is gained not through "construction" but through "engagement" with the world and its Others (Ingold, "Hunting" 41). Accordingly, no qualitative or ontological "rupture or abyss" exists to separate the human from the animal (Derrida 30), nor any distinction between the natural and the social/cultural world. Any such separation would make it impossible for the human to enter into the very relationship with the animate world and the larger relational field that sustains his life.

Lopez finds the engagement with the environment associated with *Umwelt* theory and the indigenous conception of the hunt to represent a valuable approach to the natural world. He offers a definition of hunting attuned to Eskimo hunters' animism, but one that downplays the immediate goal of the hunt:

To hunt means to have the land around you like clothing. To engage in a wordless dialogue with it, one so absorbing that you cease to talk with your human companions. It means to release yourself from rational images of what something "means" and to be concerned only that it "is." And then to recognize that things exist only insofar as they can be related to other things. These relationships—fresh drops of moisture on top of rocks at a river crossing and a raven's distant voice—become patterns. The patterns are always in motion. Suddenly the pattern—which includes physical hunger, a memory of your family, and memories of the valley you are walking through, these particular plants and smells—takes in the caribou. There is a caribou standing in front of you. The release of the arrow or bullet is like a word spoken out loud. It occurs at the periphery of your concentration. (200)

In Lopez's imagination, hunting becomes a way for the human to engage in a 'wordless dialogue' with the land that constitutes an embodied *responsiveness* toward it rather than an abstract interpretation of it; a dialogue that activates a range of sensory input more complex and absorbing than linguistic communication. The passage hints that this form of (biosemiotic) communication exists beyond—and is hindered rather than aided by—rational conceptualizations. Once this conceptual filtering or 'rationalization of meaning' is abandoned, other and more complex forms of communication can emerge. These hold the power to draw the hunter into life-worlds shared with other creatures and allow him to become aware of the myriad of complex and inter-connective relationships that exist in the land. As expressed in the quotation above (and exemplified in the following discussion), these dynamic social-ecological relationships become part of larger overarching relational patterns in which the hunter partakes with his entire being. Because these relationship patterns are simultaneously ecological *and* social, they represent for the individual in question ecological dependencies as well as patterns of meaningful social engagement with environmental Others. Both kinds of patterns undergo dynamic changes, but these are more rapid in the latter than in the former case. In this context the actual killing of the prey becomes an expression of the hunter's active engagement with the environment. It forms part of an ongoing communication which recognizes and responds to the environmental Other, but which ultimately remains a part of overarching relational patterns. Expressed here from the point of view of the *human* hunter, and exemplified by a word in human language, this

form of communicative interaction with the environment is one in which hunters of any biological species can be thought to engage.

Although arguably in consonance with a relational conception of the world, the fact that Lopez's text shifts the purpose of the hunt away from the actual killing of the prey signals Lopez's status as cultural observer rather than active participant in Eskimo hunter culture. For all his sympathy with his Eskimo hunter companions and their mode of engagement with the natural world, Lopez ends his text by reaffirming his disgust at the sight of animals killed (408–409). Reported in a cultural setting in which the killed animal is understood to confirm life's continuation, this attitude is paradoxical. It signals the extent to which Lopez remains a modern Westerner to whom hunting is associated with a particularly violent (and unnecessary) form of sport. As the text repeatedly shows, this form of sport is one that exploits human supremacy over the natural world, and that throughout modern history has had tragic effects not merely on Arctic animal individuals, but also on this region's animal populations.

Tracing Relationship Patterns

Despite this paradoxical attitude toward hunting, Lopez actively employs the indigenous hunter's social-ecological model of the world and describes his own explorations of the Arctic in terms of a hunter's engagement with the land. At the barren Pingok Island, he finds himself involved in the

old business [of] walking slowly over the land with an appreciation of its immediacy to the senses and in anticipation what lies hidden in it. The eye alights suddenly on something bright in the grass—the chitinous shell of an insect. The nose tugs at a minute blossom for some trace of Arctic perfume. The hands turn over an odd bone, extrapolating, until the animal is discovered in the mind and seen to be moving in the land. One finds anomalous stones to puzzle over, and in footprints and broken spiderwebs the traces of irretrievable events.

[...] I squatted down wherever the evidence of animals was particularly strong amid the tundra's polygon fractures. Where Canada geese had cropped grass at the edge of a freshwater pond, at the skull of a ringed seal carried hundreds of yards inland by ice, or scavengers; where grass had been flattened by a resting fox. (254)

The narrator's mode of observation here has a sense of immediacy and anticipation associated with the hunt. It engages his entire sensory system *and* gives rise to imaginative contemplations based in this sensory experience. To the indiscriminate eye, the part of Pingok Island described here is an environment of non-presence. What Lopez actually presents us with is the shell of an insect, a broken spider-web, the bone of an animal; all examples of life passed away. Then some cropped and flattened grass, and a few footprints as evidence of life that has passed through. Only by coupling this sensory information with experience-based knowledge of animals does Lopez manage the feat of allowing this barren land to emerge in his text as teeming with life. This act of interpretation reveals his skill in finding and interpreting signs of animal presence, and is clearly driven by knowledge and the will to understand. It is also expressive of the hunter's effort to imagine the land in terms of the animal life it holds. Yet, as evident in

how the ptarmigan's camouflage throws him off his visual trace and flocks of geese flee at his approach, Lopez is a hunter emerging, and far from fully trained.

Because of his own admittedly limited abilities as a hunter, Lopez supports his animal portrayals with up-to-date information from modern field biology. The chapter on the muskox provides an excellent example of the complex ecological insights that can emerge through thorough scientific investigations of animal-environment interrelationships. Through field biologists' reports we learn that "[i]n their winter pawing, muskoxen expose food for Arctic hares and willow buds for ptarmigan. Arctic fox derive some unknown delight in their company. And in their wandering they stir up insects, which the birds feed upon" (72). While the field biologists study muskoxen in their natural habitat in the hope of discovering response mechanisms determining muskox breeding patterns, findings that reflect how these animals' diet varies according to "their idiosyncratic needs and tastes" speaks of their individuality (71). This individuality is further emphasized by Lopez's narrative voice, which disrupts the objective presentation of ecological facts. With the words "If you were a muskox" he asks us imagine the environment from the perspective of this animal (ibid.).

An important factor of muskox life, and key to its survival in the Arctic, is its sociality. "Muskoxen," writes Lopez, "are unique among ruminants in the amount of body contact they make" (60). When faced with danger, they either "gallop away shoulder to shoulder [...] mov[ing] as a single animal" or form a synchronous "close-contact, defensive formation [...] found in no other species" (61). Within these defensive formations "knowledge of the other animals' personalities" are of great importance, as changes in the herds "suggest that both individual animals and the aggregations themselves have 'personalities'" (62). To the extent that an understanding of these interrelationships escapes us, this is due, Lopez claims, to the way we "unthinkingly imagine the animals as instinctual", without "motive and invention" (63). Only if we leave this conception behind does it become possible to think of an animal like the muskox beyond its placement within hierarchically structured food chains, and to discover its full ecological *and* social significance in the relational networks of the Arctic tundra.

Scientific facts are of vital importance to Lopez's portrayals of Arctic animals, but it is the hunter's mode of engagement that engenders his curiosity and responsivity toward the animals he encounters. The first animal to come into focus in this way is a collared lemming. Lopez writes with great respect of this "year-round resident[] of the local tundra communit[y]," who has migrated so far and so courageously to reach this distant region of the world, and who has the knowledge and strength to survive the Arctic winter (35). His engagement and attempt at communication with this small animal is reflected in the way he 'takes its stare', rather than just observing it, thereby acknowledging and engaging with its co-presence and difference—what Massey (following Johannes Fabian) would call its *coevalness* (Massey 69).

Whenever I met a collared lemming on a summer day and took its stare I would think: Here is a tough animal. Here is a valuable life. In a heedless moment, years from now, will I remember more machinery than mind? If it could tell me of its will to survive, would I

think of biochemistry, or would I think of the analogous human desire? If it could speak of the time since the retreat of the ice, would I have the patience to listen? (36)

The meeting leads Lopez to ponder how Western philosophy's mind/matter dualism has influenced our perception of animals in general, and tended to block our interest in this kind of relationship. As modern science and culture generally work within this conceptual framework, neither has conceived true communication with animal 'machinery' or 'matter' a possibility. Thus Lopez comes to question whether or not a dialogical engagement with animals is still possible, and whether or not modern humans would—after this long separation—even be interested in engaging in it. Although the nature of Lopez's personal engagement is coupled with critical introspection and differs significantly from that of the indigenous hunter, it enables him to recognize the lifeworld of the lemming and to identify what blocks our acknowledgement of this world. As a consequence, this seemingly insignificant little animal is in Lopez's text allowed to rise to "strike[] a posture" on the tundra "that urges you not to trifle" (35).

In the following example, an Arctic fox hunting for food on the seemingly desolate Pingok Island has caught Lopez's attention:

I watch the fox now, traveling the ridge of the sand dune, the kinetic blur of its short legs. I have seen its (or another's) tracks at several places along the beach. I think of it traveling continuously over the island, catching a lemming here, finding part of a seal there, looking for a bird less formidable than a glaucous gull to challenge for its eggs. I envision the network of its trails as though it were a skein of dark lines over the island, anchored at slight elevations apparent to the eye at a distance because of their dense, rich greens or clusters of wildflowers. (267)

One of the points made by Lopez in his reflections on the nature of hunting is that the patterns of relationship between the different objects of the environment are "always in motion" (200). The constant movement through which the fox of Pingok Island engages with the environment in his search for sustenance would be characterized by Ingold in terms of the *wayfarer's* movement *through* the world, which contrasts the traveler's movement *across* its surface (*Being* 149). In consonance with northern theories animism, the line of travel represents for the wayfarer "an ongoing process of growth and development, or self-renewal" (Ingold, *Being* 150). The linear trajectories formed by the fox's tracks across Pingok Island can be interpreted to represent precisely such a spatial trajectory inscribed *on* the land of the fox's life and development *within* it.

Lopez *Umwelt*-sensitivity opens up for a multitude of other creaturely worlds existing within the space of Pingok Island. In addition to the viewpoint of the travelling fox, who "see[s] so much with its black nose," Lopez tries to imagine Pingok through the perceptions of its other denizens:

I wonder how any animal's understanding of the island changes over the year; and the difference in its shape to a gyrfalcon, a wolf spider, or a bowhead echolocating along its seashore. What is the island to the loon, who lives on the water and in the air, stepping awkwardly ashore only at a concealed spot at the edge of a pond, where it nests? What of a bumblebee, which spends its evening deep in the corolla of a summer flower that makes its world 8°F warmer? (267)

The animal life-worlds alluded to here are intricately attuned to this particular environment, and represent various animals' modes of interaction with it. Yet relatively speaking, the number of animal life-worlds within this Arctic environment is low. This simplicity, coupled with the fact that within this peculiar environment animal tracks and traces may be left undisturbed for long periods of time, is what allows Lopez to visualize the fox's tracks in terms of a tangle of lines crisscrossing the land. It also makes it possible for the reader to imagine similar itineraries for the other animal points of view presented here. In this manner the very barrenness of Pingok Island aids in an unconventional conceptualization of this space; one which consists of an interweaving network of trajectories representing different animal persons' continuous processes of development. These biological processes exist on scales of time and distance radically different from—and potentially threatening to—supposedly universal modern human scales.

Arctic Dreams also gives several examples of how *traceless* relation structures manifest themselves. From Thule Lake, California, the southern home of Arctic migratory snow geese, Lopez reports how flocks of five to ten thousand birds “rise from the fields like smoke in great, swirling currents” (154). In watching them, he is struck by “how each bird while it is a part of the flock seems part of something larger than itself. Another animal” (154). The fact that the unity of the flock is figured in terms of *another animal* signals that the relationship patterns within the flock should not be thought of in abstract terms. Not only do these patterns bind the individual birds together, they also allow the flock to take on a particular form of movement and agency. It is this agency that allows, among other things, the great feat of annual migration through which this bird sustains its life. And whereas the itineraries of the fox remain limited to Pingok Island, those of the lesser snow geese connect, or make clearer, not only “the extent of space between ground and sky, [but] between [the Californian] here and the far North” (158). In this manner the snow geese's migrations serve the important function of bringing the network of relationships, generally traced within the Arctic wilderness, ‘home’ to Lopez's fellow American readers.

The Arctic as Organism

The text further traces a multitude of other annual animal migration routes, all of which are journeys to and from nesting or calving grounds, expressing what Ingold would call “renewal along a path rather than [...] displacement in space” (*Being* 72). The North American Arctic is simultaneously also host to forms of migration that occur at different scales in time and space. Here “[a]nimals are still adjusting to the retreat of the Pleistocene glaciers,” as well as to shorter climatic shifts (160). Then there are short-distance migrations attuned to annual climactic cycles, complemented by animal migrations during a season, or in response to diurnal rhythms (161). Yet all of these represent merely particular expressions of a much wider scope of animal movement adjusted to the dynamic alterations of this environment and the possibilities they offer

(158). To Lopez “[t]he extent of all this movement is difficult to hold in the mind” (161). It bespeaks vast and intricate networks of relationship as life-giving to this land as breath is to an animal. “Watching the animals come and go, and feeling the land swell up to meet them and then feeling it grow still at their departure,” Lopez writes, “I came to think of the migrations as breath, as the land breathing” (162). This figuration is repeated in the Epilogue, in which Lopez states that “[t]he land, an animal that contains all other animals, is vigorous and alive” (411). Through the migratory patterns of snow geese and caribous, and the defensive behaviors of muskoxen, Lopez has already introduced us to the idea that animal relationship networks have agency. Here he further asserts that the physical land in fact exists *in and through* the relationships with the animals it supports. Not only do these animals bestow life upon the land. By “always testing the landscape” in search for new means of sustenance or the potential for new life-worlds, they also contribute to the always-changing nature and ongoing creation of new relationship patterns (161).

Knowledge about the ‘all-encompassing relational field’ that *is* the Arctic comes to Lopez from *within* this environment. It is the result both of the experience of being caught in the dynamism of animals in movement, *and* of his contemplative efforts. To visualize and communicate this knowledge, Lopez grants the Arctic body and breath. Thus through attentive awareness of its animals, the text inscribes the Arctic itself as an animal. It is, however, significant that this vision is not the result of sensitivity toward animals *only*. In consonance with his allusions to *Umwelt* theory and the concept of a social and relational environment, Lopez continuously insists that all relationship patterns must include the physical environment. A breath without a body is nothing. “[T]ry[ing] to understand the animal apart from its background, except as an imaginative exercise,” Lopez writes, “is to risk the collapse of both. To be what they are they require each other” (176–177). The great dynamism of animal movement in the Arctic is only possible because—and as a part—of the dynamism inherent in the land. And it is his scientific knowledge in combination with his hunter’s sensitivity that helps this modern traveler bring out the particular vitality of the physical Arctic: its changing sea-ice; its always moving and morphing icebergs; its fast-changing, violent weather and suddenly shifting seasons; and its treacherous air, offering optical illusions turning mountain ranges upside down or enticing explorers into non-existent lands.

Lopez avoids coupling embodiment with anthropomorphization by specifying that the rudimental body he sketches is that of an animal. Through this evasion the Arctic remains wild, powerful and beyond human domination, even within a human conceptualization of it. Also to many past European explorers, Lopez admits, the land gradually became “large, alive like an animal” (393). But the nature of Lopez’s animal is as intricately complex and fundamentally life-giving as theirs was desolate and associated with death (*ibid.*). In his organismic ecosystemic vision, Arctic landscapes are presented as but a few among the world’s many and different ones, all of which are, Lopez claims, “hard to know individually. They are as difficult to engage in conversation as wild animals” (255).

Because Lopez is informed by Eskimo hunters' view of the world and mode of engagement with it, he can recognize the vitality and otherness of the Arctic—while at the same time open up a possibility for dialogic engagement with it. Yet in order to substantiate and justify his conceptualization of the Arctic as an organic unity to his modern readers, Lopez adds the perspective of quantum theory. Accordingly, he claims that although

[a]nimals move more slowly than beta particles, and through a space bewildering larger than that encompassed by a cloud of electrons, ... they urge us, if we allow them, toward a consideration of the same questions about the fundamental nature of life, about the relationships that bind forms of energy into recognizable patterns. (178)

In suggesting that quantum theory's organismic view of the world should be extended to our reflections on the natural environment, Lopez signals the outmodedness of traditional science's mechanistic image of animals. By retaining focus on the individual animals and their network of relationships, his text instead constructs what might be termed a *reconstructive* postmodern ecological vision of the Arctic wilderness; one which "restores *inherent reality*, hence activity and experience to nature" (Cobb 109).³ The combination of quantum theory, *Umwelt* sensitivity, and the hunter's mode of engagement allows the dimensions of space in Lopez's Arctic to become relativized and entangled with time—subjective biological as well as evolutionary time. And whereas this relational vision resembles the animism of northern indigenous hunters, it emerges from within our own culture's system of knowledge production, and hence cannot be dismissed as a primitive, naturalized or unscientific metaphor of the world.

Arctic Cultures and Civilizations

In consonance with the text's re-association of time and space, *Arctic Dreams* recognizes and traces the histories of both humans and animals in the land. In the case of polar bears and Eskimos, Lopez traces lines of relationship with the environment that run parallel, and points out how both have responded by establishing the same food-base, hunting grounds and mode of habitation (108). Thus the bear's endurance, agency, inventiveness and ability to learn from experience are presented as equal to those of the Eskimo hunter. Accordingly, Lopez writes, "[t]o encounter the bear, to meet it with your whole life, was to grapple with something personal." (110). The confrontation was personal because it involved an animal person who existed on the same ontological level as the human hunter, and who held the power to bring termination or renewal to his life. To emphasize that humans constitute vital parts of the Arctic's relational networks, Lopez dedicates the second half of the chapter on migration to the arrival and development of human cultures. His profound and detailed contemplations on the "great

³ Max Oelschlaeger describes a conception of the natural world based on ecology's principle of internal relations and the irreversibility of time in terms of an "organismic idea of nature" (131). To David Ray Griffin this organismic view of the world signals a constructivist (or reconstructive) postmodern turn in science, ushered in by recent discoveries in quantum theory (15).

drift and pause of life” in the North American Arctic ends by an image of “[p]eople, moving over the land” (203). Like animals, humans migrated into this region from places further south, responding to the demands of the environment. The diversity of Eskimo cultures that resulted from this movement went unnoticed by European explorers until the beginning of the 20th century. To them, the Eskimo were primitive or pre-modern Others: a naturalized, homogeneous group of people somehow closer not only to the natural environment but also to the animal Other. “The notion of Eskimos exploring their own lands and adapting anew at the same time Europeans were exploring the Arctic,” writes Lopez, “was something the Europeans were never aware of” (382). The distinctly modern conception of space implicit in their geographical endeavors made them prone to conceiving of Eskimo cultures in terms of *primitive isolates*; described by Massey as place-defined ‘original’ societies lacking any history of contact with the outside world, and passively awaiting their arrival (67–68). Offering detailed descriptions of Eskimo cultures based on a variety of textual reports and archaeological discoveries, *Arctic Dreams* corrects and complicates this simplified and erroneous image, just like it has complicated the image of Arctic animals.

Thus by granting agency, intent, personhood, sociality and history to the animals of the Arctic, *Arctic Dreams* establishes parallels and interrelationships between humans and animals of this region, and describes them both in terms of “non-Socratic societies” (75). Based on these observations, I would argue that implicit in Lopez’s critique of Western explorers’ failure to recognize the cultural diversity and dynamism of human societies of the Arctic lies a further critique of our culture’s failure to recognize its *animal* societies. Like their human counterparts, these animal societies consist of—and owe their characteristics to—individuals involved in complex relational networks. The text’s challenge to Western culture’s anthropocentric perspective is strengthened as human societies in the Arctic are joined by a multitude of animal societies, and Lopez invites us to imagine the land, that larger unity which holds them all, in terms of “another sort of *civilization*” (12). In this manner Lopez refrains from naturalizing the human into an animal. His text shows us ways to imagine animals as existing on the same ontological level as humans, without separating either from their ecological foundations. Instead, both are presented as part of a natural environment that the text allows us to understand in terms of a social space.

Although civilization should be understood in relational rather than in metaphorical terms in this context, Lopez’s move here is bold. The concept of civilization is in itself evasive and has spurred several different definitions. However, all share in reserving the concept of civilization to the *human* social sphere, and to societies that have developed social institutions and stratifications, written language and/or city states.⁴ Even to Felipe Fernández-Armesto, whose work on civilizations focuses on the

⁴ An extensive selection of definitions of the term civilization may be found at the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations’s Web site: <http://www.wmich.edu/isccsc/civilization.html> (Web 25.04.2014). These range from Oswald Spengler’s definition of civilizations as a higher states and/or final phases of human cultures, in turn figured in terms of “*organisms*” (104), to Andrew Bosworth’s definition of civilizations as “culture[s] resting on complex and evolving structures of information and knowledge (best reflected by a writing system)” (25).

human “relationship to the natural environment,” the definition rests upon the extent to which this natural environment is “recrafted, by the civilizing impulse, to meet human demands” (14). As Eskimo hunter cultures throughout historical time have adjusted to the conditions of the natural environment rather than recrafting this environment to suit their purposes, this approach implies that even *human* indigenous civilizations do not exist in the Arctic (Fernández-Armesto 40–55).

Arctic Dreams depicts a variety of encounters with animals acknowledged to have their own rational motivations for—and history of—interaction with the land. Yet this text can hint of a more inclusive and less constructivist definition of civilization primarily because it tacitly activates conceptions of the natural environment from Eskimo cosmology and theoretical theories in which animal sociality is recognized as a matter of fact. In this manner *Arctic Dreams* indirectly addresses the question of whether or not animals, which do not possess language, may be considered subjects. The presumption concerning the uniqueness of human language, like the presumption that human social behavior alone is based in *reasons* rather than in biological *causes*, has served to block the notion of animals as capable of forming cultures (Lestel 380–381). An approach like Lopez’s implies the outmodedness of such presumptions in light of recent developments in the animal and the physical sciences.

Lopez’s proposition that we regard the Arctic in terms of a civilization constituted by a multitude of animal cultures serves to disrupt modern Western culture’s nature/culture dichotomy and to suggest an alternative and less conceptually mediated way of relating to the natural environment. It also brings the question of our relationship with animals into the more familiar sphere of the social. One thing contemporary Western people *are* used to having to deal with is cultural variety, and we have established a set of theories and ethical norms as to how this should be done. Unfortunately, as Cary Wolfe points out, when it comes to dealing with animal Others such a framework is still largely missing (7). In allowing for a way to conceptualize the Arctic and its animals in terms of civilizations and societies, *Arctic Dreams* implies that our approach to these parts of the natural world should be as respectful and cautious as if human civilizations and societies were involved. Hence, it should proceed through dialogue and a search for knowledge, rather than through brute force and attempts at domination. Such a dialogue is made possible through *Arctic Dreams*’ repeated suggestions of ontological equality, in combination with depictions of Arctic space as lively and relational, and always in the process of being made.

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Fluid Identities: Poetry and the Navigation of Mixed Ethnicities in Late Antique Gaul¹

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Abstract



This paper uses the work of Late Antique (4th-6th century) Latin poets to demonstrate the ways that pre-modern sources can be a part of scholarly discussions of the development of environmental imaginations and can usefully contribute to the development of the environmental humanities. The three poets (Ausonius, Sidonius Apollinaris, and Venantius Fortunatus) have many works that explore and describe nature; one theme that emerges is that they closely connected the rivers of Gaul to their concerns over political and cultural identity. Rivers, including the Rhone and the Mosel, were intricately woven into the daily life and cultural identities of 4th-6th century Gaul, and were both tangible and fluid political boundaries. These poems use rivers to confirm cultural identities, validate the Christian cultural experience, and express broader cultural and political concerns about cultural integration and hybridity.

Keywords: rivers, medieval, poetry, Late Antiquity, ecocriticism, identity.

Resumen

En este ensayo se utilizan textos de poetas latinos de la antigüedad tardía (siglos IV y VI) para demostrar cómo algunos recursos pre-modernos pueden formar parte de discusiones académicas sobre el desarrollo de la imaginación ambiental y contribuir al desarrollo de las humanidades ambientales. Los tres poetas que se discuten aquí—Ausonio, Sidonio Apolinar y Venancio Fortunato—tienen obras que exploran y describen la naturaleza. Uno de los temas que surgen es que ellos conectan los ríos de la Galia con su preocupación por la identidad política y cultural. Algunos ríos, entre ellos el Ródano y el Mosela, eran fronteras políticas fluidas y tangibles que estaban intrincadamente relacionadas con la vida diaria y las identidades culturales de la Galia durante los siglos IV y VI. Estos poemas usan los ríos para confirmar las identidades culturales, validar la experiencia cultural cristiana, y expresar profundas inquietudes culturales y políticas sobre la integración cultural y la hibridez.

Palabras clave: ríos, medieval, poesía, la antigüedad tardía, ecocrítica, identidad.

In a beautiful and tragic poem about the murder of a young queen, Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530- c. 600-609) let his literary imagination fly when describing her arrival in Gaul:

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The channel of the Vienne is crossed by an alder craft; the accompanying throng emerges briskly from the fast-flowing waters. From there the slow-moving Loire receives her with its bright and chilly stream, where the smooth sand gives over not even to a fish. She reaches the place where the Seine with fishy wave makes for the sea, near the curved bend by Rouen. (George, *Personal and Political*, 6.5 45)

Fortunatus, himself an immigrant, wrote many poems in which the rivers of Gaul play pivotal roles: they are in turns beautiful, dangerous, sheltering, alienating, welcoming, rushing with chaotic waters and dried up and disappearing. In pre-modern Europe, Rivers were vital to economic development, travel, industry, and agricultural development. Settlements, trade routes, military campaigns, and industries were established and maintained along rivers, and leaders worked to develop, protect, and control both the rivers and access to them. But beyond this, rivers were part of the cultural fabric of society, and deeply embedded in the early medieval environmental imagination.

This paper uses the work of three poets, Ausonius (c. 310- c. 390), Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 430- d. after 479), and Venantius Fortunatus, all of whom lived in Gaul (roughly France, Germany, and the Low Countries) during a period marked by intense cultural change. These men were all members of the local elite, which during this time meant that they were (at times) fairly wealthy, of the political and social upper classes, and, increasingly, Christian. They were also Latinate—schooled in the Roman educational system and seeped in the traditions of Latin literature. All told, they wrote hundreds of poems and letters, a surprising number of which describe and praise the natural and built environments of Gaul, using nature as a way to express broader cultural and political concerns. They contain many fascinating details about the rivers themselves, human uses of rivers, the seasonality of water resources and the risks and rewards of living in close proximity to these powerful resources. But in this paper I want to focus on only one aspect of this poetry of nature: rivers as markers of cultural identity.

This paper explores how these poets, recognizing that they were in a cultural and political borderland, let rivers work for them as they worked through their own questions about cultural identity. Because so much of ecocriticism has been modern in its focus, the process that I am looking at in these poems has often been termed the development of a “national imaginary.” Tricia Cusack links this directly to rivers and riverscapes, pointing out that “It is clear therefore that river narratives, transmitted through stories and visual imagery, have tended to metamorphose to accommodate the dominant religious and political groups in different cultures at different times. National riverscapes will be seen to fulfill a similar function that is, one adapted to carrying the contemporary ideologies of elite strata in the nation-state” (8). But how do we trace this impulse before the rise of the nation? As Franca Bellarsi claims, “Ecocritical questioning goes hand in hand with the interrogation of human identity and borders” (126). Such questions need not be limited to the modern world. In spite of their distance from us in time, these authors’ words and ideas resonate with modern concerns about ethnicity, identity, political boundaries, and the integration of new groups into states and societies.

Rivers' permanence in the landscape, ties to power and wealth, and ability to change, grow, and shrink—to adapt—make them excellent metaphors for the concerns of fragile and adapting cultural groups. As T.S. McMillin notes in his study of rivers in American literature, "All of those variables make it difficult to pin "rivers" down as a category of knowledge. And we also have to consider the notorious paradoxical qualities of rivers, their ability to be or do several things at once. Rivers *move*, flowing over land, through history, and among diverse groups of people, changing considerably from their source to their destination; yet they also *stay*, permanent blue lines on our maps, constant waypoints and lasting landmarks" (xii). River borders are historically and culturally compelling because they make impressive, legible, and visible frontiers. Yet they are also fluid and shifting, attracting the attention of these poets who were also exploring the ways that ethnicity, German-ness, and Roman-ness were constantly being repositioned and renegotiated.

All three poets construct and describe rivers as frontiers and as borderlands, linking identity to riverine allegiance and using differences between rivers as markers of the differences between peoples. This is particularly evident when the poets are negotiating the issue of what marks the German from the Roman. In turn, to firm up their own identities as members of a Roman-influenced elite, rivers and water become ways that the poets show the endurance of Roman identity and civilization (*Romanitas*) in Gaul. Finally, while acknowledging the complexities of ethnic identity, all three poets show a close identification with *place*. Their work creates a sense of geographic belonging, of being closely allied to a landscape and a place, is embodied in the region's rivers. The Mosel, the Rhine, and the Garonne, in particular, signify the poets' belonging and Gaul as home and homeland. As Lawrence Buell points out, "place" can be a "resource of environmental imagination," and that "an awakened sense of physical location and of belonging to some sort of place-based community have a great deal to do with activating environmental concern" (*Writing* 56).

Such claims are not limited to the modern world. Ecocritical questions and concerns can reach across the boundary of the modern, and a growing body of work has shown the relevance of ecocritical concerns to medieval and Early Modern literature (Nardizzi). Though some of these works (Siewers, and Overing and Osborn) explore older pieces, most have focused on later authors, and particularly English ones, primarily the recognized authors viewed by modernists as relevant and resonant--Shakespeare (Brayton) and Chaucer (Kiser). However, little of this pre-modern ecocriticism focuses on medieval Latin literature, despite the fact that this dominated European culture for centuries before the emergence of vernacular writing. As I hope to show in this essay, Late Antique and early medieval voices have much to contribute to ongoing discussions of the formation and transformations of environmental imaginations.

As but one example of how conversations across centuries might enhance ecocriticism, I would like to point to Isabel Maria Fernandes Alves' essay on the modern Portuguese poet A. M. Pires Cabral's work *Arado*. This book of 76 poems both celebrates the landscape of Northern Portugal and mourns its loss, and includes several poems on

the river Douro as a key part of that landscape. Fernandez-Alves argues that “Cabral, pursuing his poetic work on rural experiences and on the landscapes of his native land... shows a poetic voice that does not cast aside social and environmental tensions, but instead [highlights them]” (163). Though those tensions have changed since 300 CE, I hope to show that Late Antique poets similarly used their poetic voices to reflect on, negotiate, and even participate in transforming their social contexts. The poets of Gaul, by bringing the rivers and riverscapes of Gaul into the foreground of their works, used nature as a way of exploring and confronting changed identities.

Gaul

Roman Gaul (Gallia) comprised the area between the Northern Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Rhine river; it included the areas we think of as Provence, Northern France, Belgium, and the Alsace. Gaul was bordered by Germania to the East and the Atlantic Ocean to the West. By the Merovingian period (where this paper ends), Gaul stretched as far as the Rhine, where the area between the Rhine and the Elbe was a zone of shifting control. Merovingian control did not encompass the Danubian frontier, though did reach into Bavaria, and the Rhine, Mosel, Rhone, Loire, and Garonne rivers represented the main traffic arteries and economic drivers of Gaul.

To situate Late Antique concerns about identities and ethnicities, I’ll start where all histories of Gaul start: “All Gaul is divided into three parts.” Julius Caesar’s famous opening line is a reminder that from its earliest encounters with Rome, the region of Gaul was recognized as diverse—ethnically, politically, and even linguistically. Yet Caesar simplified the landscape, making a complicated set of relationships and identities more easily legible. The story of Rome’s engagement with Gaul is one of piecemeal conquest, settlement, and negotiations with the various Celtic or Gallic tribes. The integration of so many different peoples was much less smooth and complete than Caesar would have us believe, but over the course of the Roman imperial project, the residents of the three Gauls became increasingly Romanized, and added the identity of ‘Roman’ to their other identities.

By the third century CE, historians are able to speak of a new ethnic, cultural, and political hybrid, the “Gallo-Roman.” Gaul emerged as a vibrant center of Roman culture, with major cities such as Trier, Metz, Bordeaux, and Arles. These cities were connected via a network of roads and rivers, and the countryside contained Roman *villae*, traditional Celtic settlements and new hybrid towns. The cities had all the modern conveniences of Roman imperial culture, including aqueducts, amphitheaters, and baths. Rome, too, was changing as a result of its contact with Gaul and the Germans. Jane Webster has pointed out that because of the complex integration of both cultures into each other, “we should think of the societies that emerged in the Roman provinces not as Romanized, but as *creolized*” (209).

By the late 3rd and through the 4th century, as the Roman Empire was experiencing radical internal and external changes, Gaul was put center-stage. Civil war drove armies through the region, and at one point the Gallo-Romans even acclaimed an

emperor. Gaul and its cities and rivers became the frontier or borderland across which new Germanic groups like the Franks, Goths, and Alamans migrated, invaded, and slowly integrated themselves into a new Rome (Wells). Gaul was also a crucial part of the story of the integration of a new religious identity into Rome: Christianity. Constantine (himself representative of the coming of age of the provinces) legalized Christianity and patronized Trier. Missionaries and soldiers all along the Germanic frontiers spread the faith, while at the same time bishops in Gallic cities became religious and administrative leaders of urban territories.

Over the course of the 4th and 5th centuries, Gaul continued to be the center of the contest over Roman power and Germanic migration and integration. The Rhine and Danube frontiers remained contested zones, and especially as Gothic Migration was propelled by changes within the Byzantine Empire and by the arrival of the Huns, Gaul was a contested zone, with Visigoths, Gallo-Romans, imperial troops, Alamans, Lombards and Franks jostling for recognition, land, and imperial authority. It was the Franks who emerged by around 500 as the dominant Germanic group in Gaul, establishing the Merovingian dynasty which, while forming the roots of medieval Europe, also looked to Rome for cultural and religious legitimacy.

Between 300 and 500 CE, Gaul was at a cultural and political crossroads, and these poets were all part of it; pulled between the distant culture of Rome and the immediacy, vibrancy, and beauty of Gaul—the “New Frontier” of Late Antiquity. The poetry of Late Antiquity is itself a bit of a hybrid, working out the literary merging of Rome and Christianity, trying to find a modern voice within a classical frame. In such a changing world, as José Manuel Marrero-Henríquez points out, “literary landscapes of national imaginaries act not only as literary signs of aesthetic interest, but also seek to impose models for inhabiting the world....literary imaginaries respond to a world in constant change” (6). There is a modern perception that the period often termed the “Dark Ages” was somehow stagnant. Yet this was a vibrant and shifting political and religious landscape. Faced with a new religion, new Germanic cultures, new languages, and new aesthetics, the residents of Gaul were dealing with a crisis of identity, and needed to renegotiate their relationships to Rome, to the Germanic other, and to their own landscape and homeland.

Rivers of Empire

Ausonius of Bordeaux’s life and career (310-390) spanned almost the entire fourth century. He came from a prominent and wealthy (and Christian) Gallo-Roman family who were part of the newer elite. Peter Brown explains “the aura of faded nobility that seems to have clung to his family proved an advantage to Ausonius” (188). He became a prominent teacher in Bordeaux, a job he held for almost thirty years. Around 364, he went to Trier where he served as a tutor to the imperial family, allying himself with the emperors Valentinian and his son Gratian. He retired to Bordeaux around 379—just in time to avoid the turmoil of the 380s when Gratian was killed, shifting the political scene in Gaul quite dramatically (Sivan; Brown).

Ausonius wrote hundreds of poems and letters, ranging from 121 brief epigrams to the complex 483-line *Mosella*. The range of length, styles, and subject matter of Ausonius' poems makes them a hard corpus to master, and has made Ausonius in turns fascinating and frustrating. As his most recent editor, R.P.H. Green, notes, "a poet who tackles such matters as astrology, zoology, the Nicene Creed, the Olympic Games... and if not cabbages and kings... then at least hyacinths and Caesars, is likely to appear forbiddingly arcane and bewilderingly diverse" (vii). This range is on full display in his best-known work, the *Mosella*, which presents a series of vignettes of human and non-human life along the river.

The poem is a striking reminder that nature-writing existed in the pre-modern world, and that the people of Late Antiquity were attuned to the subtleties, beauty, and natural dynamics of their local landscapes. Ausonius' Mosel is the prime geographic feature of Gaul and as a symbol of Gallic pride (Green; Kenney; Roberts, "The Mosella"). He links the river to economic development, sport and leisure, natural beauty and abundance, and, I argue, the successful integration of Germanic peoples into the Roman Empire. In the passage that follows, from late in the poem, Ausonius has just finished a long description of the villas and bath houses along the river (a subject I will return to) and then shifts the focus to the many tributaries of the Mosel:

But for me, O Moselle—as worthy to be remembered as the ocean— how can there be an end to speaking of your sparkling tributaries, the numberless streams which run through many different mouths (into your) breadth. They might be able to change their courses, but instead they rush to bestow their name upon you. (ll. 349-543)²

Ausonius then lists rivers that are tributaries of the Mosel, including the Sauer, the Dhron, and the "famed Kyll, known for its fish," finally invoking the Saar, which he describes as prolonging its course so that, though tired, "it may let its wearied mouth flow out underneath imperial walls" (l. 369). Ausonius ends this excursus by concluding that "a thousand others desire to become yours, each according to the greater strength that propels it: each hurried by the course of their waves and their character" (ll. 362-364). Personifying the rivers suggests that each have wills and character of their own, and are in fact agents in their destinies.

At first, this passage seems to be a poetic topography; but if we step back, and take the Mosel as representing the Gallic version of Rome, and the other rivers as the Germanic tribes of the 300s, it becomes an even richer passage. We can read this as not only a description of a powerful river, but as a way of the poet working out the complex status of the Roman tributary states--the many tribes who by the fourth century wanted to integrate into late antique Roman culture. Michael Roberts backs up this interpretation, pointing out that this "catalogue of tributaries...presents the ideal: a mutually gratifying, non-aggressive assimilation" ("The Mosella" 351). And Tricia Cusack sees a similar literary impulse in a 19th century work on the Thames, in which "the Thames functioned as a metaphor for the assimilation of waves of conquerors into a

² All translations of Ausonius' work are mine, using Green's edition and his numbering of the smaller works. I have chosen prose translations in order not to lose meaning for the sake of rhyme or metre. All citations are of the Green edition.

single stream of national history” (60). Importantly, by the 300s, Roman culture was itself represented for many not by Rome itself, but by the vibrant cities along the Mosel. As Peter Brown explains, “it was a world where, for much of the fourth century, many roads led to Trier—and few to Rome” (187). Ausonius recognizes the agency and desires of the tributaries, all hurrying to join (with varying degrees of force) the Roman cultural stream. The tribal streams all aspired to become merged with the Roman Mosel.

This reading of rivers and bodies of water as ethnic groups is supported by both classical precedent and the other poets who later built on Ausonius’ work. As Prudence Jones observes, in the classical world “a shared water source indicates a shared culture. The river from which one drinks is convenient shorthand for the group to which one belongs. The river also shares in the identity of those it nourishes” (47). Herodotus made just such a claim about the Egyptians since, “just as the climate belonging to them is different and their river displays a nature different from other rivers, for the most part they have established customs and laws contrary to other peoples” (qtd. in Jones 39). The poets of Late Antiquity picked up and continued this classical habit. Sidonius Apollinaris describes “the Frank” as “he whose land is washed by the sedgy waters of the Neckar” (trans. Anderson, I.7), and blends ethnicity, nature, and physiognomy when describing the “Herulian with his blue-grey eyes, who haunts the uttermost retreats of Ocean and is almost of one colour with its weedy depths” (Anderson, II, 8.9).

Rivers as both physical and metaphorical boundaries loomed large in the Roman imagination. Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon and the Germanic campaign across the ice-bound Rhine, and Constantine’s ultimate victory on the Milvian bridge spanning the Tiber were not only decisive military engagements, but also representative of larger transitions. All three occurred at watershed moments, when political, cultural, and religious regimes were in a state of flux, and Roman identity was poised for redefinition. Rivers, on the one hand fixed and permanent, on the other always shifting and changing their courses, came, over the course of the 4th-6th centuries, to stand in for the problems of defining, marking, and bounding the many ethnicities of the Roman and post-Roman world.

The Danube and the Rhine were the two most prominent riverine boundaries in the Late Roman world. During the first century CE, the Emperor Tiberius began the process through which the Rhine would be linked indelibly with the Roman frontier, the German integration into Rome and the shifting identities of the later Empire. According to the Roman historian Dio Cassius, Tiberius “transferred forty thousand captives from Germany and settled them on the banks of the Rhine in Gaul” (qtd. in Mathisen 1024). The poets imagined both of these rivers as frontiers and as symbols of imperial power and identity. In one of Sidonius Apollinaris’ panegyrics, an Alaman crosses both a political and ethnic barrier when he “drinks from the Roman side of the Rhine” (Anderson I.7, 151). Though the Rhine would remain a boundary between the German and Roman worlds for the next several centuries, in practice, this was a porous boundary for cultural identity, legal citizenship, and *Romanitas* or Roman-ness (Geary, Wells). Germanic settlement continued along both sides of the river, as did Roman urban growth and civic culture.

Two of Ausonius' short poems take the voice of a personified Danube, praising the emperor Valentinian, himself born across the Danubian frontier in Pannonia. Both poems use the Danube to establish and confirm imperial dominion over the ethnic Germans. In the first, a personified Danube discusses Valentinian's recent victory over the Suevii (Swabians) and announces a desire to become the mouthpiece and embodiment of empire:

Ruler of the waters of Illyricum, second only to you Nile, I, Danube, offer up the fertile source of the spring/fountain-head (*fonte caput*). I greet the *Augustii*, both son and father, whom I myself reared among the sword-bearing Pannonians. Now I want to rush as a messenger to the Black Sea, so that there the victory can be made known to Valens, *cura secunda*, [how] by means of slaughter, flight, and flames, the Suevii have been struck down into ruin, and the Rhine is no longer the boundary-line of Gaul. And if it was possible for the current to flow back to me from the sea, I would then be able to bring the news to there of the victory over the Goths. (Epigram 2, 66)

The poem is full of claims on the part of the Danube to being the true river of empire. The river names himself³ as "ruler of the waters of Illyricum,"⁴ second only in greatness to the Nile. The Danube then offers up its source (and thus its origin point) to the emperors. The Danube claims a deep connection to Roman rule, as "I myself reared [the emperors] among the sword-bearing Pannonians." The proud river then praises Valentinian's recent conquests, stating a desire to be able "to rush as a messenger to the Black Sea, so that there the victory can be made known to Valens [Valentinian's brother and co-emperor]... the Rhine is no longer the boundary of Gaul." The Rhine, once the limit of empire, has shifted from frontier to part of the empire solidly ruled over by the Roman emperors who the Danube itself reared. The Danube commands primacy over the Nile and replaces the Rhine as the demarcation of Empire. This reading of the Danube as the vehicle of empire is supported by Simon Schama's discussion of rivers as roads or highways, when he points out that "in Latin texts, too...history was straightened out in linear development so that rivers—not least the Tiber—might also be imagined as lines of power and time carrying empires from source to expansive breadth" (261).

In addition to reflecting on the changed status of the Rhine, Ausonius' Danube also longs for a new identity. Not content to fulfill natural routes of communication, it longs to reverse course to inform Rome of the expansion of empire: "But if at the sea's behest my stream should flow backwards may I hither bring from there news that the Goths are vanquished." In this brief poem, Ausonius commends Roman triumphs over the Goths, recognizes distinctions amongst the different Germanic peoples, acknowledges the "barbarian" birthplace of the emperor, and uses rivers to mark both the integration of the Germans (the Rhine) into Rome and the expansion of Rome's influence and power into new Germanic lands (the Danube).

In his second Danube poem, Ausonius has the river (again personified) continue to serve as a vehicle for marking and defining different Germanic identities, and to then note their subordination to Rome and Valentinian. The poem (Epigram 4) opens with a

³ In Latin, river is a male noun, and rivers are normally portrayed as male. On the shift of the gender of European River allegories, see Schama, 367-374.

⁴ A Roman province in the modern Balkans.

direct statement of the expanded imperial power and gaze, as the river's source has not only been discovered, but conquered:

I, Danube, having had my source once fully hidden on the edges [of the Empire], now flow entire under your command. Just as I pour forth my icy source amid the Suevii, so I cleave the Pannonian [lands], pregnant with empire, and I let free my rich waters at the mouth, into the Scythian [Black] Sea, all of these waters I submit to your yoke. The palm [of victory] shall be given to Augustus, but the next will go to Valens: he will also discover/acquire sources—even yours, Nile. (66-67)

The poem again acknowledges the Danube as source of both Germanic identity and Valentinian's own power, and the river describes itself as dividing "the Pannonians, pregnant with empire"—a second reference to Valentinian's birth in the borderlands of the Empire. Then the Danube winds up in the sea, but not before gathering together all of its waters submitting them to imperial power. Finally, the Danube confirms Valens' imperial succession, implying that he will expand the empire even further, notably by discovering and controlling even more river sources.

Rivers are porous boundaries, and though they marked Romanness and served to define the German other, those differences could still become blurry. Ausonius gives us the chance to explore this in more detail in a series of poems about a young Swabian slave Bissula, who was given to him as spoils of war. Ausonius first freed his apparent concubine, and then devoted a full book of poetry to her, though only three of the poems survive. The first of these poems essentializes her ethnic otherness from the beginning, connecting her physical (and sexual) identity to her birth:

Bissula, sprung from the stock of and (belonging to) the household gods beyond the icy Rhine, Bissula, knowing the origin source of the Danube, seized as a captive into my hands, but released from my hands, through her charms she has dominion over him whose war-prize she once was. Without a mother, lacking a tutor, [not knowing the patriarchal mastery of empire⁵]... (XVII 3, ll.1-5, 131)

Bissula is presented as able to intuit and embody nature. She in some ways *is* the icy Rhine, and she knows "the Danube's birth"—her own source and origins give her native knowledge. Yet Roman culture and her male master tame her, and she is freed. But, though "civilized", she remains German:

And, just as she was changed by the good things of Latin culture, she remained a German in appearance, with blue eyes and golden hair. The girl is changeable; sometimes her tongue defines her, sometimes her form; the one shows her to be born of the Rhine, the other of Latium⁶ (ll. 9-12)

Bissula's culture and identity change radically (free to slave to free again, barbarian to civilized, ruled to ruler), yet she is not fully transformed, and Ausonius struggles to classify her.

Generations later, Venantius Fortunatus, whose work is clearly indebted to Ausonius', echoed these images of rivers as the markers and the mouthpieces of Empire. In a poem addressed to the emperor Justin and his wife Sophia, Fortunatus has Gaul and its rivers proclaim fealty to the Eastern Empire: "Gaul too sings this song to your merits,

⁵A problematic transmission of text.

⁶ A poetic and ancient phrase for Italy and Rome.

Augustus, the Rhone, the Rhine, the Danube and the Elbe proclaim this” (George, *Personal and Political*, 113, Appendix 2). But of course, there is still a big question in this attempt to integrate or define the German: what about Rome?

In an imperial panegyric, Sidonius Apollinaris (ca. 430-489) puts this very question into the mouth of a personified Rome, who bemoans to Jupiter her dwindling culture and power, remembering a time when the empire had more sway and more visual power. Rome cries, “Alas! Where now are those pageants, those triumphs rich of a consul poor? My spears affrighted Libya’s clime, and I laid the yoke even a third time upon the faithless Carthaginian” (Anderson I, Epigram 7 125). Sidonius then presents the dwindling power of Rome in much the same way he in other works represents the ascendancy of the North—through her river. Rome adds that, once upon a time, at the height of her power, “Ganges of the Indian, Phasis of the Colchian, Araxes of Armenia, Ger of the Ethiopians, Tanais of the Getae, all trembled before my Tiber.” Sidonius was able to recognize the shifting of power to the German lands, the changing character of the empire, and, interestingly, the beauty of the Gallic landscape and the way in which *Romanitas* could still play out in “barbarian” or “alien” lands.

Sidonius was well-positioned to understand this dynamic. He was from a powerful and well-connected Gallo-Roman family. He was raised as a Christian, and he received both schooling and access to the highest levels of society, perhaps allowing for his eventual marriage to the daughter of the future emperor Avitus (Anderson I, p. xxxii-xxxvi; “Sidonius” 780). Through this marriage, he was connected with powerful people, and as is common in such a context, his career reached high points but was also full of turmoil and setbacks. His personal and political ties got him in some trouble once Avitus was killed, though he was able to win both a pardon and renewed positions from his successor Majorian (for whom he wrote a panegyric in thanks). Throughout his career he moved back and forth between Gaul and Rome, where he held political office. Yet when Majorian, too, was unseated and killed, Sidonius retreated to the Auvergne, the area in Gaul near Bordeaux. There, as Helge Köhler notes, “he felt more at home than in his birthplace of Lyons” (4). He focused during this period on his writing, though this was (according to Sidonius himself) set at the wayside by 470, when, perhaps as a result of his political disenfranchisement, or perhaps for more personal reasons, he took over as the bishop of Clermont. As bishop he was pulled back into larger affairs when the city was repeatedly besieged by the Goths. Despite his tumultuous and rather worldly role as bishop, Sidonius would be venerated as a saint after his death.

Sidonius’ work was important even in his lifetime, and his literary fame was part of the key to his continued ability to politically reinvent himself (Köhler 8-10). Sidonius, like Ausonius, wrote hundreds of poems and letters, which he published during his lifetime. His 147 surviving letters were published in nine books, which provide rich and important evidence for the social and political worlds of late Rome. The first poems that he published were lengthy imperial panegyrics that draw heavily on the work and style of classical poets, indicating the continuing importance of classical style in the Late empire. Van Dam points out that “Sidonius always retained a strong nostalgia for the Roman Empire” (349).

Rome loomed large in Sidonius' poetic imagination, and he expressed concern for the future of Rome's culture and power. Yet he was also a resident of Gaul, and in the same poem that presents Rome's sad complaint to Jupiter, Sidonius reveals his own deep connection to Gaul. He has Jupiter suggest that in fact, there is another land that might save Rome: the Auvergne, which "carries its head high as sprung from Latin blood" (trans. Anderson I, p. 129-130). Sidonius presents it as a place of natural bounty and the potential seed-bed for renewed empire. Auvergne is "a land famed for its men, a land to which Nature, the blessed creator of all things vouchsafed no peer in days gone by." And Bordeaux is the center point of this landscape: "from the city extend rich and fertile fields; scarce are they cloven with the early ploughing when they thirst for the tardy seeds, and while the ox enjoys luxurious ease they display clods made black by some fatness mysteriously at work." Its soils abound, and make the soils of Libya and Apulia look bleak and washed out. Though Rome may feel that the Tiber and Italy have been leached of power, the Auvergne presents salvation. Jupiter sees in the Avernians "the sole hope for the world." Sidonius picks up this theme in another piece when he claims that the various Germanic groups of Bordeaux "are called for, so that the Garonne [River], strong as its warlike settlers, may defend the dwindled Tiber" (Anderson, Letter 8.9 447-449).

The most extreme recognition on the part of Sidonius of the shifting of the cultural power and identity of Rome to the Germanic/Gallic regions is found in a remarkable poem, "On the Castle of Pontius Leontius," (poem 22). This poem is characteristic of a type of poetry of praise that these poets wrote for their patrons who wanted to be presented as Roman, and who wanted Latin-speaking poets to provide them with reflections of an elite lifestyle and identity, to show their wealth, taste, power, and culture to their peers. Thus a wide variety of "villa" poems exist, encomia to the little micro-Romes that bishops, counts, Roman officials, and Gallic leaders had built up for themselves in the cities and countryside of Gaul (Brown). More often than not, these villas were on rivers, and the rivers figure heavily into the representation of Roman-ness. At times, the poets even pit Gallic waters directly against Roman ones, such as when Sidonius claims that "rich Campania would be ill-pleased with the Lucrine mere if she beheld the waters of *our* lake," and that the baths at his villa were comparable to those of the famous resort town of Baiae (Anderson Epigram 18, 257; emphasis mine).

In Poem 22, Sidonius (a Christian) imagines a conversation between the pagan gods Bacchus and Phoebus Apollo, in which Apollo tries to convince Bacchus to abandon Rome/Olympus and move with him to the castle along the River Garonne in Gaul. This poem, which serves partially as a praise of Leontius and partially as a praise of the estate he has built, links both the landscape of Gaul and the culture of Gaul to classical models and standards. It also shows an appreciation for both the beauty (Apollo) and the pleasure (Bacchus) of that landscape.

Though the castle lies squarely in Bordeaux, because of the owner's *Romanitas*, reflected in the building's baths, granaries, porticoes, etc., the gods (and Rome) can find their new home there. This tie to the new landscape is made even more explicit when Apollo tells Bacchus that he can have the vineyards and hills and the baths, and

everything else as long as he agrees to grant Apollo “my spring, which flows from the mountain, shadowed by an arched covering of ample circuit, much pitted. This needs no embellishment, for Nature has given it beauty. It seems good to me that there no counterfeiting should seem good” (281). Here is an appeal to the fundamental, unembellished, natural identity of Gaul amidst the praise of baths, fountains, and the other trappings of *Romanitas*.

Venantius Fortunatus (c.530–c.600/609), continued to develop the connection between the waters of Gaul and the cultural heritage of Rome. He wrote poetry both on request and as a way to seek patronage, and many of his poems reflect his clients’ desires to be seen as part of a broader Roman literary and cultural scene. His reputation as a poet who could help give political and ecclesiastical efforts validation and the ring of *Romanitas* appears to have spread quickly, and his first decade in Gaul saw, as Michael Roberts points out, the “most intense poetic activity” of his career (Roberts, *Humblest Sparrow* 5).

Fortunatus was not shy about linking these Frankish princes, bishops, and minor nobility to the imperial past. He wrote of Duke Lupus of Champagne, “Rome’s might shone in splendor; but with you as Duke, Rome has now here returned for us” (George, *Personal and Political*, Poem 7.7 56). However, for the most part, Fortunatus is subtler than this, and demonstrates *Romanitas* rather than naming it outright. In several prominent instances, this is shown through control of rivers and waterworks. He devotes a whole poem to Bishop Felix of Nantes’ river engineering project on the Loire, which he describes as bringing “empire,” invoking Homer and Achilles (Van Dam 349). His poems often evoke an older kind of Roman bucolic leisure, with villas, baths, fountains, and fishponds.

One of these poems, “Ad Gogo,” not only presents a traditional life of the leisured elite, but frames it to echo Vergil’s *Georgics*, presenting his patron with a double dose of *Romanitas*. The titular Gogo hunts, fishes, and enjoys an “outdoors” lifestyle of sport and comfort along the rivers of Gaul:

What occupies his carefree mind in tranquil times?
if he lingers by the banks of the wave-driven Rhine
to catch with his net in its waters the fat salmon,
or roams by the grape-laden Moselle’s stream
(Roberts, *Humblest Sparrow*, Poem 7.4 257-58).

In this poem we see a medieval poet adapting a classical trope to a new landscape. But it is also more than that—it is a recognition of the characteristics and beauty of his adopted home, and an example of the ways that Fortunatus found in the forests, fields, and rivers of Gaul fertile ground for his poetic imagination.

Poetry and Pride of Place

All three of these poets appear to have been personally quite proud of and attached to their homeland, its climate, and its landscape. Ausonius wrote in the *Ordo Urbium Nobilium* (a series of poems about cities) that he identified both Rome and

Bordeaux as his homelands (*patria*): “I love Bordeaux, I devote myself to Rome” (l. 167, 175). Sidonius spent time in both Rome and Bordeaux, and his preference for the Auvergne goes beyond Bacchus and Apollo. In a teasing letter to a friend, he writes “you say,” writes Sidonius, “you are delighted that I, a friend of yours, have at last got a view of the sun, which as one who drank of the Arar, I have seen (you say) at all events very seldom” (Anderson, Letter 1.8 381). The friend has clearly written that Sidonius must, as someone who, living in rain and clouds and fog and mist, must be loving the Mediterranean clime during his visit. “You bring up against me the fogs of my countrymen,” Sidonius writes, but how can he “talk this balderdash to me, you a native of Caesena, which is an oven rather than a town?” This letter underscores something that is important to recognize and is my final theme: early medieval Gallo-Roman people could not only artfully praise their own lands and identities, but also be proud of them, and prefer them to others. This sense of pride in place, of “belonging” to a landscape as well as a community has been a key theme taken up by ecocritics. As Lawrence Buell points out, placedness is closely connected to other types of bonding: “Those who feel a stake in their community think of it as their place....Place is associatively thick” (Buell, *The Future* 63).

For Ausonius, the Mosel was a meaningful place that helped him situate himself within the new communities that were emerging in Gaul; the rivers of Gaul marked his homeland and wove through his identity. In the opening passages of the *Mosella* (115-130). Ausonius describes travelling on foot through the Hunsrück, under a cloudless sky and the “golden” sun. He enters the forest, “where the sky is blocked from view by the green gloom,” and then all at once walks out to a clearing with an overview of the Mosel valley opening up beneath him. He immediately connects the landscape below him to his own identity and his own familiar landscape:

Truly, the whole charming vista struck me as if it were my own homeland of Bordeaux, bright and cherished. From the heights [I saw] the roofs of the *villae* that clung to the riverbanks, and the green Bacchic hills and the beautiful Mosel River, flowing underneath, quietly murmuring. (ll. 18-22)

This suggests not only an appreciation for the beauty of the view, but also an emotional response to it. Ausonius’ pride in the Mosel (and by his own extension Gaul and Bordeaux) is apparent throughout the poem. He compares the river favorably to all other waters, describing it as “the greenest river: ship-bearing as the sea, with steep and sloping waters like a river, and with your glassy depths imitating a lake...” Like Roman Gaul, the Mosel gets its strength and identity from the blending of the characteristics of all its tributaries. “You alone have everything: features of the spring, the river and the brook, the lake, and the double-flowing ebb and flood of the sea” (ll. 26-33).

Towards the end of the *Mosella*, Ausonius invokes the Rhine, which he urges to incorporate the Mosel into its stream. Just as the smaller rivers “speed” to merge with the Mosel, the poet imagines the power of the blended Rhine/Mosel. (Intriguingly, the Rhine and the Mosel do meet at Koblenz, but in the poem this is presented in the future subjunctive, as something that might yet happen). In his essay “The Mosella of Ausonius,” Roberts points out that “the successful unification [of the rivers and the

peoples] is represented as something still to be achieved, and it is set in the context of the still uncertain outcome of imperial policy on and near the Rhine” (351).

Ausonius asks the Rhine to “to measure out a space for the new stream, [with] fraternal waters increasing yours” (*Mosella*, ll. 419-420). The Rhine, by taking in other German waters, will expand and grow—but this is not to suggest that Ausonius saw all “Germans” as equal or as successfully integrated (or able to be integrated) into Rome. He was Gallo-Roman, and his concerns reflect those of the Gallic integration into Rome, especially when new Germanic peoples arrived to complicate matters and relationships. He addresses this tension directly as he addresses the Rhine, explaining that if the Rhine stretches out its channel to include the Mosel, they could be a tremendous force: “Your source could extend twin banks, separated, and together pour out mouths through different courses. The men shall approach, quaking; the Franks as much as the Chamaves and the Germans. Then truly will you be considered the frontier. Then the twin name will come to you from this great river, and though you flow from a single source, you shall be called ‘two-horned’” (ll. 433-437). The idea of a twin name also links the Rhine to the Danube, referred to earlier in the poem as the “twice-named Ister” (l. 106), as does the connection between the river’s source and the course of empire, as noted above.⁷

For the Rhine/Mosel hybrid, the two mouths and two sources of the river would thus help both blur and reinforce identities. Immediately after calling the Danube two-horned, Ausonius himself makes the link between the rivers and the problems of multiple allegiances, loyalties and identities inescapable. He turns the issue of a “double source” directly onto himself: “Thus indeed am I, from my birth drawn from the Viviscan people, [but] long-familiar through old ties of friendship to the Belgian people. Ausonius—by name Italian—by home and homeland [from] between the borders of the Gauls and the high Pyrenees, where cheerful Aquitaine mixes honorable character for her residents--with this little hope, I bravely harmonize” (ll. 440-443).

Venantius Fortunatus: Citizen of the Rhine

In his poetry Fortunatus depicted the complexities, concerns, and preoccupations of the sixth century Gallo-Roman elite, struggling to navigate political change and conflict, the growing cultural force of Christianity, the continuing gravitational pull of classical culture, and the new economic, urban, and geographical realities of Merovingian Europe. His poetry is full of descriptions of the natural world that surrounded him, including river poems filled with discussions of the nature of exile, homeland, and travel. The rivers become the points of transit along which Fortunatus (and others) transform their identities, and river travel becomes (for the devout Christian and eventual hagiographer and saint) amongst other things a kind of a

⁷ River gods were often depicted as horned; they also carry cornucopia, or horns of plenty, often associated with rivers (Green 509; Schama 652). So by wearing or having two horns the Rhine will be taking on two identities, and two sets of abundance.

pilgrimage.

Fortunatus was himself an immigrant to Gaul, though rather than moving across the German frontiers, he left Italy to become part of the Merovingian world. In later years, after having successfully become an essential part of the social and religious fabric of Gaul, Fortunatus reflected back on his arrival in the North, and wrote in a poem to an early patron: “When Germania, a strange land, filled my gaze you were like a father, and were there to take thought for my homeland” (George, *Personal and Political*, Poem 7.8 63). Fortunatus’ transformation from Roman to Gaul was strikingly complete. After leaving Ravenna, he never returned to Italy, and his works reflect his adoption of his new homeland—in fact so much so that Michael Roberts has referred to his “Gallocentricity, which even marginalizes Rome” (51).

Fortunatus, though most famous in his own time for his religious writings, wrote many smaller poems, including occasional poems, encomia, and epigrams. He covered topics as wide-ranging as flowers, food, episcopal duties, and wedding celebrations. He was deeply indebted to his classical training and to Ausonius’ work, but he also showed a willingness to be poetically adventurous and to experiment with newer genres of Latin poetry (Brennan; George, *Latin Poet*). Though many of his poems are light, he did not shy away from tackling trickier issues including theology, good government, and the tabloid scandal of the day, the shocking murder of Galswinth, the Visigothic princess who married Childebert I. In “On Galswinth,” Fortunatus recounts the princess’ departure from Spain, and her arrival in “the chill North” (George, *Personal and Political* 40). The poem is laced with images of the natural world; it is a story of loss (of family, happiness, home, and life) and longing, and these powerful emotions are echoed by the landscape. Fortunatus imagines her parting from her family and her homeland, writing that “rivers of tears disfigure the faces of the people.” Then Galswinth “speeds over the Pyrenaean mountain range through the clouds, where July is freezing with frosty rains, where the mountains, white with snow, disappear into the stars and their sharp peaks emerge above the rains. From here Narbonne welcomes her, where the gentle Aube, nibbling away at the flat coast, softly enters the waters of the Rhone” (46).

Unfortunately the transition of identities that Fortunatus was himself able to make was impossible for Galswinth, as she was murdered shortly after her arrival in Gaul, cutting short all opportunity at integration. Fortunatus directly addresses some of the tensions and complexities of Late Antique identity: “An ancient people are divided between two new kingdoms; the father stays, the son goes; the father-in-law stays, the son-in-law goes. Anyone seeing the confusion would think that the nation was emigrating, and would believe that it was going alone virtually as a captive” (43). Galswinth’s shift of identities is never complete, and she winds up a captive to her marriage, and is ultimately killed, possibly on her husband’s orders. Fortunatus cannot directly blame the king, but he does find ways to suggest that the fault lies in the fragmented polity of Gaul.

This poem resonates with the same issues of ethnicity and identity and “between-ness” that were so much a part of Ausonius’ poetry. All three of these poets, whose lives and careers span almost the entirety of Late Antiquity in Gaul, were working through the

questions of who is who and who belongs where? How are new identities layered on top of old? How do identities blend and merge? Fortunatus picks up on the tensions of identity and of people pulled between two places and two cultures when Galswinth's mother laments her daughter's departure: "Likewise, wandering here without you, I seem a foreigner, and in my own land I am both native and exile" (44). After her untimely death, Galswinth's fate echoes her mother's state of being in-between, as she becomes "a foreigner in her own tomb" (46).

Once Galswinth's murder is known, has rivers stand in for both lands and peoples: "Here the sister, there the distraught mother, with shared tears one lashes the Rhine with her tears, the other the Tejo; the Batavians shared in the grief of one, the land of Andalusia mourns here; the Waal's waters roared here, and there the Ebro's stream" (50). Echoing the work of Ausonius and Apollinarius and drawing directly on classical precedent, Fortunatus connects his landscape to the classical world. As Jones points out, in the work of classical poets,

rivers understood in an ethnographical context share in the idea that a river not only establishes a distinction between one group or state of being and another but also provides a means of connection, something that can represent the ties within a group or that can transform colonists from visitors to inhabitants. (47)

One of Fortunatus' more striking river poems, and one that has direct connections to Ausonius' *Mosella*, is poem 10.9 "On His Voyage." The poem describes Fortunatus' arrival in Gaul, and is structured around the river as vehicle for his personal rise in political status, and his transformation from stranger to welcome guest. The poem begins with a moment in which Fortunatus arrives at the royal court at Metz, but is kept at arm's length, an unknown stranger: "Coming upon the royal pair where Metz' walls stand strong, I am observed and held back from my horse by my lords. From here I am commanded to skim the Moselle by oar, a sailor, and to make my way, swiftly gliding over the trembling waters" (George, *Personal and Political* 109).

The poem then describes his river-borne experiences as he follows the royal fleet (en route to the king's wedding) down the Mosel to the Rhine confluence, and continuing up the Rhine. He travelled through Gaul, passing by key cities and "drinking in [the muses'] song," listening to his companions' voices, which "unite the sundered bank with their sweetness, and there was a single voice of song in hill and river." After this voyage, in which he recognizes both the beauty of Gaul and is, through his poetry and through music, himself brought into the landscape, he is finally received at court. The transformation wrought by Gaul's river is complete, and the question of identity might be answered at last. The poem ends with a royal feast of fish borne forth from the abundance of the river, and Fortunatus, "the stranger to the Rhine is welcomed to the feast as a citizen" (111).

The river, and his experience of it, becomes integrative. Though at first this might seem a sharp difference with the Ausonius' riverine frontier, it is instead the culmination of a Late Antique recognition that rivers were fluid boundaries, across and along which culture and identity spread. These poets represented and responded to common cultural concerns about defining, explaining, and understanding their own tenuous cultural

identities. Rivers, ever-present and ever-changing, were powerful metaphors for these men, and in their hands the rivers were themselves transformed. In their works, though dependent on classical and Roman ideas, the medieval river emerges as a distinct metaphor, just as medieval culture, though sprung from Rome, transformed and emerged from Late Antiquity with distinct forms.

Medieval rivers were drawn into Christian belief systems—they miraculously acknowledged sanctity and punished malfeasance, providing abundance, protected Christian infrastructure, and transported ideas, relics, and saints as they travelled through a converting world. As the Roman Empire dissolved and the successor kingdoms emerged in the North, the rivers became the internal roads and highways of new polities. But they also retained some of the functions of boundaries and frontier, becoming the favored sites of political treaties and negotiations. Eventually, *Romanitas*—so important to Late Antiquity—also slipped away as newer identities and expressions of culture, art, and value took over—but all of this is a different story, and one that I’m currently figuring out how to tell. For now, I leave the present study with the words of Sidonius Apollinaris from a poem that is a self-conscious embodiment of the idea of shared poetic space (Anderson, Poem 22 327). The poem is addressed to his own book of poetry—urging it to move through his circle of friends and out into the wider world, following the routes and rivers of Gaul, moving through the fields, following the fishes, and finally putting out to sea. Sidonius ends the poem with a final metaphor on river travel: “But enough! Away with you, put out from the harbour and, lest I weight you further with a load of sandy ballast up with the anchor even while these verses sound!”

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"A Life of Metal": An Ecocritical Reading of Silvia Avallone's *Acciaio*

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Abstract



Silvia Avallone's acclaimed novel *Acciaio* (2010) narrates the struggling friendship, complicated existence, and coming of age of Anna and Francesca, two teenage girls who live in a working class neighborhood in the Tuscan coastal town of Piombino, near the Lucchini steel plant where most of their blue-collar older friends and relatives work. It tells the stories of human bodies who grow, love, suffer, struggle and die, but also of nonhuman matter (iron, steel) that is created, transformed and then "lives" a parallel co-existence in the same environment. More in particular, as its title and plot suggest, the novel also deals with the close relationship and reciprocal interferences between human beings and nonhuman matter, be it inorganic, like the iron ore and the machines the workers use to produce steel, or organic, like the animals, plants and shells the girls find on a beach near the plant site. Building on some of the theoretical postulates and methodological insights provided by ecocriticism's recent "material turn", that is, focusing on the novel's representations of the encounters "between people-materialities and thing-materialities" (Bennett x), the aim of this paper is to suggest that Avallone's novel not only presents a radically alternative vision of—at least a section of—Tuscany's famed "Etruscan Coast," but also hints at the sort of posthuman ecology that regulates this particular place. Ultimately, I argue that this text, by drawing attention to the mutual connections between "organisms, ecosystems, and humanly made substances" (Iovino 10), and between the biological, socio-economic and cultural spheres, goes way beyond the story of Anna and Francesca and the industrial area of Piombino where the Lucchini factory is situated. Taking this unusual Tuscan territory as an example, Avallone's text provides a template for understanding ongoing dynamics in many other "Piombinos", be they nearby in Tuscany—the Solvay soda-ash plant in Rosignano comes to mind—elsewhere in Italy, or all around the globe.

Keywords: material ecocriticism, Silvia Avallone, industrial pollution, environmental issues

Resumen

La aclamada novela de Silvia Avallone, *Acciaio* (2010), narra la lucha de la amistad y la complicada existencia y mayoría de edad de Anna y Francesca, dos adolescentes que viven en un barrio de clase obrera en el costero pueblo Toscano de Piombino, cerca de la acerería Lucchini, donde trabajan la mayoría de sus amigos mayores y sus parientes obreros. La novela cuenta la historia de cuerpos humanos que crecen, aman, sufren, luchan, y mueren, pero también de la materia no humana (hierro, acero) que se crea, se transforma, y después "vive" una existencia paralela en el mismo entorno. En particular, tal y como sugieren el título y la trama, la novela también trata de la cercana relación y las interferencias recíprocas entre los seres humanos y la materia no humana, sea inorgánica, como el mineral de hierro y las máquinas que los trabajadores usan para producir acero, u orgánica, como los animales, las plantas y las conchas que las chicas encuentran en una playa cerca de la acerería. Usando como base algunos postulados teóricos y conocimientos metodológicos surgidos del reciente "giro material" de la ecocrítica, es decir, centrándose en las representaciones que la novela ofrece de los encuentros "entre materias-humanas y materias-cosas" (Bennett x), el objetivo de este ensayo es sugerir que la novela de Avallone no solo presenta una visión de la famosa "Costa Etrusca" de la Toscana (por lo menos una parte) radicalmente alternativa, sino que también insinúa el tipo de ecología posthumana que regula este lugar en concreto. Por último, argumento que este texto, al dirigir la atención a las conexiones mutuas entre "organismos,

ecosistemas, y sustancias hechas por humanos" (Iovino 10), y entre las esferas biológicas, socioeconómicas, y culturales, va más allá de la historia de Anna y Francesca y del área industrial de Piombino donde se encuentra la acerería Lucchini. Tomando este insólito territorio toscano como ejemplo, el texto proporciona una plantilla para entender las continuas dinámicas en muchos otros "Piombionos", estén cercanos a la Toscana (la planta de sosa Solvay en Rosignano viene a la mente), en otros lugares en Italia, o alrededor del mundo.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica material, Silvia Avallone, contaminación industrial, temas medioambientales

"As Alessio walked he crushed nettles and chunks of refractory brick underfoot. Metal saturated the ground and his skin."¹

(Silvia Avallone, *Swimming to Elba* 17)

"And human metalworkers are themselves emergent effects of the vital materiality they work."

(Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 60)

According to its official tourist website (<http://www.costadeglietruschi.it>), the section of Tuscan coast overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea branded as "Costa degli Etruschi" extends approximately one hundred kilometers, from Livorno in the North, to Piombino in the South. Directly to the west lie three of the islands forming the Tuscan Archipelago—Elba, Capraia and Gorgona. The other four—Pianosa, Giglio, Montecristo and Giannutri—are scattered further south. To the East of the Costa degli Etruschi, in its adjacent hinterland, villages such as Bolgheri and Castagneto Carducci exude the "Etruscan" aura of beauty, civilized refinement, layered history, culture and literariness. Besides Giosuè Carducci, the bard of unified Italy, who celebrated these places in his poetry in the late nineteenth century, Gabriele D'Annunzio spent at least some of his "inimitable life" in his cliff-side "Villa Godilonda" near Quercianella. A little later, yet another famous poet, Giorgio Caproni, wrote memorable lyrics about Livorno (his birthplace) and his beloved Tyrrhenian Sea. And, finally, in 1962 film director Dino Risi shot some crucial scenes of his classic *Il Sorpasso* (*The Easy Life*) on the coastal road near the fashionable and celebrity-friendly resort town of Castiglioncello.² Those whose interests veer more towards the gourmet than the literary and cinematic might also recall that one of the best red wines in the world ("Sassicaia") is produced in this area, benefitting from the mild climate and the sea breezes.

Such cultural associations and representations of place (the list is far from exhaustive) have helped boost the appeal of this geographic area. Perceived by the majority of Italians and foreigners alike as a place of leisure, a coveted Arcadian tourist

¹ "Alessio calpestava ortiche e resti di mattoni refrattari. Il metallo saturava il terreno e la sua pelle" (24). Passages quoted are taken from Antony Shugaar's English translation of *Acciaio: Swimming to Elba*.

² Actors Marcello Mastroianni, Alberto Sordi, and Paolo Panelli, and screenwriter Suso Cecchi D'Amico all owned villas and used to vacation here.

destination, the "Costa degli Etruschi" is usually appreciated for its well-tended beaches, unpolluted sea, nature reserves, archeological sites, gastronomical excellence, and, last but not least, progressive environmental policies.³

Of course, it goes without saying that this sort of Edenic, constructed perception of the area is substantially incomplete, and does not capture the real and more complex nature of the place.⁴ For example, on any given day the air quality in Livorno's industrial harbor area is quite mephitic.⁵ Tar, oil from ships and plastic debris, from large bottles to microscopic spheres, gather in even the most secluded rocky coves and beaches. Vada's famous "White Beaches", with their Caribbean-like powder sand and eerie-looking turquoise waters, are actually the direct byproduct of industrial toxic waste, loaded as they are with chemical compounds of ammonia, soda-ash, and mercury from the local site of the Belgian multinational corporation Solvay.⁶ However, at a time when Italy as a whole is facing skyrocketing unemployment rates and much greater economic and political problems, this sort of information, even on the rare occasions when it manages to reach a wider public, is generally considered an annoying curiosity, of at most marginal importance.⁷ This said, a poignant look at and realistic representation of the southernmost point of this coastal area, Piombino and surroundings, is found in a contemporary work of literary fiction: Silvia Avallone's acclaimed first novel *Acciaio* (2010).⁸ This novel problematizes the initial, idyllic picture I painted above, and simultaneously raises both local and wider, global environmental concerns.

³ I use the term "progressive" also to emphasize how Tuscany's environmental efforts and policies are presented by the media (rightly so, in many cases) as particularly advanced, if compared to those of other, euphemistically speaking, "historically less environmentally engaged" Italian regions (i.e. Campania). For example, in 2013, the international "Programma Bandiera Blu" [Blue Flag Program] (<http://www.bandierablu.org/common/index.asp>) which assigns a sought after eco-label to coastal localities that promote a sustainable management of the environment, listed and rewarded with a "blue flag" the following locations in the area: Livorno (Antignano and Quercianella); Rosignano Marittimo (Castiglioncello and Vada); Bibbona (Marina di Bibbona); Castagneto Carducci; Cecina; Piombino (Parco naturale della Sterpaia); San Vincenzo. This, of course, does not mean that the situation in Tuscany is ideal.

⁴ Interestingly, Carducci in his poem "In riva al mare"—without any clear environmental concern in mind—already mentions the Tyrrhenian Sea's "suicide schiume" [dirty foaming waters], and its "immonde prede" [unclean prey] hunted by a "cetaceo" [cetacean].

⁵ See Barbaro and Maltagliati, <http://www.arpat.toscana.it/documentazione/report/indagine-sociale-sulle-maleodoranze-intorno-all2019area-picchianti-livorno-analisi-delle-schede-di-rilevazione>.

More information may be found on the site of ARPAT (Agenzia regionale per la protezione ambientale della Toscana) <http://www.arpat.toscana.it/>.

⁶ A recent book such as K. Bertrams, N. Coupain and E. Homburg's *Solvay: History of a Multinational Family Firm* provides the reader with everything one may wish to possibly know about Solvay, its praiseworthy initiatives and innovative corporate policies, with the exception of any hint of the "history" of the effects that this "family firm" has had for the past one hundred and fifty years (and continues to have) on the environment (on Rosignano Solvay and its nearby coastal areas as well).

⁷ As I am writing this paper (Spring 2014), the Lucchini steel-plant in Piombino is (still) in trouble. Its workers are organizing strikes to protest against the potential sale of the factory to an Indian investment group.

⁸ Silvia Avallone was born in Biella in 1984. After graduating with a degree in Philosophy at the University of Bologna, she collaborated with *Il Corriere della Sera* and *Vanity Fair*. Her poetry and short fiction appeared in *Granta* and *Nuovi Argomenti*. As noted, the English translation of *Acciaio* came out in 2012 with a title, *Swimming to Elba*, which would seem to target Anglo-American readers of Frances Mayes' "Bella Tuscany" book series (if so, these readers may not find exactly what they expected). A cinematic adaptation with the same title as the novel, *Acciaio*, directed by Stefano Mordini, was premiered in 2012.

Set in 2001, *Acciaio*'s main plot line tells the story of the struggling friendship, complicated existence, dreams, and coming of age of Anna and Francesca, two teenage girls who live in a working class neighborhood in the industrial quarter of Piombino. Most of their relatives and friends work in the nearby Lucchini steel plant. At the same time, as its title suggests, the novel also deals with the close relationship and reciprocal interferences between human beings (their own bodies and selves) and nonhuman matter, be it inorganic, like the iron ore and the machines the workers use to produce steel, the combination of concrete, asbestos and rust with which their tenement houses are built, or organic, like the animals, plants, algae and shells the girls find on their secret beach near the plant. This relationship and interference is both literal and symbolic. For instance, human beings may assume "thing-like" qualities, like Francesca's father, who is significantly called a "Whatsisname" ("coso") after losing his finger, and objects, which may in turn display uncanny anthropomorphic and vital qualities, like the fused metal which is subtly assimilated into the flow of blood (16), or the blast furnace "A-Fo 4" that is described as a "vast burgeoning organism" that "digests, ruminates, and belches out" twenty-four hours a day (16).

By building on some of the theoretical postulates and methodological insights provided by ecocriticism's recent "material turn," that is, by focusing on the novel's representations of the encounters between people and things, of a space in which the human protagonists are intimately entangled with nonhuman entities and, in short, of a situation in which bodies, machines, substances and landscapes are interlaced and collectively share agency, the aim of this essay is to suggest that Avallone's novel not only presents an alternative vision of (at least a section of) Tuscany's famed "Etruscan Coast," but also illustrates the "complexity of levels, at once ecological, political . . . artistic, cultural, that craft the life of this place" (Iovino, "Bodies of Naples" 98). I would like to argue that this text, by drawing attention to the mutual connections between organisms, ecosystems, and objects, and between the biological, social, and technological spheres, may go far beyond the main story of Anna, Francesca, the industrial area of Piombino and the Lucchini factory. Taking this fictional, "unusual," but also very real Tuscan territory as an example, Avallone's novel provides a template with which to better understand similar, ongoing dynamics in many other coastal, rural, or urban "Piombinos," be they nearby in Tuscany (the Solvay soda-ash plant in Rosignano comes again to mind), elsewhere in Italy, or anywhere around the globe.

While it would be impossible (not to mention redundant) in this context to provide an exhaustive summary either of the philosophical genealogy or of the growing theories and scholarship on "new materialisms" that, in recent years, have contributed to, and greatly expanded the range of environmental studies "beyond nature", let me at least sketch the underlying ideas and (more ecological) implications of this turn to materiality that are especially relevant to my discussion of *Acciaio*.

To limit the discussion to some of the scholars quoted so far (whose work I consider particularly inspiring for my discussion), I will just point out that part of my title, "A Life of Metal," hints at the homonymous chapter in Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. The major claim of her book, which expands on a

materialist tradition that follows the line "Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze more than Hegel-Mark-Adorno" (xiii), is that there is an active vitality intrinsic to matter, that to separate what is "inert" from what is "vital" is more difficult than one thinks, and that the agencies of nonhuman materials and forces ("operating in nature, in the human body, and in human artifacts," xvi) need to be considered to ultimately "counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (xvi). The section of her book titled "A Life of Metal," in particular, following insights by Deleuze and Guattari, convincingly questions a traditional "association of metal with passivity or a dead thingness" and observes that "it is metal that best reveals this quivering effervescence; it is metal, bursting with a life, that gives rise to 'the prodigious idea of Nonorganic Life'" (55). As the earlier quotes from the novel already suggest, this kind of observation seems to resonate quite well with some of the dynamics and situations described in *Acciaio*.

Bennett's positions on material agency and her ideas on a posthuman inseparability of human and nonhuman entities, themselves "'emergences' whose existence and meanings are strictly connected to the discursive dimensions with which they are entangled" (Iovino, "Steps" 135) are shared by a number of other scholars who (to simplify) generally agree in viewing the world as a place in which everything is intermeshed and interferes with everything else, and where, by extension, the primacy and centrality traditionally assigned to human beings and their discourse at the expense of other forms of life and/or "things" (i.e. the anthropo-logo-centric perspective) is radically questioned.

Thus, for example, when Andrew Pickering states that we all live in the "mangle of practice" and that "everyday life has this character of coping with material agency, agency that comes at us from outside the human realm and that cannot be reduced to anything within that realm," (6) he wishes to surpass the dichotomies society/nature, nature/culture and human/nonhuman. Similarly, and despite her different disciplinary angle and emphasis, when Stacy Alaimo introduces the notion of "trans-corporeality" to indicate "the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment' . . . the flow of substances . . . between people, places and economic/political systems" (2-9), and views the self as "a process of interacting agencies rather than a fixed, immobile and self-referential identity" (qtd. in Iovino, "Steps" 138), she shares an interest in moving beyond traditional juxtapositions of matter, agency and meaning.

The work of additional scholars (from Bruno Latour and Gregory Bateson to Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti) could certainly provide a more nuanced and detailed picture of the ramifications and consequences that this material turn has for ecocriticism. I would just like to emphasize two points for my limited purposes. First, that one of the main objectives of this interdisciplinary encounter is to re-think "the borders of the human," and develop "a more inclusive vision of the earthly dynamics" (Iovino, "Steps" 144). And, secondly, that within such a vision "there is . . . a mutual

porosity, an intra-action, between individuals and their landscapes" (Iovino, "Bodies of Naples" 105).⁹

From the material ecocritical perspective delineated above, *Acciaio's* significance seems thus to rest in its representation of various transformations of human and nonhuman bodies (be they those of the girls, the animals, the industrial products, or the land itself), on that of the interactions between these bodies and their environment, and on the mutual transformation of narrative, landscape and nonhuman subjects. While depicting an intimate connection between organisms, ecosystems and humanly made substances, the novel ultimately also dramatizes the risky and potentially hazardous consequences that such a connection may entail. That is, it illustrates how difficult, if not impossible, it is to isolate the health or illness of geographic spaces from the health or illness of existential spaces. As the narrator asks: "What does it mean to grow up in a complex of four big tenements shedding sections of balconies parts and chunks of asbestos into a courtyard where little kids play alongside older kids dealing drugs and old people who reek of decay?" (24).¹⁰

Avallone's novel seems to hint right from (and especially at) its inception at this intersection between the biological and the social, at the mingling of bodies and world, at the "porous dimension in which bodies are absorbed by the world, and the world... is absorbed by bodies" (Iovino, "Bodies of Naples" 107). The narration significantly opens with the image of Francesca's attractive and sexually maturing body observed by her dull father (Enrico) from a distance (the balcony of his tenement apartment), as, together with her best friend Anna, it moves on, and interacts with, Piombino's Beach of Via Stalingrado. There is no question that, despite its "fatherly" provenance, this still is a quintessential male gaze which, following an ancient and well-known trope, dissects and fragments her figure in detail, unavoidably objectifying her:

Within the round blur of the lens, the body, headless, shifted slightly. A backlit wedge of flesh pulled into focus... Muscles flexing just above the knee, the arc of the calf... a gleaming blond head of hair... And the dimples on the cheeks, and the hollow between the shoulder blades, and the indentation of the belly button, and all the rest. (Avallone 3)¹¹

Here, however, I wish to leave the rightful impulse to analyze this passage from a gender and/or feminist perspective to someone else and, instead, merely stress the literal meaning of the word "object," that is, the "thingness" of Francesca, her being immediately introduced as belonging to an apparently transitional ontological status, between whole and part, human and thing ("headless"). Shifting attention to the beach where she is frolicking, one may then observe that this is a place where, as expressions

⁹ "Material ecocriticism relates therefore to landscapes as material narratives of a society's physical and cultural transformations" (Iovino, "Material" 61).

¹⁰ "Cosa significa crescere in un complesso di quattro casermoni, da cui piovono pezzi di balcone e di amianto, in un cortile dove i bambini giocano accanto a ragazzi che spacciano e vecchie che puzzano?" (32).

¹¹ "Nel cerchio sfocato della lente la figura si muoveva appena, senza testa. Uno spicchio di pelle zoomata in controtuce... i muscoli tesi sopra il ginocchio, la curva del polpaccio... una splendida chioma bionda... E le fossette sulle guance, e la fossa tra le scapole, e quella dell'ombelico, e tutto il resto" (9).

such as "an ankle dusted with sand"; "[she]plunged into the water"; "the expanse of flesh pebbled with salt" indicate (3, 4),¹² the sand, salt and water stick to, and "mangle" with her, but also where, at the same time and in a parallel dynamics, "the sand was mixed with rust and garbage; sewer pipes ran down the middle; and no one went there but criminals and the poor folk from the public housing" (4).¹³ Despite the fact that access to this beach seems to be, with an ironical twist, limited by one's (low)socio-economic and (affirmative) penal status, all the substances at play cannot but actually intermingle, disregarding any real or constructed differences and hierarchies, any distinction between high or low. Thus, the sand becomes a part of Francesca's attractive young body and, at the same time, actively mixes with the rust, the trash and the industrial waste.

This condition of material porosity may immediately raise some questions: first, what may the direct or indirect consequences of this situation be? Second, who could tell with absolute certainty that the sand (or any other human/nonhuman matter) coming from this degraded beach will not one day move around and risk contaminating with its disturbing, or potentially poisonous presence also the nearby, shimmering "white beaches on the Isle of Elba... an unattainable paradise. The inviolate domain of the Milanese, the Germans, the silky-skinned tourists in black SUVs and sunglasses" (10)?¹⁴ And, finally, who, and/or what, will be eventually *Swimming to Elba*, to refer to the market-smart title translation of *Acciaio* in English? Of course, the novel will eventually provide its answers to at least some of these queries, but from these initial pages it may already be possible to suggest that the scenario Avallone is depicting is one where there cannot be pure, clear-cut distinctions and solid boundaries between different bodies, or between inside and outside, where substances, be they organic or inorganic, natural or artificial, mix together and, in short, where human beings are always entangled, with both other subjects and other objects.

The narrative provides another, literal instance of the mutuality between the human and the nonhuman by reminding us that the large size and growth of Enrico's own body has been determined by external circumstances and materials: "from childhood, he'd sculpted his muscles by hoeing and digging the earth. He had become a giant in the tomato fields, and, later, shoveling coking coal" (5),¹⁵ before the following chapter takes us inside the perimeter of the Lucchini factory. In these artfully crafted pages, one finds even clearer kinds of corporeal and material entanglements. The opening scene in the factory chapter is of a fistfight between Alessio (Anna's brother) and another, younger factory worker guilty of having verbally disrespected Anna. It informs us right away not only of the inherent violence, energy and power this place cultivates and projects, but also that it is one where distinctions between human and

¹² "La caviglia sporca di sabbia," "si iniettava dentro un'onda," "pelle intarsiata di sale" (9, 10).

¹³ "La sabbia si mescolava alla ruggine e alle immondizie, in mezzo ci passavano gli scarichi, e ci andavano soltanto i delinquenti e i poveri cristi delle case popolari" (9, 10).

¹⁴ "Spiagge bianche dell'isola d'Elba... un paradiso impossibile. Il regno illibato dei milanesi, dei tedeschi, i turisti satinati in Cayenne nero e occhiali da sole" (17).

¹⁵ "Fin da bambino si era scolpito i muscoli a forza di zappare la terra. Si era fatto un gigante nei campi di pomodori, e poi spalando carbon coke" (11).

nonhuman, inert and living matter are particularly hard to make. Thus, in the same way in which inorganic substances, like the iron filings smearing the face and being swallowed by Alessio during his fight ("his whole face, filthy with pig iron... He had to swallow a huge gob of spit and iron filings to keep calm" 14-15)¹⁶ define and become an integral part of the human subject, organic matter is processed by the body of the plant, and ends up taking part in the creation of its final product.

Bennett's expression of "material vitality" (or "vital materiality" 60), indicating "the elusive idea of a materiality that is *itself* heterogeneous, itself a differential of intensities, itself *a life*" (57), seems especially fitting in the context of the industrial factory plant and its various theriomorphic components, unfailingly described by Avallone as being an extended (or, to be precise, "burgeoning") animated organism. A word like "secretion", more commonly associated with the physiological sphere, is used to depict the multiple, hybrid agencies involved in the production and coming into existence (or "birth") of steel: "Steel does not exist in nature, it is not an elementary substance. It's a secretion of thousands of human hands, electric meters, mechanical arms and every so often the skin of a cat that's tumbled into the molten alloy" (Avallone 14).¹⁷ Metal—continues Bennett—"is always metallurgical, always an alloy of the endeavors of many bodies, always something worked on by geological, biological, and often human agencies" (60). Multiple agencies and the secretion of "many bodies" are certainly involved here, to a point where both human and mechanical arms, electricity and even some occasional cat fur become the necessary ingredients to be mixed in and, in turn, swallowed up by the "ladles" where the melting takes place (15). Such an enormous container is just the first, surreal inhabitant of this fantastic, trans-corporeal ecosystem:

It's an entire zoo in here: pig iron everywhere, cranes of every species and variety. Rusted animals with horned heads... The dense black sludge of molten metal was bubbling in the crucibles, potbellied swiveling barrels running along on the mill trains. Giant tanks on wheels that looked like primordial creatures... Metal was everywhere, in the process of birth. Unceasing cascades of steel and glistening cast iron and viscous light. Torrents, rapids, estuaries of molten metal coursing through the flow lines, into the ampules of the ladles and pouring out into the tundishes to drain into the molds for furnaces and trains... Raw materials were being transformed at every hour of the day and night... You could feel the blood rushing through your arteries at a fantastic velocity in there, and from the arteries to the capillaries, while your muscles built up in tiny fractures: You were regressing to the animal state. Alessio was small and alive in this vast burgeoning organism. (15-16)¹⁸

¹⁶ "Il viso sporco di ghisa . . . dovette ingoiare un bolo grosso così di saliva e limatura di ferro" (21-2).

¹⁷ "L'acciaio non esiste in natura, non è una sostanza elementare. La secrezione di migliaia di braccia umane, contatori elettrici, bracci meccanici, e a volte la pelliccia di un gatto che ci finisce dentro" (21).

¹⁸ "Un intero zoo: nel cielo sveltavano torri merlate, gru di ogni genere e specie. Animali arrugginiti dalle teste cornute... La melma densa e nera del metallo fuso ribolliva nelle siviere, barili panciuti trasportati dai treni siluro. Cisterne munite di ruote che assomigliavano a creature primordiali... Il metallo era ovunque, allo stato nascente. Ininterrotte cascate di acciaio e ghisa lucente e luce vischiosa. Torrenti, rapide, estuari di metallo fuso lungo gli argini delle colate e nelle ampolle dei barili... A ogni ora del giorno e della notte la materia veniva trasformata... Ti sentivi il sangue circolare a ritmo pazzesco, là in mezzo, dalle arterie ai capillari, e i muscoli aumentare in piccole fratture: retrocedevi allo stato animale. Alessio era piccolo e vivo in questo smisurato organismo (22-3).

The various references to, on the one hand, animals, streams, rapids and estuaries and, on the other, human arteries, capillaries and muscles make evident Avallone's wish to rhetorically correlate different bodies that are traditionally considered separate and, in turn, to analogically assimilate the artificial landscape of technology and the processes of industrial production to natural and physiological phenomena. In fact, the awe-inspiring energy, excitement and dangerous beauty that characterize this place evoke the aesthetic notion of the "technological sublime," perhaps in a peculiar postmodern (and posthuman) "hybrid" manifestation.¹⁹ In other words, a manifestation where nature or, better yet, the language of nature, has not been completely displaced by (that of) the machine, but is still reappearing, and exploited to convey a particularly striking experience. At the same time, however, Timothy Morton's reminder that "Nature as such appears when we lose it, and it's known as a loss" (133), may quickly make us realize that this resurfacing and discursive presence of nature is nothing but a spectral trace, a linguistic remnant and, as such, also the sign of an actual loss, an absence. And among the ramifications of this uncertain situation seem not only to be that one cannot again be sure of the location of borders, of the meaning of nature, but also, albeit tangentially, that "it is impossible to separate matters of social and environmental concern from discursive ones" (Iovino and Oppermann 463).²⁰

"Where does the body end and 'nonhuman nature' begin?" Stacy Alaimo asks in her *Bodily Natures* (11). The passage from *Acciaio* quoted above provides a potential answer to her question by implying that technology, animality, landscape and humanity are all intermeshed. This particular human being, Alessio, like every other thing, is just a part of this more-than-human, immense organism. His substance is "inseparable from the environment" (Alaimo 2), and his life and vitality are literally dependent on (and even "enhanced" by) those of the steel plant which, in turn, depends on him to function properly.²¹

Various instances of the "vibrancy" of matter and its transformations, of its "various degrees of agentic capacity" (Iovino and Oppermann 461) seem thus to surface in these pages: "[Alessio] shot a quick glance at the blonde on the *Maxim* calendar. Constant yearning for sex, in the mill. The reaction of the human body inside the titanic body of industry: It's not a factory but material changing form" (16).²² If taken literally, these lines not only suggest, along with Bennett, that a factory and a human being are

¹⁹ On the technological sublime, see Slack and Wise. The authors observe how the machine has supplanted nature with "almost religious like reverence" (18).

²⁰ "Apparently, the very dynamics of environmental degradation lie not only in our social and economic practices and imperialist attitudes to nature, but in the structures of the discursive formations that have led to such destructive mechanisms in the first place" (Iovino and Oppermann 464). In this light, the comparison the novel makes between a cascade of melted steel and one of water could contribute to conveying the former's apparent naturalness and, therefore, diminish (or eliminate) the potential environmental concerns associated with it.

²¹ "Everyone knows, everyone takes it for granted that inside the Lucchini plant, deep down in the bowels of the place, the flesh of human legs, arms, and heads is stirring" (73) ["Uno lo sa, lo dà per scontato, che dentro la Lucchini, nelle viscere, si muove la carne di gambe, braccia, teste umane" (86)].

²² "Diede un'occhiata alla bionda del calendario Maxim. Perenne desiderio di scopare, là dentro. La reazione del corpo umano nel corpo titanico dell'industria: che non è una fabbrica, ma la materia che cambia forma." (23)

both bodies constituted by and manifesting merely different shapes and degrees of material animation, but also that it is through their respective agencies, their mutual intercourse, that a final production (be it industrial/inorganic, like steel, or biological/organic, like an actual "secretion") may be completed.²³ Significantly, although Alessio is aroused by looking at the image of a human (though virtual) pin-up blonde on a calendar (one of many hanging around the factory), the text seems to subtly suggest that the monstrous, nonhuman body of the plant blast furnace is the real (additional and/or involuntary) target of his physiological reaction since he is, after all, responsible for "inseminating" it so that it can deliver its final product: "The artificial insemination took place in a test tube as tall as a skyscraper, the rust-flaked urn of A-Fo 4—AltoForno4, or BlastFurnace4—that has hundreds of arms and bellies and three horns in place of ahead" (16).²⁴

In other words, the textual closeness between, on the one hand, Alessio's "wish to fuck," and, on the other, the action of "artificial insemination" that sparks the creation of steel, can hardly be random. Not surprisingly, both A-Fo 4's (plus the rest of the machinery's) animal-like features and animated, "biological" behaviors, and Alessio's mixed, hybrid corporeality, are further underlined in the following paragraphs, together with a clear hint at the hazardous byproducts and catastrophic effects created by such an erotic human-machine intercourse:

He could feel the pressure of it at the nape of his neck, the black tower of the A-Fo 4, a giant spider that digests, ruminates, and belches out... Bluish fluorescences, toxic clouds in volumes sufficient to poison not only the Val di Cornia, but all of Tuscany... tons of metal whirling like birds, yellow clouds of carbon smoke, black at the mouths of the smokestacks. It's called continuous integrated steel production. As Alessio walked he crushed nettles and chunks of refractory brick underfoot. Metal saturated the ground and his skin... the elementary motion of machinery that is no different from life. (16-17)²⁵

What may first capture one's attention in this literal and metaphorical scenario of contamination is not only the intimacy of Alessio's and A-Fo 4's different, and yet physically proximate bodies, the indication of the various and ubiquitous embodiments of metal (and other materials) or, finally, the explicit analogy and direct attribution of life to the technological object. At another level, these lines potentially evoke also a

²³ Regarding "secretions," the fact that, later on, the narrator will refer to the plant as "steel jungle", and to "the incessant screeching, roaring, the ejaculations of the mill" (291) ["La giungla d'acciaio, lo stridore continuo, ruggiti, eiaculazioni di impianti" (337)] seems again particularly revealing of a confusion between technology and biology. Mario Perniola's observations in his study, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* may also come to mind here.

²⁴ "La fecondazione assistita avveniva in un'ampolla alta come un grattacielo, l'urna rugginosa di Afo 4 che ha centinaia di braccia e pance, e un tricornio al posto della testa" (23).

²⁵ "Se la sentiva premere sulla nuca, la torre nera di Afo 4, il gigantesco ragno che digerisce, rimescola erutta... Fluorescenze azzurognole, nubi tossiche in quantità sufficiente ad ammorbare non solo la Val di Cornia, ma la Toscana intera... tonnellate di metallo vorticavano come uccelli, nuvole gialle di carbonio, nere dalle bocche delle ciminiere. Si chiama ciclo continuo integrale. Alessio calpesta ortiche e mattoni refrattari. Il metallo saturava il terreno e la sua pelle... il movimento elementare della macchina che è uguale alla vita" (24-5).

"monstrous/toxic birth"²⁶ and, in turn, what Rosi Braidotti has "coded as *zoe*... the non-human, vital [generative] force of Life... the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains" (60) that implies an expanded (i.e. post-anthropocentric) notion of the relational self and, at the same time, also alludes to *Thanatos*, *zoe*'s complementary "other side," the "death-bound or necropolitical face of post-anthropocentrism" (118).²⁷

Alessio's encounters with organic and inorganic corpses including "the rotting corpse of a rat," "the posthumous carcasses of the three blast furnaces that hadn't yet been dismantled," followed by his view of the local population of resident cats "all of them mangy and sick, all of them calico, with black and white patches, from the relentless inbreeding," as he walks through the plant site towards its exit "where the canebrakes, the marshes, begin, and you could breathe a sigh of relief" (18)²⁸ may thus suggest again a context of extended, transversal vulnerability, since a rat, the blast furnaces, a cat and, eventually, Alessio himself are all perishable objects. Just like life, death, destruction and illness are not the prerogative of just one thing. As Braidotti observes, "the body [any body] doubles up as the potential corpse it has always been" (119).

In the advanced capitalist dynamics which the surviving Lucchini plant still embodies, one where "the West was reproducing the world and exporting it" (18),²⁹ vitality and decay, beginning and end coexist, and affect multiple corporealities. The apocalyptic landscape described in the novel, one where "Some sectors of the plant were dying; smokestacks and industrial sheds were being demolished with dynamite," while, at the same time, "millworkers had their fun, riding the power shovels like bucking bulls, their transistor radios blaring out at full volume, an amphetamine tablet dissolving under their tongues" (18),³⁰ seems to perfectly capture the sort of complex dynamics and encompassing proximity between inorganic death and organic life (and vice-versa). Alessio's own absurd death at the end of the novel, in turn, further reminds us of the entanglements and environmental inter-connections addressed so far. On the one hand,

²⁶ David del Principe's "eco-gothic" approach, also connected with questions of industrialization, comes to mind in this instance.

²⁷ Braidotti writes that "Life as *zoe* also encompasses what we call 'death'" (134). The objective of her "posthuman affirmative ethics" is to stress the positive, "productive aspect of the life-death continuum" and, "the politics of life itself as a relentlessly generative force including and going beyond death" (121). That is, from her posthuman, vitalist brand of materialism, "the emphasis on the impersonality of life is echoed by an analogous reflection on death," and the latter "could not be further removed from the notion of death as the inanimate and indifferent state of matter, the entropic state to which the body is supposed to 'return'" (131-137). It should be clarified that I am quoting Braidotti especially to underline that death (like life) "is not a human prerogative," and the proximity of human and nonhuman entities, but that, at least in the context of this novel, I am not able to individuate any of its "productive aspect[s]." I tend to see more the negative, lethal effects of industrialized modernity on multiple subjects/objects.

²⁸ "Il cadavere putrefatto di un topo," "le carcasse postume dei tre altoforni non ancora smantellati," "tutti malati, tutti bianchi e neri a forza di incrociarsi sempre tra loro," "cominciavano i canneti, le paludi e tu potevi tirare un sospiro di sollievo" (24/26).

²⁹ "L'Occidente . . . riproduce il mondo e lo esporta" (25).

³⁰ "Alcuni rami della fabbrica morivano, ciminiere e capannoni venivano fatti saltare con il tritolo," "gli operai... si divertivano a cavalcare gli escavatori come tori, con le radioline portatili a palla e una pasticca di anfetamina sciolta sotto la lingua" (25).

in fact, like a dismantled blast furnace he represents a human "posthumous carcass" (recalling one of Braidotti's "potential corpse[s]"), a disposable "sector of the plant," and on the other, as his own corporeality vanishes, he ultimately becomes indistinguishable from, and merged with, the posthuman body of the plant: "Alessio had . . . stopped being a human body. . . had become a puddle of blood, spreading between the scattered steel rods, a blinding pool. *Not Alessio. A cat.*" (341)³¹

The novel's initial chapters are not the only sections that could benefit from a material ecocritical analysis. References to the dangerously attractive vibrancy of matter, and to the corporeal interchanges between "human bodies, non-human creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Alaimo 2) recur in additional, significant moments in the narration. When, for example, Anna and Francesca hop on the scooters of their young suitors and ride to an abandoned, secluded area within the Lucchini plant, another "dead branch of the factory [that] had been reduced to a carcass of rusted metal... industrial cemetery" (53),³² one immediately notes the juxtaposition between the burning desire and sexual vitality of the adolescents and the lifeless, scorching condition of the place. However, it does not take long to realize that the terms of such a juxtaposition can also be reversed, since multiple, active substances coming from the plant are entering and vitally affecting everyone's body, implicitly turning the four friends into additional, endangered appendices of this hellish ecosystem:

You could feel the light coating of coal dust filtering into your lungs, sticking to your body, blackening your skin... The body was pounding hard along with the metals in the furnaces. Rebar, slabs, billets: along with the heart, the arteries, the aorta... The incessant, raucous, lament of the steel mills – you could feel it vibrating deep in your bones... Lead and the heavy scent of iron burned the lungs and the nostrils... you could feel yourself liquefying. (52-53)³³

Once again, human and nonhuman matters intermesh in this environment up to a point in which substance-saturated human bodies, just like the metals involved in the production of steel, may literally liquefy. At that time, words like "dead" and "burning" could ideally describe both a few pieces of anthropomorphized broken machinery ("an excavator with a twisted arm and an upside-down bucket. Dead and seething with heat." 53) or, from a posthumous perspective, also those young, human bodies. Not surprisingly, Enrico's own body following his job-related accident, with his fractured ribs, vertebrae and shattered hand is not only broken (just like the "excavator") and literally transformed into a useless thing ("Then he wasn't even a first and last name anymore. Whatsisname, he'd become" 248), but his amputated finger also directly

³¹ "Carcassa postuma," "ramo della fabbrica," "Alessio aveva... cessato di essere un corpo, ed era diventato... una pozza di sangue allargata tra i tondi, una polla abbacinante. Non Alessio. Un gatto" (341).

³² "Ramo morto della fabbrica [che] si era ridotto a una carcassa di ruggine... [un] cimitero industriale." (64-65). This is an important scene in the novel because it reveals Francesca's attraction and queer desire for Anna.

³³ "Lo spolverino prodotto dal carbone te lo sentivi entrare nei polmoni appiccicarsi addosso, annerire la pelle... il corpo batteva forte insieme ai metalli nei forni. Le barre, i blumi, le billette: insieme al cuore, le arterie, l'aorta... Il lamento rauco, perenne delle acciaierie, te lo sentivi vibrare nelle ossa... Il piombo, l'odore pesante del ferro bruciava i polmoni e le narici... ti sentivi liquefare" (64).

mirrors a parallel, physical loss in the industrial body of the plant: "The decline in the price of steel on the world market over the past two decades had forced the steelworks to dismantle A-Fo 1, A-Fo 2, and A-Fo 3. They were gone now. Like his finger. An enormous hole in the toxin-saturated earth" (248).³⁴ As Enrico's finger vanishes, anticipating by synecdoche both the disappearance of the blast furnaces and of Alessio, he thus becomes "A zero in the depressed system"(249) another discardable entity in this "inhuman," market-driven space of corporeal confusion and contamination.

After having focused my analysis on the pages of *Acciaio* dedicated to the representation of the Lucchini factory and the iteration of some mutual interactions between the steel plant and the novel's main characters, I wish to move towards the conclusion of this essay by making a few observations on the "canebrake," the girls' secret beach, which is the apparent natural other of the factory. I say apparent because, despite the obvious differences, there also is a certain similarity between these two crucial places in the narration, especially in terms of their both being sites where human and nonhuman elements coalesce, where equal importance is assigned to subjects and objects, and, finally, where the vitality (and, by extension, the mortality) of matter is made evident. Animals, animate and inanimate things, "human actors and their words" (Iovino and Opperman 469), waste products, debris and garbage, are all constitutive parts (also) of this ecosystem, and implicitly convey an essential continuity and mutuality between the industrial/technological and the supposedly natural. Thus, in the "canebrake" Francesca and Anna, significantly "emitting little, scarcely human bursts of giggles," (94) become just "a pair of excrescences on that murky landscape," (94) their sweat mixing with the sap from the vegetation, their soiled bodies merging with (and ontologically similar to) those of the insects, the algae, the shells, the cats, and all the other things, either alive or dead, that end up here:

Their damp hair, scented with shampoo, was gradually being impregnated with another odor: a mixture of sweat and sap. The downy growth on the surface of the plants caused their skin to itch. It felt as if they were walking through wool... The beach was piled high with seaweed... Fishermen came here to leave the broken hulks of boats to save money on dumping fees... Balls of neptune grass by the million, all tossed up by the sea right there. On the shore they broke down into a black mucilage, a muck that reeked of pee and fresh bread... They chewed the algae. They sank their faces into the damp and rough furs of the cats... That dead zone of the coastline was reduced to a primordial broth of things... a ladle, a ceramic tile. [Francesca] d hunker over her digging and shout if she unearthed anything human. (94-5-6)³⁵

³⁴ "Poi, non era più neanche un nome e cognome. *Coso*, era diventato," "La flessione dell'acciaio sul mercato, nel giro di due decenni, aveva costretto a smantellare Afo 1, 2, e 3. Non c'erano più. Come il suo dito. Un buco enorme nel terreno saturo di veleno... Uno zero nel sistema depresso" (288).

³⁵ "Sudore misto a linfa. La peluria delle piante pruriginava a contatto con la pelle. Sembrava di camminare nella lana... La spiaggia era un cumulo di alghe... I pescatori ci venivano a gettare le carcasse per non pagare la tassa dei rifiuti... Posidonie brune a milioni, riversate dal mare tutte lì. Sulla riva si sfibravano in una mucillagine nera, una poltiglia che sapeva di pipì e di pane... Masticavano le alghe. Affondavano il muso nelle pellicce umide e ruvide dei gatti... Quel punto morto della costa era ridotto a un brodo primordiale di cose... un mestolo, una piastrella di ceramica. [Francesca] Si chinava a scavare e gridava, se dissotterrava qualcosa di umano" (109-111).

The ironic contrast emerging in these lines between the lifeless condition of this coastal area (a "dead zone") and the fact that, at the same time, it also constitutes a "primordial broth" cannot be overlooked. Not only is this apparent necroregion³⁶ literally at odds with its definition as a "primordial broth," that is, the hot, carbon-based solution that is allegedly at the origin of organic life on Earth but, in turn, such a life-giving substance is paradoxically constituted by human made things and inorganic debris. In other words, these are objects which simultaneously suggest their condition as both "dead" and "alive," or as Bennett puts it, which "at one moment disclos[e] themselves as dead stuff and at the next as live presence: junk, then claimant; inert matter, then live wire" (5).³⁷

This condition seems to re-emerge also in a later, related passage. When, after her falling out with Francesca, Anna revisits the beach alone, and reminisces while gazing at the garbage deposited by the sea: "Empty gas canisters, used sanitary napkins, glass and plastic bottles... She walked by the cadavers of things. There were broken dishes and fruit juice cartons. There were plastic spoons and forks and shredded plastic plates. The rusty shower up there, and here a broken toy pail" (221), this sight deeply affects her. This vision of desolation and abandon stirs her memory, increases her awareness of the effects this place has on her ("Places cling to you. Places become extraneous to you", 222) and, most significantly, makes her realize that there are "The things that come back, the things that can never come back" (222),³⁸ implicitly associating Francesca (and their interrupted friendship) with one of those "moving" things.

Once again, therefore, Bennett's observations that "a vital materiality can never really be thrown 'away', for it continues its activities even as discarded or unwanted," and her affirmation that inanimate things have the "curious ability... to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6), would seem to aptly describe the kind of interactions between human and nonhuman entities mentioned above.

At this point, I should not need to stress either how Avallone's novel deeply understands the life and mind of this particular place; how it is informed by a marked sensibility to and awareness of the environmental, socio-economic, and political issues that characterize Piombino's industrial territory and its surroundings, or the extent to which the narration repeatedly alludes to the kind of coextensivity across bodies, and blurring between people, things and landscapes, which has been variously theorized by scholars of vital materialism and posthumanism. Therefore, I prefer to conclude by reflecting on a few of the larger ecological implications of this closeness and mutual

³⁶ I am borrowing the concept of "necroregion" from Serenella Iovino, to indicate an extension of space (such as the "canebrake" but also the whole area of the Lucchini factory) which shows evident signs of ecological and cultural abandonment.

³⁷ In the section "Thing-Power I: Debris," Bennett describes a (rather similar) encounter she had "On a sunny Tuesday morning... in the grate over the storm drain to the Chesapeake Bay," and writes: "Glove, pollen, rat, cap, stick... I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert" (4-5).

³⁸ Cisterne vuote, assorbenti usati, bottiglie di plastica e di vetro... Passava accanto ai cadaveri delle cose. C'erano cocci e cartoni di succo di frutta. C'erano posate e piatti di plastica sventrati. Le docce arrugginite lassù, e qui un secchiello rotto" (258); "I luoghi ti impastano. I luoghi ti diventano estranei" (258); "Le cose che ritornano e le cose che non possono tornare." (258-259)

relationship between organic and inorganic substances. The first is that, as the novel depicts some of the dynamics specific to this localized industrial Tuscan landscape, it also implicitly evokes comparable, global capitalist practices of advanced industrial production and consumption, and their real effects on other human/nonhuman bodies. And the second is that, while doing so, it reminds us of literature's power to provide readers with knowledge, awareness and "the critical instruments necessary to develop their own 'strategy of survival' both environmentally and politically" (Iovino, "Naples 2008" 343).

Serenella Iovino writes that a story may initiate the practice of "restoring the imagination of place" only when is "open," that is, when it shows "awareness (about values and critical issues), projectuality (vision of the future), and empathy (as a mutually enhancing dialectic amid different subjects)" ("Restoring the Imagination" 107). Even though ecological questions may not be its most obvious or principal subject, *Acciaio* seems to be "open" in the way Iovino describes, and, as such, is also an example of what she calls "narrative reinhabitation," that is a narrative able to affect a taken-for-granted knowledge of the world (here, of a particular world), and with the ultimate potential to transform a (quasi) necroregion into an "evolutionary landscape" (112).

In its final pages, the novel hints at how such an evolution may look in Piombino's industrial area, by alluding to some of the changes the Lucchini plant will likely undergo: "People were already starting to talk about reclamation, about dismantling the steel mills. Converting the local economy, focusing on tourism, the service industry... Like the Colosseum, like the hulls of the fishing boats stranded on the sand, the blast furnace, too, in a decade or so, would become the property of the cats" (303).³⁹

We learned that the substances that constitute this place and those that make the humans who inhabit it are not that different: what happens to one may eventually happen to the other. It should not be surprising, therefore, that, in the end, Francesca, now described as "the most radiant of all the elements" (308),⁴⁰ travels together with her best friend Anna from Piombino to Elba, symbolically taking the place and reversing the trip of the iron ore that was once shipped from Elba's mines to Piombino's industries. If, on the (optimistic) one hand, this action could be a first step in the right direction towards such a (posthuman) form of restoration and reinhabitation, on the (less so) other, it cannot but recall and, in turn, further unsettle the idyllic view of the Etruscan coast I initially sketched. As the text re-imagines and re-draws the borders between these Arcadian and industrial spaces, it also reminds us that any landscape requires more complex and hybridized readings than those we are usually exposed to. The "blue flag" I mentioned at the beginning may now well show a hint of steel grey.

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³⁹ "Cominciavano già a parlare di bonifica, di smantellamento. Convertire l'economia locale, puntare al turismo e al terziario... Come il Colosseo, come gli scafi arenati sulla spiaggia, anche l'altoforno, nel giro di un decennio, se lo sarebbero preso i gatti" (351).

⁴⁰ "Era il più radioso fra gli elementi" (358).

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"Heaps of scrap metal and defunct machinery": Assemblages, Ethics and Affect in W. G. Sebald's Orford Ness

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Abstract



At the beginning of W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, the narrator sets off to walk the county of Suffolk to try and shake off the sense of emptiness he experiences whenever he finishes a long piece of work. However, far from effecting the kind of reconnection associated with the Thoreauvian saunterer or the walkers of narrative scholarship, this journey leaves him prey to a "paralysing horror" which assails him "when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident even in that remote place". Nowhere are these 'traces of destruction' more apparent than on the almost-island of Orford Ness, where the post-apocalyptic landscape and the contraptions of the abandoned military base induce in him the fantasy that he is present long after the extinction of our civilization.

This essay explores the dissonant affective implications of these all-too-human traces of destruction, drawing on concepts such as 'thing-power' (Bennett), 'assemblages' (Deleuze and Guattari), and the generative interplay of 'actants' (Latour), suggesting that while the material turn in ecocriticism has contributed valuable theoretical tools to the posthumanist project of decentring the human, its emphasis on our material imbrication in the life of the planet, with its myriad agencies and forms of signification, has at times deflected attention too far from the specificity of the human and the ongoing impact of our unique forms of 'technicity,' both on the landscape and on our own consciousness. It suggests the need for a tentative ongoing humanism within the posthumanist project, albeit from a decentred and position of reduced authority, that focuses on the unrelenting interrogation of the specificities of the human animal.

Keywords: literary criticism, English literature, European literature, cultural studies.

Resumen

Al comienzo de *The Rings of Saturn* de W. G. Sebald, el narrador emprende un viaje por el condado de Suffolk para intentar librarse del sentido de vacío que experimenta siempre que termina un trabajo extenso. Sin embargo, lejos de tener el efecto de reconexión que se asocia con el caminante de Thoreau o los caminantes de la narrativa académica, este viaje le convierte en presa de un "horror paralizante" que le asalta "cuando se enfrenta a los rastros de la destrucción, volviendo atrás al pasado, que eran evidentes incluso en ese lugar remoto." En ningún lugar son estos 'rastros de destrucción' más obvios que en la casi-isla de Orford Ness, donde el paisaje post-apocalíptico y los artilugios de la base militar abandonada le inducen la fantasía de que él está presente mucho después de la extinción de nuestra civilización.

Este ensayo explora las implicaciones afectivas disonantes de estos rastros de destrucción excesivamente humanos, valiéndose de conceptos como 'poder-cosa' (Bennett), 'artilugios' (Deleuze y Guattari) y la interacción generativa de 'actantes' (Latour), sugiriendo que mientras que el giro material en ecocrítica ha proporcionado al proyecto posthumanistas herramientas teóricas valiosas para descentrar al ser humano, su énfasis en nuestra imbricación material en la vida del planeta, con sus innumerables agencialidades y formas de significado, a veces ha desviado la atención demasiado lejos de la especificidad del ser humano y el continuo impacto de nuestras formas únicas de 'tecnicidad,' tanto en el paisaje como en nuestra propia consciencia. Sugiere la necesidad de un provisional humanismo continuo dentro del proyecto posthumanista, aunque desde una posición descentrada y de autoridad reducida, que se centre en la constante cuestión de las especificidades del animal humano.

Palabras clave: crítica literaria, literatura inglesa, literatura europea, estudios culturales.

Prelude

*You are a human animal,
You are a very special breed,
For you are the only animal
Who can think, who can reason, who can read.*

*The cow goes moo, and the dog goes ruff,
The cat meows, the horse kicks up his hoofs,
And so the only human animal is you, you, you.
(Jimmie Dodd, "You [Are a Human Animal]")¹*

These lyrics, sung by the Disney character Jiminy Cricket, originally featured in a 1955 Mickey Mouse Club animation. I first came across the song in a seemingly quite incongruous context; it was until recently used as the theme music for Michael Silverblatt's American radio show "Bookworm," a programme which explores a range of literature via interviews with the writers, and I heard it when I listened to an archived recording of Silverblatt's 2001 interview with the German-born author W.G. Sebald. My first reaction was one of ironic amusement—I was at the time in the midst of reading works of posthumanist philosophy, and this seemed a dated and comical example of humanist boosterism. I assumed that the song must have been chosen for the show in an ironic and knowing spirit—because of its obvious reference to reading but possibly also, more subtly, because of the questions it begged in its apparent vaunting of the qualities which raise us humans above the other animals that inhabit this planet. Later, having researched the song a little further, and having encountered web-based discussion criticising the lyrics for their suggestion that humans are animals rather than "men and women made in God's image" (Adask n.p.), I began to feel that the song, even such as it is, may have unexpectedly radical potential in its naming of the human *animal*, both historically and in the ongoing creationist wranglings of the 21st century. I also began to feel that it might have a point—that there might be some value in continuing to explore the *human animal*, if not as a 'special' then at least as a specific breed. I realised, as I listened to the interview with Sebald, how the song might in that sense be an apt choice when it came to discussion of his work, given what an intensely *humane* thinker he was, how preoccupied with conscience, memory, ethics, and affect, and how willing to engage with the specificities of the human animal, not from a vantage point high up in the Great Chain of Being but from a deep reservoir of abjection and guilt.

This essay is divided into two sections. In the first I explore aspects of the 'material turn' in contemporary thought, discussing its incorporation into posthumanist ecological perspectives, its theorisation within the emergent field of material ecocriticism, and its implications for the development of new ethical positions. The insights of these 'new materialisms' have undoubtedly provided both posthumanism

¹ "You (Are A Human Animal)." From Walt Disney's *The Mickey Mouse Club*. Words and Music by Jimmie Dodd (c) 1955 Walt Disney Music Company. Copyright Renewed. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission. Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Corporation.

and ecocriticism with invaluable tools for decentring the 'human' and disrupting anthropocentric world views. However, while material ecocriticism has fruitfully engaged with the notion of material interrelatedness and its *effects* on bodies and environments, and begun to explore the ethical implications of such entanglements, I would suggest that it has, as yet, been less forthcoming on the subject of *affect*—that dimension of bodily immersion that involves the interplay between the senses and registers of emotional experience. This is perhaps because, in its association with complex and contested concepts such as consciousness, subjectivity, conscience and memory, an exploration of affect might be seen as bringing attention back to the human self in a manner that sits uneasily with the broadly posthumanist remit of material ecocriticism. And yet one of the ways in which the vitality of matter manifests itself is in the powerful affective reverberations and resonances it co-creates in the human mind, and to step back from an investigation of the kind of subjectivities and interiorities which may come into play when considering affect both limits a full investigation of vital materiality and misses the opportunity to explore the potential of affective states for generating ethical development. Drawing on recent formulations of 'affect theory' that characterise affect as operating in the context of material immersion and involved in ongoing processes of becoming, as well as being potentially instrumental in the recalibration of ethical positions, I contend that there are some significant parallels with new materialist perspectives, and argue for the further ecocritical exploration of what we might call *material affect*.

In the second part of the essay I explore the applicability of a material ecocritical reading to a short passage from W.G. Sebald's 1995 work *The Rings of Saturn* in which the narrator-figure describes his experience of a visit to the almost-island of Orford Ness, the site of a now defunct military weapons-testing base. In highlighting the significance of Sebald's evocation of the darkly disturbing, vitally affective power of the landscape's collection of "scrap metal and defunct machinery" (237), which triggers a response in the narrator-figure that is, though unstated, integrally bound up with aspects of memory, conscience, and, ultimately, ethics, I argue for the need for an ongoing humanism within ecocriticism that incorporates an understanding of our immersion in and dependence upon the nonhuman world (a model Serenella Iovino proposes in her essay "Material Ecocriticism: Matter, Text, and Posthuman Ethics"), but also reserves a place for the continuing and specific investigation of the human animal and its affective sensorium. Following Elspeth Probyn's lead, I also suggest that the literary exploration and articulation of affect might "generate new ways of thinking about how we are related to history and how we wish to live in the present" (Probyn 89), in other words, might contribute to the development of the new ethical positions called for by the new materialisms and material ecocriticism.

Part I: The New Materialisms, Ecological Posthumanism, Material Ecocriticism, Affect Theory

The material turn in areas such as feminist science studies, politics, and philosophy has inspired significant developments in the field of ecocriticism. The new materialisms emerging from these disciplines emphasise the shared materiality of the human and the nonhuman: "We live our everyday lives surrounded by, immersed in, matter. We are ourselves composed of matter" (Coole and Frost 1). They also foreground the agentic potential of all matter—its inherent "thing-power" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 4)—which enables it to "make things happen, to produce effects" (5) as it participates in "intra-actions" (Barad 28) and "choreographies of becoming" (Coole and Frost 10). Within this framework, nature and culture are seen as "co-dependent and co-evolving," (Wheeler 41) inextricably combined as "naturecultures" (Haraway 1) that reveal the entanglement of areas previously deemed separate such as the biological and the social, the natural and the political. Diverse phenomena combine in "assemblages" (Deleuze and Guattari 4), groupings that "force us to abandon the subject-object dichotomy" (Latour 180) since all of the component parts, both human and nonhuman—the "actants" (180)—"are in the process of exchanging competencies, offering one another new goals, new possibilities, new functions" (182)

In this sense of the human as materially immersed in a world replete with nonhuman agencies and potentialities, the new materialisms have contributed to the posthumanist project of decentering the 'human'. They have also added impetus to specifically ecological perspectives. The revelation of the agentic potential of all matter not only disrupts our sense of the autonomous human subject but also disturbs "the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature" (Coole and Frost 10), as well as bringing sharply to our attention the folly of continuing to adhere to binary human/nature distinctions. Stacy Alaimo, pursuing "a new materialist and posthumanist sense of the human as substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments," ("States of Suspension" 476) has developed the concepts of "trans-corporeality" ("Trans-corporeal" 238) and "deviant agencies," (*Bodily Natures* 139) to articulate the way in which matter—sometimes highly toxic matter—crosses indiscriminately into environments and bodies.

The incorporation of these perspectives into the emergent field of material ecocriticism has similarly foregrounded the importance of the new materialisms to posthumanist and ecological perspectives. Serenella Iovino takes up Karen Barad's notion of "posthumanist performativity," (Barad 801) describing this as an effect whereby 'posthuman' "replaces the human/nonhuman dualism and overcomes it in a more dialectic and complex dimension" (Iovino, "Stories" 459). In this posthuman performativity the agentic contributions of the human and the nonhuman cannot be distinguished from each other, thus limiting our hubristic sense that we are in some way controlling the course of events. Serpil Oppermann, drawing parallels between the new materialisms and postmodern perspectives, also hints at their potential for providing "conceptual and practical tools of emancipation from anthropocentric thought" (36).

Taken as a whole, the contemporary material turn has given us, as Iovino argues, the opportunity to develop an "ecological horizontalism and an extended moral imagination" ("Material Ecocriticism" 52).

The mention of a 'moral imagination' here suggests that the insights of the new materialisms might enable the development of new ethical positions. Jane Bennett hopes that the "onto-story" of matter and the "monism of vibrant bodies" (*Vibrant Matter* 3, 121) "will enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us, will generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies, and will enable wiser interventions into that ecology" (4), and Alaimo suggests that

Emphasizing the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world, [...] allows us to forge ethical and political positions that can contend with numerous late-twentieth-century/early-twenty-first-century realities in which "human" and "environment" can by no means be considered as separate. ("Trans-corporeal" 238)

Likewise, Iovino argues that the ecological horizontalism she invokes might encourage the development of a "material ethics" ("Material Ecocriticism" 64) based on the "co-extensive materiality" (64) of human and nonhuman. Recognising a possible tension between the notion of human ethics and the posthumanist drive to dismantle the human subject, Iovino posits the necessity for an ongoing "welcoming humanism" (66) within posthumanism—one that implies "agential kinships" (66) and "moral horizontality" (64), and involves both an understanding of "the inescapable role of the nonhuman in the making of the human, but also the impossibility of being, acting, and thinking in isolation from the nonhuman" (66).

As already noted, however, notwithstanding this ongoing strand of humanism and its calls for ethical recalibrations, the focus of material ecocriticism on nonhuman agency combined with its broadly posthumanist leanings, has perhaps circumscribed the amount of attention as yet devoted to exploring the implications of the affective dimension of our receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds us. While Bennett puts forward the notion of 'enchantment' as a catalyst for both ethical aspiration and enactment in her 2001 work *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, writing of the need for, among other factors which influence the formation of ethics, "a distinctive assemblage of affective propulsions" (3), in the more recent *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, she turns her focus from the 'alter-tale' of enchantment to the 'onto-tale' of matter. And although she identifies a possible "performative contradiction" (*Vibrant Matter* 120) in vital materialism in its reluctance to engage with the human subject—"Is it not, after all, a self-conscious, language-wielding human who is articulating this philosophy of vibrant matter?" (120)—for her, any attempt to interrogate the human in terms of its specificity leads back to hierarchy, and so she resists going any further in that direction. Instead she suggests that we try to elide the question of the human:

Postpone for a while the topics of subjectivity or the nature of human interiority, or the question of what really distinguishes the human from the animal, plant and thing. Sooner or later, these topics will lead down the anthropocentric garden path, will insinuate a hierarchy of subjects over objects, and obstruct freethinking about what agency really entails." (120)

But one of the central insights of the new materialisms is the conviction that *everything* in the cosmos is material, including those phenomena such as human subjectivity that we might have previously considered—at least from a Cartesian dualist perspective—as 'immaterial' and thus separate from and transcending the world of matter. Coole and Frost's 'choreographies of becoming,' involve a material continuum of

objects forming and emerging within relational fields, bodies composing their natural environments in ways which are corporeally meaningful for them, and subjectivities being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardingly and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes (10)

and they state definitively that "In this monolithic but multiply-tiered ontology there is no definitive break between sentient and non-sentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena" (10). While they are not explicit at this point about what constitute 'spiritual phenomena', earlier in their introduction to *New Materialisms* they discuss the way in which materialists have contested the supposed 'immateriality' (and also the privileging over matter) of phenomena such as "language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul; also imagination, emotions, value, meaning and so on" (2), suggesting that these may be some of the 'spiritual' phenomena they have in mind.

Of course these phenomena are not unique to the human. Coole and Frost not only stress the multiplicity of nonhuman agencies, but also emphasise a plurality of 'subjectivities'. In fact, a key insight of at least one strand of the new materialisms is the immanence throughout the nonhuman world of phenomena such as signification, meaning and even 'mind'. The ecophenomenologist David Abram sees human language as a response to an earth replete with its own forms of speech, arguing that "Mind is a luminous quality of the earth" (*Becoming Animal* 132) in "a terrain filled with imagination" (270). Iovino also draws on these perceptions in her articulation of material ecocriticism, identifying Abram with an area of new materialist thought which stresses "the concrete links between life and language, mind and sensorial perception" and encourages a sense of "kinship between out-side and in-side, the mind and the world" ("Material Ecocriticism" 55). In the predominance of the idea of kinship in this model, it might be seen as manifesting something of a deep ecological response to the notion of material entanglement, highlighting as it does the potential for a profound and rewarding sense of human imbrication in the life of the planet.

However, as Iovino also readily acknowledges, the notion of shared materiality involves more problematic elements—for example, the ontological and epistemological challenges implied by complex naturalcultural intertwinings such as "electric grids, polluting substances, chemicals, energy, assemblages, scientific apparatuses, cyborgs, waste [...]" ("Material Ecocriticism" 52)—elements that might combine with human subjectivities to create more dissonant affective states that militate against a sense of kinship. Jane Bennett herself makes it clear that the vital materiality she proposes is not one of harmonious interrelationship: "in contrast to some versions of deep ecology, my monism posits neither a smooth harmony of parts nor a diversity unified by a common spirit" (*Vibrant Matter* ix). She evokes a complicated range of phenomena in her

delineation of 'thing-power', when she describes a collection of objects she encounters one morning in a Baltimore storm-drain that includes a dead rat, a plastic glove, a plastic bottle cap, and a stick of wood. She stresses the way in which these things "commanded attention in [their] own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habit or projects" (4) and though she begins to address the affective power of the assemblage—"It issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying. At the very least, it provoked affects in me: I was repelled by the dead (or was it merely sleeping?) rat and dismayed by the litter" (4)—she resists privileging her subjective response over the vibrancy of the objects, ultimately reading this response as itself a form of thing-power:

Was the thing-power of the debris I encountered but a function of the subjective and intersubjective connotations, memories, and affects that had accumulated around my ideas of these items? Was the real agent of my temporary immobilisation on the street that day *humanity*, that is, the cultural meanings of 'rat,' 'plastic,' and 'wood' in conjunction with my own idiosyncratic biography? It could be. But what if the swarming activity inside my head was *itself* an instance of the vital materiality that also constituted the trash? (10)

Having come to this insight—which reveals the materiality of affect—Bennett then renews her attention to the ongoing material effects of things rather than pursuing the full reverberations of the vital, swarming affective activity, including those feelings of repulsion and dismay, inside her head. Similarly, she uses Robert Sullivan's powerful description of toxic pollutants combining in a New Jersey garbage heap to exemplify the ways in which "a vital materiality can never be thrown 'away,' for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity" (6). The passage quoted from Sullivan ends:

this little seep was pure pollution, a pristine stew of oil and grease, of cyanide and arsenic, of cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, nickel, silver, mercury, and zinc. I touched this fluid — my fingertip was a bluish caramel colour — and it was warm and fresh. A few yards away, where the stream collected into a benzene-scented pool, a mallard swam alone." (qtd. in Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 6)

We have a clear sense here of the continuing activities of the chemical pollutants as they combine into a toxic stew. But what might it mean to consider the affective agency of the scene for the human who forms part of the assemblage, or indeed for the reader of the text itself? Bennett may displace, as Iovino notes, "the focus of agency from the human to the 'force of things'" ("Material Ecocriticism" 55) but an integral part of that force of things is its impact on what Coole and Frost call 'spiritual phenomena,' which include those manifested by the human animal. The sensations (and the description of them) that tell us that the stew of pollutants is warm and fresh and that the pool smells of benzene and is populated by a lone bird surely also carry with them further affective resonances including fear; possibly revulsion; perhaps a sense of guilt and responsibility at the pollution of the pool and the danger posed to the mallard—and these resonances may propel us to make ethical adjustments just as much as the conscious knowledge that the pollutants contained in the detritus of human consumerism are agents that have the power to recombine and develop new

potentialities. As we have seen, though, the idea of focusing attention on the human sensorium raises the spectres of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism and can be seen as undermining the posthumanist project. Bennett asks: "Why are we so keen to distinguish the human self from the field?" (*Vibrant Matter* 121), fearing that the quest may be motivated by the demand "that humans, above all other things on earth, possess souls that make us eligible for eternal salvation?" (121).

But what if the quest has a quite different motivation—one arising not from a desire to exalt the human subject as a uniquely autonomous privileged self, destined for transcendental salvation, but from a belief in the need to continue to investigate the flawed and complex human animal in all its dimensions? This is a question which has already been raised in recent ecocritical literature. Timothy Morton, for example, in *The Ecological Thought*, cites Levinas in his observation that "Posthumanism seems suspiciously keen to delete the paradigm of humanness like a bad draft; yet 'Humanism has to be denounced only because it is not sufficiently human'" (113). He suggests that there are gaps in "posthuman ideological barriers" (113) that ecological thinking might need to slip through. It is perhaps one of these gaps that John Parham identifies when he suggests that, given that one of the insights of posthumanism is the recognition of "the fundamental difference between, and integrity of each and every species," (146) in avoiding the question of "how we think about retaining expressly humanist perspectives and interests," posthumanism "surely neglects the logic of its own position" (147). Similarly, material ecocriticism might risk neglecting the logic of its own position if it resists exploring the affective dimension of material embodiment, particularly its more dissonant aspects, even if that entails something of a re-engagement with the 'human'. Responding to Jane Bennett's work, Iovino writes; "If embodiment is the site where 'vibrant matter' performs its narratives, and if human embodiment is a problematic entanglement of agencies, the body is a privileged subject for material ecocriticism" (58-59). But the body is also the site of the narratives of affect—the entanglements of sense and feeling which occur as vital matter continues to swarm and reconfigure itself. In an ontology in which there is no definitive break between the material and the spiritual, the subjectivities "that emerge hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes" (Coole and Frost 10), including those of the human, are surely a site of interest.

In fact, recent conceptualisations of affect resonate with aspects of the new materialisms and suggest that the study of matter and affect may share a good deal of common ground. While Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth note, that "There is no single, generalizable theory of affect" (3), in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* they offer some broad definitions that characterise affect as intrinsically related to materiality and embodiment. Affect is "found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds" (1). And, chiming with Coole and Frost's 'choreographies of becoming' and their account of an ontology in which there is no definitive break between material and spiritual phenomena, Gregg and

Seigworth's affective process bridges sensation and sensibility, and can be understood as:

A gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations—that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to compartments of matter of virtually any and every sort. (2)

This sense of incrementalism also implies that affective forces, like the actants Latour describes, are always involved in "exchanging competencies, offering one another new goals, new possibilities, new functions" (Latour 182), and that their 'becoming' cannot be contained or limited. Thus Gregg and Seigworth comment: "Perhaps one of the surest things that can be said of both affect and its theorization is that they will exceed, always exceed the context of their emergence, as the excess of ongoing process" (5). The idea of affect as bodily, contingent, and incremental allows for a sense of human subjectivity as unstable, fluid, and co-constituted by the nonhuman—a perception that may avoid leading us, as Bennett fears, "down the anthropocentric garden path" (*Vibrant Matter* 120) in our exploration of it, and thus sit more easily with posthumanist interests. At the same time, though, the study of affect does seem to involve discussion of specifically human subjectivities and perspectives. Gregg and Seigworth draw attention to its role in driving the human towards movement and thought (or conversely suspending that movement and thought), as the repetition of the pronoun 'us' and the anthropomorphising of affect in the following passage demonstrates:

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force relations, or that can leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. (1; emphasis original)

The notion that we might be overwhelmed by the world's apparent 'intractability' also hints at a break in human kinship with the non-human world—producing a sense in which we are both affectively imbricated but also 'other'. It signals that there may be a basis for an ongoing strand of humanism within affect theory. Nigel Thrift, in his 2007 work *Non-Representational Theory: Space / politics / affect*, allies himself with theories of affect that move away from the notion of the human subject, but also confesses: "All of that said, I do wish to retain a certain minimal humanism. Whilst refusing to grant reflexive consciousness and its pretensions to invariance the privilege of occupying the centre of the stage, dropping the human subject entirely seems to me to be a step too far" (13). Allowing some room for discussion of the human subject, albeit one removed from centre stage, also perhaps opens up the possibility of exploring the potential for affect to generate human ethical aspirations. In her essay "Writing Shame" which discusses the work of T.E. Lawrence and Primo Levi, Elspeth Probyn, while emphasising the bodily impact of affective states, also suggests that "ideas and writing about shame seek to generate new ways of thinking about how we are related to history and how we wish to live in the present" (89).

I turn now to the work of W.G. Sebald and to a reading of his account of a visit to the abandoned military base at Orford Ness, which forms a short section of *The Rings of Saturn*. I suggest that a material ecocritical approach to the passage that stops short of an exploration of Sebald's subtle articulation of the affective impact of the naturalcultural assemblage in which the narrator-figure finds himself misses the opportunity to consider the ways in which affective states might encourage us to think about history and how we wish to live now. I hope to show that Sebald's description of the experience, while conveying a sense of material immersion in a vibrantly agentic world and encouraging the notion of a subjectivity emerging "hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes" (Coole and Frost 10), also pushes at the boundaries of the posthumanist/material ecocritical paradigm by signalling the necessity for an ongoing investigation of the specificity of the human animal and highlighting the role of affect in bringing ethical concerns to the fore.

Part II: W. G. Sebald's Orford Ness and the 'Traces of Destruction'

The Rings of Saturn, subtitled in the original German-language edition *An English Pilgrimage*, documents a journey on foot through the East of England, with a narrative delivered by a semi-fictionalised narrator-figure. It was first published in Germany in 1995, with the English translation by Michael Hulse coming out in 1998. Like the Thoreauvian saunterer or the walkers of narrative scholarship, the narrator of the book views his walking tour as holding the promise of psychic restoration. He begins: "In August 1992, when the dog days were drawing to an end, I set off to walk the county of Suffolk, in the hope of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work" (3). However, even in the course of the very first paragraph those expectations are quashed and we are given a sense of misalignment and discord. Though at first he feels carefree as he moves through the landscape, the narrator almost immediately finds his joyful spirit dissipating: "At all events, in retrospect I became preoccupied not only with the unaccustomed sense of freedom but also with the paralysing horror that had come over me at various times when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident even in that remote place" (3). In fact, a year to the day after beginning this walking tour, the narrator/Sebald (it is difficult to distinguish with any certainty between the two) is hospitalised, immobilised by his reaction to that horror. And nowhere are those 'traces of destruction' more evident than when he reaches the 'almost-island' of Orford Ness, an episode he describes briefly towards the end of the book.

Orford Ness is a shingle spit joined to the English Suffolk coast at Aldeburgh, but then separated from the mainland by the river Alde as it makes its way to the sea. For much of the 20th century the Ness was a site for secret military research, including the development and testing of atomic weapons. Though it is now owned by the National Trust and is open to visitors, the area is still littered with the remnants of its military history, including strange earth mounds, and buildings known, because of their uncanny

resemblance to the religious buildings of Eastern Asia, as the 'pagodas'. It is a place which seems to hold a particular fascination for Sebald, a fascination located at least in part in the geological genesis of the island; it has an "extra-territorial quality" (233), perhaps generated by the way in which it has been gradually shape-shifting over a period of millennia, moving "down from the north across the mouth of the River Alde, in such a way that the tidal lower reaches, known as the Ore, run for some twelve miles just inside the present coastline before flowing into the sea" (233).

It is perhaps this extra-territorial quality, and the sense that it is a landmass constantly in (slow) motion, which set the scene for the intense experience of dislocation and disorientation which follows. The state of the narrator as he steps onto the island is one of utter blankness: "I had not a single thought in my head. With each step that I took, the emptiness within and the emptiness without grew ever greater and the silence more profound" (234). However, when he startles a hare hiding in the grass beside him the episode remains etched into his mind, a moment in which animal and human become disorientatingly indistinguishable:

I still see what occurred in that one tremulous instant with an undiminished clarity. I see the edge of the grey tarmac and every individual blade of grass, I see the hare leaping out of its hiding-place, with its ears laid back and a curiously human expression on its face that was rigid with terror and strangely divided; and in its eyes, turning to look back as it fled and almost popping out of its head with fright, I see myself, become one with it. (235)

The mounds and pagodas have a similarly disorientating effect. At first they suggest to the narrator pre-historic burials or some ancient religious function, but soon develop for him into "the image of the remains of our civilization after its extinction in some future catastrophe" (237), and lead him to imagine the landscape being walked by a future visitor for whom, as for the narrator, the nature of the long-departed inhabitants of the place is a mystery:

To me too, as for some latter-day stranger ignorant of the nature of our society wandering about among heaps of scrap metal and defunct machinery, the beings who had once lived and worked here were an enigma, as was the purpose of the primitive contraptions and fittings inside the bunkers, the iron rails under the ceilings, the hooks on the still partially tiled walls, the showerheads the size of plates, the ramps and the soakaways. (237)

This sense of temporal dislocation and inability to fathom the nature of the beings responsible for the scraps of metal and defunct machinery leaves the narrator utterly disorientated: "Where and in what time I was that day at Orford Ness I cannot say" (237). As he watches the sun set, the tide advancing up the river, and listens to the "scarcely audible hum" (237) of the radio masts above the marshes, he feels utterly displaced. Unlike Thoreau's saunterers who are at home everywhere, the narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* finds that he is no longer at home anywhere. Looking back at the town of Orford he thinks, "There [...] I was once at home" (237).

The Orford Ness passage as a whole, and this collection of 'things' in particular, holds elements that might be seen to speak to several of the new materialist, posthumanist and material ecocritical concepts discussed above. It is brimming with the kind of vibrant materiality Jane Bennett evokes in her description of the things she finds

in the Baltimore storm-drain, each element, including every individual blade of grass, manifesting the ability to command attention. The fraught encounter with the hare gives a sense of the blurring of boundaries between human and animal, conjuring a kind of human/nonhuman kinship, and at the same time suggesting the existence of nonhuman subjectivities in the landscape. The collection of 'things' Sebald details—particularly the scrap metal and the bewildering contraptions at the centre of the description—is also foregrounded in the text to imply some kind of ongoing vitality and significance. The human, the hare, the tarmac, the grass, the decaying buildings and their fittings, the setting sun, the rising tide, and the humming radio mast together comprise a powerful assemblage involving a host of different processes of becoming. But their treatment in the text also pushes at the boundaries of a materialist reading that stops short of addressing the affective dimension of their vitality. The passage clearly chimes with some of the accounts of affect given by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. The whole episode is replete with a sense of "intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds" (Gregg and Seigworth 1). The sense of kinship between the human and the hare rests above all in a kind of trans-corporeal affect as they mirror each other's terror and disorientation in an affective intensity that registers viscerally and circulates between the two bodies. When it comes to the collective agencies of the assemblage, Sebald's text shows their affective impact developing incrementally and swarming within the narrator's mind, exceeding the context of their emergence and involving him in imaginative processes that range across past and future timescales. What is perhaps most striking about the scene is the affective power of the material objects to conjure, as they intra-act with the sensorium of the human animal, a sense of phenomena that are not actually present, calling up from the unconscious fragments of historical memory and potentially calling forth feelings of guilt and shame. This affective power works "beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing" (Gregg and Seigworth 1). On my first reading of the Orford Ness passage, the "primitive contraptions and fittings inside the bunkers, the iron rails under the ceilings, the hooks on the still partially tiled walls, the showerheads the size of plates, the ramps and the soakaways" (237) inexorably conjured images of the Holocaust in my mind, just as I believe they did for Sebald—an affective impact he conveys subtly through the narrator's account of his Orford Ness experience.

This idea of an affective force that exceeds its initial context is one that comes into play in Sebald's own account of his writing. In the radio interview mentioned in the prelude to this essay, the host Michael Silverblatt questioned him about certain themes in his writing that are never made explicit yet are powerfully present. He says of Sebald's later work *Austerlitz* that the text seems to have an "invisible referent", and that, as the narrative progresses, "the missing term is the concentration camp, and that always circling is this silent presence being left out but always gestured toward. Is that correct?" ("Interview" n.p.). Sebald responds in the affirmative, elaborating, "I've always felt that it was necessary above all to write about the history of persecution, of vilification of minorities, the attempt well-nigh achieved to eradicate a whole people"

but suggesting that the horror of this subject is so great that it can only be approached tangentially. Nevertheless "you need to find ways of convincing the reader that this is something that is on your mind [...]. The reader needs to be prompted that the narrator has a conscience". Sebald describes this invisible referent as an "undeclared concern," giving as a further example a piece of writing by Virginia Woolf, ostensibly about the death of a moth on a window pane in Sussex, but which actually evokes the writer's concerns about the battles of the First World War. The passage, Sebald suggests, demonstrates that Woolf "was greatly perturbed by the first world war and by its aftermath, by the damage it did to peoples' souls" ("Interview" n.p.).

One of the undeclared concerns in the Orford Ness passage certainly seems to be the concentration camp, and, more broadly the damage done to human souls by war. But while Sebald might, as a writer, be deliberately trying to provoke an affective response in the reader by hinting at these concerns, the phenomena that drive this impulse and bring these concerns to his mind are the material 'traces of destruction' he finds in the landscape. He does not seem to be suggesting that *humanity* is the real agent in the Orford Ness assemblage, nor does he promote the idea of the kind of self-reflexive, invariant human self. The narrator is very much acted upon *as* vital matter and *by* vital matter, with an identity that seems uncertain and contingent throughout—one that is initially blank, almost waiting to be co-created through intra-action with its environment. Mark McCulloh suggests that Sebald's world view is a kind of monism: "Everything—body and soul, mind and matter, present and past—belongs to one continuum" (20). This has much in common with Bennett's onto-tale of matter, but it is one that allows for the "subjective and intersubjective connotations, memories, and affects" (Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* 10) that Bennett identifies as a function of vital materiality but chooses not to explore further. The power of the Orford Ness assemblage for Sebald, and for a reader alert to its undeclared concern, lies not only in its vitality as a collection of things with ongoing material effects in the environment but in an affective force which builds incrementally through the continuum of body/soul, mind/matter, present/past, powerfully raising questions of 'conscience'. This mention of conscience, of course, leads us back to expressly human concepts and concerns. However it does not seem to be motivated by a desire to exalt the human soul, but rather to put it under close scrutiny. The narrator's palpable inability to comprehend the 'beings' with their 'primitive contraptions' who lived and worked at Orford Ness, and his feeling of extreme temporal distance from them (when in fact less than a decade had passed between the departure of the last service personnel² and the publication of *The Rings of Saturn*) suggest that Sebald might side with Levinas in believing that humanism is not yet 'sufficiently human'. It can also be seen as signalling a need to investigate the human dimension of material affect, particularly since it seems to be here that considerations of responsibility and ethics arise.

Sebald has already been identified as a writer who is "informed by a profound ethical and political seriousness" (Long and Whitehead 4), and I would argue that the

² According to the National Trust website page for Orford Ness, the last military service personnel left Orford Ness in 1987.

Orford Ness passage, through its complex and subtle engagement with the landscape's affective powers offers a greater potential for the consideration of "how we wish to live" (Probyn 89) than an approach more focused on material effect. In order to demonstrate this greater potential I look now at the 2013 "Episode 7" of the British wildlife documentary programme, *Springwatch*, set on Orford Ness. The tenor of the narrative is a celebration the re-encroachment of 'nature' on the site, and it exemplifies to me the danger of any version of events that forgets its human history and that embraces material vitality without deep reflection about the implications of the contribution of the human animal to that vitalism. The military history of the Ness is outlined, with the presenter talking of its involvement in design and engineering, and of the nuclear bombs "that were born here" but whose threat has now dissipated: "Tested, stressed, pushed and pounded, designing the end of the world—now they've gone. The buildings fade into the land, replaced by nature and its accidental designs of evolution". The narrative clearly expresses a sense of ongoing material processes but it also displays an almost wilful neutralisation of human responsibility. The idea of bombs being 'born' on the site has the effect of naturalising their existence. The description concludes:

so many new and different lives in a landscape that plotted to take life away. Just as nature is rising here so the buildings of Orford Ness are falling [...] leaving a question for our nation. Renovate this unique landscape - an emblem of British design - or forget it? Allow continued ruination, a redesign by nature.

The complacency of this statement and the manipulation of its grammatical subject speak volumes. The *landscape* plotted to take life away, but the apocalypse never happened and so the necessity of exploring the species that actually made the plans for the end of the world has dissipated. The sinister buildings and contraptions of Sebald's Ness are neutralised, either to be renovated as (apparently) positive emblem of design, or left to material processes of decay.

To some this optimism may seem a positive development, particularly in the context of environmentalism, which sometimes suffers from an almost crippling sense of doom. Timothy Morton states:

Environmentalism is often apocalyptic. It warns of, and wards off, the end of the world. [...]But things aren't like that: the end of the world has already happened. We sprayed the DDT. We exploded the nuclear bombs. We changed the climate. This is what it looks like after the end of the world. Today is not the end of history. We're living at the beginning of history. (98)

For Morton, the end of the world has already happened and we must think forward from this point. For Sebald, past and future co-exist—his monism encapsulates them. We live in the midst of the flow of history backwards and forwards, and the potential apocalypse—the 'future catastrophe'—symbolised by the contraptions at Orford Ness resides within us at all times. Standing in stark contrast to the blithe optimism of *Springwatch* are the figures cited by Stuart Parkinson, the executive director of Scientists for Global Responsibility, in a recent blog entry. According to Parkinson, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calculates recent global spending on climate change mitigation and adaptations at 364 billion US dollars. By contrast the

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) figure for global military spending in 2013 is an astonishing 1.75 trillion US dollars. The figures suggest that we are still, in various ways, designing the end of the world. In this context it seems that Sebald's preoccupation with affect, memory and ethics is well-founded. For a species that can carry out the "attempt well-nigh achieved to eradicate a whole people" or wage war on a 'world' scale, the domination of nature even to the brink of ecocide and beyond is entirely possible. It suggests that a remorseless enquiry into the specificity of such a species and an investigation of the means by which ethical changes might be triggered is highly necessary in the context of ecological and environmental thought.

Conclusion

Sebald ends *The Rings of Saturn* with a powerful evocation of mortality and loss. He says that in the Holland of Sir Thomas Browne's time

it was customary, in a home where there had been a death, to drape black mourning ribbons over all the mirrors and all canvasses depicting landscapes or people or the fruits of the field, so that the soul, as it left the body, would not be distracted on its final journey, either by a reflection of itself or by a last glimpse of the land now being lost for ever. (296)

A world in which humanity discards its history along with the bad draft of humanness will endlessly be lost to us spiritually and perhaps also ecologically. In conclusion, I return to the song with which I began the essay and its assertion that we are a "very special breed". The insights of the new materialisms and posthumanism have shown us to be a materially less discrete, and certainly less 'special' breed. However, we are the only breed to have used its technicity to 'design the end of the world', and perhaps the only one to have attempted to eradicate a whole racial component of our species. While quite rightly removing us from the privileged place we have appropriated for ourselves in the mesh of being, posthumanism cannot yet afford to drape black ribbons over all the mirrors which might reflect us back to ourselves and which give the human soul a glimpse of the land we run the risk of losing for ever. Timothy Morton, argues that in developing ecological thinking we should continue to allow "a special place for the 'subject' — the mind, the person, even the soul" (113). Ecocriticism needs to continue to puzzle over those enigmatic beings who constructed the mysterious buildings in Sebald's assemblage, and to reserve a place in its theorisations for affect, human subjectivity, and even the troubled human soul, particularly when it comes to the question of developing new ethical positions. Sebald, or at least his narrator figure, might be overcome by paralysing horror at the traces of destruction in the landscape, might, as Gregg and Seigworth suggest, be "overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (1), however, his exploration of material affect, at the very least, raises important ethical questions about how we might wish to live.

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Editorial: Creative Writing and Arts

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Maps are never neutral. With their linearly organized geometries of North and South, East and West, they express historically constructed balances, silently proposing binary world-visions and normalizing scales of values. And so, too, our imagination is never completely innocent. Talking and writing about “the North” necessarily entails a series of clichés. This does not apply merely to the geo-politically and economically leading North as opposed to a poor or “emerging” South, but also to the North of eco-cultural imageries: the Arctic and Polar North, the North of endless winters, obstinate ices, unprecedented postcolonial expansions, painfully melting glaciers, and gleefully spectral auroras. This is the North that defies our ecocritical mind, and this is what has inspired the critical essays and artistic contributions of this *Ecozon@* Autumn issue.

As Werner Bigell remarks in his introduction to the special section on *Northern Nature*, attempts at defining what the North is are easily contradicted by its multifarious natures and elemental narratives, by its interlaced cultures and diverse survival strategies. Often expected to be empty, the North is instead “filled with peoples, stories, animals, and ecosystems.” Moreover, it is “not simple but highly complex,” also in its “material and narrative interaction with the world south of it.” Envisaged as white—or as whiteness per se—the North has instead many colors—colors which house “complex stories contradicting the imagination of simplicity” and which disclose “economic, historical, and ecosystemic interactions” (Bigell, “Introduction”). To say that the North is not empty, or simple, or white, means precisely this: there is not just one North. “North” is rather another site of circumscribed plurality, and it is to this plurality—of presences, of colors, of substances—that the authors of our Creative Writing and Art Section have turned their attention.

The section opens with a series of eight photographs, *Twilight of the North*, by the Icelandic artist Thorvardur Arnason, a filmmaker and photographer, with a background in environmental studies and currently the Director of the Hornafjordur Regional Research Centre (Southeast Iceland). Arnason’s North is a place of wonder and elemental creativity. In these eight stunning pictures (one of which, *Ice Cave*, is our cover image), the northern landscape “testifies like an expansive canvas to the ongoing influence of elemental processes and the forces of weather on earthen minerals” (Macaulay, 20). In fact, here the North is in the elements; not just in their elemental purity, but rather in their pervious density and possibility to interchange and mutually hybridize. And so, we see that fire encounters an icy sky (*Oraefajokull* and *Aurora Corona*) generating auroras, “dancing flames” where magnetism convenes with light in “luminous storms that *beacon*” (Duckert 42); we see that what is per definition above—

the sky, indeed—seems to be at home below ground, in the form of giant subterranean glaciers (*Ice Cave* and *Crystal Cave*). We see Lord Byron’s “blue wilderness of interminable air” provisionally turned into ice blocks, and already melting in the eerie fluidity of our warming planet (*Blue Glacier Front*). Again, we see the almost animal power of vegetation (*Autumn Heather*), spreading onto this land, whose heat is expressed by way of magnetism and colors, flashing fluxes of matter-energy.

When all these elements and forces come together in the form of northern twilight, it is easy to think of this phenomenon as a conversation: a “conversation between the tilted rotating Earth and the Sun” (Morton 273). In the Arctic Circle, this season-long conversation has a revealing power: it is the elemental epiphany of a beauty “that coexists anarchically alongside us, physically before us, and despite us” (279). But, as Arnason writes introducing these photographs, this beauty is “in a constant state of flux,” it is an imperiled beauty. Seen in this perspective, *Twilight of the North*, with his quasi-Nietzschean title, also invites us to consider the ongoing process toward other eco-elemental states, and the sense of loss and bewilderment connected to it. As the artist, again, notes:

I feel drawn to the glaciers in part because of their strange beauty, but also because I have seen and witnessed these changes taking place. [...] The only thing you can be really sure of is that the glacier you saw yesterday will not be the same one you will see tomorrow. Attached to these filmic acts there is both an exuberance—that of being constantly exposed to new forms of beauty—and a growing sadness, caused by experiencing the slow death of this glacial beauty.

Let us turn now to other visions of slowness and beauty, this time expressed in words. Our creative writing segment speaks Italian, but with a northern accent. The author is Luca Bugnone, a young scholar and writer from the Susa Valley, an Alpine site west of Turin which has been for twenty years the theater of grassroots struggles against the environmentally-destructive plan of a high speed railway connecting Italy and France. Author of short stories and a practitioner of eco-narrative scholarship, Bugnone portrays himself as “a mountain wanderer [...] firmly trusting in the revolutionary power of slowness” (maybe in implicit polemics again top-down planned fast trains).

His piece *Elska* is a lyrical and eco-philosophical travel narrative set in Iceland. In Bugnone’s description this piece entails “a love letter” and a comparative reflection about the different Norths he experienced: Iceland and the Alps, an ancient world and a young one, the lithic and the human. In fact, we find in *Elska* a series of human/inhuman stories: stories of stones, plus stories of encounters, silences, bodies, and of intriguing elemental sensuality. We might call all this *geophilia*, a “love of stone” that Jeffrey Cohen has depicted as “often unrequited,” a challenge both for “human exceptionalism and lithic indifference,” threatened by the awareness that “to contemplate rocks [...] is to entertain the possibility of being crushed by them,” as Bachelard said (148). This love is not impossible, though, and Bugnone’s piece delves into this elemental confidence, somehow echoing David Abram’s statement: “Rocks alive? Yeah, right!” (43). Indeed, this piece of creative writing should be read against the voices of the philosophers and eco-thinkers that resonate in it: Cohen and Abram. For Bugnone, like for Cohen, rock is “a

strangely sympathetic companion, a source of knowledge and narrative, an invitation to an ethics of scale” (Cohen n. p.). For him, too, like for Abram, “The stillness, the quietude of this rock is its very activity, the steady gesture by which it enters and alters your life” (Abram 56). But there is also something other than this, since *Elska* adds to their mental-elemental wilderness the softness of the Mediterranean experience. And so, the stone stories the author recounts are meditations about the forms the North takes when embodied in mountains and solitary natures, be it in Iceland or in the Mediterranean Alps. *Mater materia, pater petrosus*, rock becomes here alluring and severe, motherly and unfamiliar, an alien root and a radically other, both a repository of memory and a fate of geological oblivion. As Bugnone writes in a passage, here translated from the original Italian:

The mother, I ponder, is an alterity tempered in time, an alterity we internalize, and love, and slowly mingle with, in mutual belonging. It is an alterity that becomes itself incorporated, crisscrossed with other alterities in the course of our existence. I think of the two-thousand-million-year-old Mt. Sinai’s dust, of the nineteen-million-year-old Iceland, and the ninety-million-year-old Alps. Ever-climbed and shelter-seeking, the Alpine rock is grey, hoary. Each stone, be it carved, cracked or sculpted, leads back to another stone. Each one is a memory. In Iceland, you cannot carve stones; pumices are moved by a wind gust. Rocks are mirrors in black, pink, ochre, and the mountains are low, pointed and green. In Iceland the earth simmers, billows, melts. It is full of gods.

My mountains, too, the Alps, are North: the Mediterranean North. Europe’s white heart, in their labyrinth they harbor orchards and vineyards, woods of deciduous trees and conifers, prairies, nivals, screes, and glaciers. This is a vertical world striving downward: after having seen diving leviathans and climbing wolves and ibexes, in millions of years this will be a desert. This means that, in a remote future, our memories will fade, too. (My translation)

In the poetry section, northern natures are voiced by two poets, Paola Loreto and Jacob G. Price. A bilingual poet, awarded numerous prizes and author of four collections of verses, Paola Loreto is also a translator and a scholar, elegant interpreter of Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost and Derek Walcott. And the echo of a conversation with these important voices can be recognized in this original, inspired triptych devoted to the Orobic Pre-Alps, the author’s “home.” This Alpine home is physical as well as emotional: besides being a poet, Loreto is also a hiker, and therefore her verses come from the very concreteness of her bodily encounters with these rugged natures, a topic that she has also explored elsewhere in her books (see for example, *In quota* or *La memoria del corpo*). As she writes in her introductory note, the three poems published in this *Ecozon@* issue “were inspired by [...] keenly receptive observation,” and express “the profound sense of an unavoidable and pacifying belonging to a world of even, objective, and multiple relations.” Like Bugnone’s *Elska*, Loreto’s *Cedevole al tatto* / “To be in any form” is thus a tribute to another North, the North of the Italian Alps. In so doing, these poems signal, again, that there is not one North, and that Northern natures are ascending—and rarely condescending—natures: natures of hawks, trails, rock waves, and clouds. These presences are alive in a body-mind continuum to which the poet gives—more by accident than by necessity—voice.

The bilingual poem *Space Junk/Basura espacial* by Jacob G. Price completes this section. A graduate student in Hispanic Literature at the University of Kansas, Price

explores in his poetic research the American “Millennial” generation’s attitude toward environmental issues, both in political and imaginative terms. Although concealed, there is North, here, too. Compared to the previous contributions, however, *Space Junk/Basura espacial* shifts us even further up: in the outer space, ideally (and maybe dysfunctionally) reconnecting the (illusion of) purity of Arctic landscapes with that of the silent universe, a place in which trash travels along with electromagnetic waves, becoming, again, elemental and erratic. Ironic and vaguely surrealist, the poem is a story of oneiric encounters between an upward-striving earth and a downward-falling galactic space. Recounting the hypnotic meeting between nature’s sheltering presence and the alien proximity of ghostly futures, Price discloses our look toward a “Northern nature” in which terrestrial intimacies and spatial threats come together.

Finally, by closing my first editorial, I would like thank Carmen Flys Junquera, Axel Goodbody and the entire editorial board of *Ecozon@* for warmly welcoming me as Arts section editor and (maybe daringly) trusting me able to carry out this role. To Isabel Hoving, who paved this way, my heartfelt gratitude.

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Twilight of the North

Thorvardur Arnason



Oraefajokull



Aurora Corona



Crystal Cave



Diamond Beach



Autumn Heather



Blue Glacier Front



Winter Light

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Elska

Luca Bugnone



I. Il primo sguardo

Giovane, piena di vita, fremevi degli spasmi e dei bollori di un'acerba, selvatica bellezza. Indomita, audace, superba, eri libera alla mia mente, al cuore che s'apriva, si spezzava. Sottili le tue dita brune sul mare; le forme colorate, i tuoi "sentieri di mela". Ricordo luci indicibili, tramonti e risvegli...

Un'ostia nera immersa nella fiamma del crepuscolo boreale, tormentata dalle onde. Così mi è apparsa la prima volta mentre l'aeroplano si chinava su di lei, scosso dalle correnti. Era qui prima di me, infinitamente più vecchia, eppure ancora bambina, scoglio emerso a trecento chilometri dalla terra verde dell'Edda—la Greenland: il porto estremo, l'ultima Thule... il Nord. È quindi questo il Nord. Lava fredda, erba rada, piccole case, barbagli sulla pianura. O l'Islanda è l'ultimo avamposto *prima* del Nord, una colonia mesta, estranea alle aurore e altre meraviglie? Dove sono le montagne? Calmo, mi ripeto, Keflavik non sarà Islanda più di quanto Malpensa non sia Italia. Ascolta il corpo, procedi lentamente. I piedi saldi al suolo, dopo tutto questo cielo, dopo tutto questo mare, conferiscono concretezza alle distanze, rendono il viaggio tangibile. Pensa non avere ali per volare, solcare per giorni l'oceano, la paura, e approdare qui, la benedizione della terra. Non sono mai stato così lontano. L'Islanda non è Keflavik. Keflavik è una capanna sulla Luna.

Il taxi ci conduce all'ostello, due bassi capannoni simili a rimesse. Manuel, uno dei compagni di viaggio, chiama il numero indicato in reception esprimendosi in un inglese sconnesso: dobbiamo aspettare, dice.

Un cartellone pubblicitario riproduce la bandiera dell'Unione europea e quella islandese congiunte da un "+". Sotto, a caratteri cubitali neri, troneggia "NEI TAKKI!", "no grazie". In Islanda, a Þingvellir, le labbra d'Europa e America si toccano; la faglia che separa i continenti e altrove è oceano, lì puoi attraversarla con un salto. Né l'una né l'altra possono pretendere l'Islanda. L'Islanda è il prete casto e infuocato che celebra l'unione.

Una decina di minuti e appare un tizio allampanato, biondiccio, inguainato in una giacca da pesca e stivalacci da lavoro. Non sorride. Mostra dove dormiremo con volto duro; la voce baritonale cadenza l'inglese con accento sincopato. Dalle espressioni del volto e da una certa impazienza traspare come attinga impacciato a quella lingua aspra, incomprensibile per noi, fatta di troppe consonanti, il norreno dei viaggiatori vichinghi. Le mani nodose e la consunzione del volto—per il sole e il freddo—mi ricordano la familiare, malinconica compostezza dei contadini della mia terra, l'imbarazzo di mostrarsi ai forestieri, di trovarsi infine gettati nel mondo.

“C’è qualcosa da visitare qui attorno?” Mi riferisco al faro oltre le barche in secca.

“Non a quest’ora, non ora”, risponde lui.

Eppure il sole è ancora là, appena sotto l’orizzonte; il crepuscolo indugia languido, la luce si scioglie sulla pianura nuda anziché sfumare nel buio, e non c’è notte.

II. Le prime parole

Il cielo pallido dissolve tinte pastello. Ogni giorno, ogni attimo indago l’evanescente richiamo di una bellezza sciupata da troppa ignoranza, tendo l’orecchio alla voce di una forza selvaggia ammansita dagli anni. Cerco tracce di bene, le tue orme, e ne scorgo...

La nebbia mette le ali al cervello, all’anima e alla mente, dice Einar Guðmundsson. Qui la nebbia, nella forma di nubi capricciose attorcigliate alle montagne o serpeggianti sulle lande, non manca. È facile esagerare quando sei nel mezzo della natura islandese. Friðrik Þór Friðriksson sostiene che la vastità dei paesaggi ispira il pensiero, che puoi spaziare fin dove arriva la vista, mentre negli altri paesi gli alberi impediscono lo sguardo. I miei occhi bevono la mole colossale di ogni cosa. Mi adeguo a una profondità che riguarda tutte le dimensioni spaziali, l’alto come il basso, l’esterno e l’interno. Mi lascio possedere dalle fantasie delle nuvole nel cielo.

Dovrei forse soffermarmi sulle pagine, ma la potenza descrittiva non regge il passo del turbino d’immagini e colori, e la lama di luce che squarcia le nubi e irradia le cose—l’effetto Dio, come lo chiama Silvia—sbaraglia ogni possibilità di carpirne l’essenza: puoi solo guardare e commuverti. In poche ore abbiamo attraversato lande petrose, poggi brulli, avvallamenti e acque. Non conosco i loro nomi. Nella terra, nei suoi sbalzi e fratture riconosco l’operosità delle forze ctonie, è lampante. L’unico rammarico consta nel sentir tessere elogi all’auto, sentirla descrivere come il mezzo prediletto per viaggiare, in luogo del passo. Pur nella comodità, consentendo una rapida esplorazione degli spazi, non lo è. L’Islanda è passo, occhi, sensi. Il passo, non l’auto, ci rende promiscui sotto la pioggia gelata, corpo unito a fronteggiare le raffiche. Camminando ci stringiamo, ci scaldiamo. Siamo sospesi in questa bolla di tempo, separati da casa e dalle incombenze, una comunità che si forma lentamente addossandosi e staccandosi come la terra, coronata dalla natura, sublimata in essa, nutrita attorno a un tavolo, chiacchierata, ciarlata, scevra d’imbarazzo, attenta ai singoli bisogni, rispettosa, quieta. Io ritaglio dei momenti per fotografare i pellegrini assieme ai luoghi. Sono paesaggi a loro volta, montagne e cascate che chiudono gli occhi, che si spostano, fanno smorfie, assumono pose sciocche. Mutano rapidi quanto gli scenari ad ogni curva. Lisa è leggerissima pomice porpora, bionda e cenerina; Francesco è cielo basso, nubi radenti; Alfred è l’Hekla tronfio, celato alla vista. Insieme siamo la levità del deserto, contrastiamo il rigore degli elementi, andiamo col vento. Siamo noi i fantasmi della terra, e sono le volute di pioggia; l’esordio alla vita è nei fili d’erba come nel nostro incanto; nell’acqua delle pozze e sulla pelle lo scorrere del tempo.

III. I primi passi

Il mio è un amore maturo, a tratti senile, addolcito dall'abitudine, mutato in tiepido affetto. Un amore che domanda attenzione, e nelle piccole cose produce infinite sorprese. La premura è necessaria in un mondo vecchio, non l'esuberanza...

Il Ring si diparte da Reykjavík costeggiando l'Atlantico, una cascata poi un'altra, rupi e falesie più vertiginose via via che s'avanza, sfiora le pendici dell'Eyafjallajökull e s'incunea tra i fiordi. È un anello di 1.339 Km, l'unica superstrada d'Islanda. Prossimi a Jökulsárlón, il lago degli iceberg, bassi fiori rosa assicurati a fusti spinosi sfidano il vento traendo luce dal volubile cielo del Nord. Ai piedi delle montagne, una lingua grigioblu attira il nostro sguardo. Scura, rabbiosa e irrefrenabile, scivola tra le rocce a lambire la piana lavica inverdita dai muschi. Si protende da una cupola sospesa, opalina e vaporosa, un'enormità tale da non capire, da non poter credere sia composta d'altro che di nubi. Vatnajökull, il più grande ghiacciaio d'Europa, erto sulle vette tracima da ogni parte, possente e scintillante, scolpisce nuvole e rocce.

Varcata la steppa, la lastra che da lontano pareva uniforme o quantomeno un percolato compatto avvicinandosi è un pantano imperfetto, nerastro e ghiaioso. Torrenti scavano il terriccio, denti si schiodano e torcono più maldestri di noi che vi camminiamo in mezzo. Pare la bocca d'un vecchio: silente, paziente, d'inaudita potenza. Qualche passo più in là, un crepaccio spezza il turchese e sprofonda nel buio.

Vatnajökull è una sostanza individuale, un'entità a sé, un corpo solido e inaccessibile. Io, come un figlio venuto alla luce affrancato dalla madre, l'osservo. È alieno, e tale rimarrà sino a quando, previo coraggio e un bel paio di ramponi, non mi addentrerò tra le sue spire. La tecnica ci consente di camminare sul ghiaccio, di solcarlo col gatto delle nevi, d'atterrarvi in elicottero: i più facoltosi lo fanno; io, vagabondo romantico e fifone, rispetto l'alterità di Vatnajökull—anch'essa ammassata ad altre oscure alterità—e conservo la mia evitando d'infilarmi là in mezzo. Colto da sacro terrore dinanzi a tanta terribile bellezza, penso a casa.

La madre, considero, è un'alterità che si stempera nel tempo, un'alterità che introiettiamo e amiamo e con cui ci confondiamo lentamente, appartenendoci a vicenda, un'alterità a sua volta amalgamata, percorsa da altre alterità nel corso dell'esistenza. Penso ai duecentonovanta milioni di anni della polvere del Sinai, ai diciannove dell'Islanda, ai novanta delle Alpi. La roccia alpina, sempre arrampicata in cerca di rifugio, è grigia, incanutita. Ogni pietra incisa, spezzata, scolpita, rimanda a un'altra pietra: ciascuna è un ricordo. In Islanda non puoi incidere le pietre; le pomice una folata e si spostano. Le rocce sono specchi neri, rosa, ocra, e le montagne basse, acuminata e verdi. In Islanda la terra ribolle, soffia, fonde: è colma di dèi.

Anche le mie montagne, le Alpi, sono Nord: il Nord mediterraneo. Cuore bianco d'Europa; nel dedalo accolgono frutteti e vigneti, boschi di caducifoglie e conifere, praterie nivali, pietraie e ghiacciai. È un mondo verticale che tende verso il basso: dopo aver visto immergersi i leviatani e arrampicare lupi e stambecchi, fra milioni di anni sarà deserto. Significa che anche i nostri ricordi, in un remoto futuro, svaniranno.

IV. Il primo bacio

Ma sono stanco. Come tutti gli amanti che han scordato l'amore, vorrei la passione di un tempo: rudi carezze, baci taglienti, i capelli scomposti. Son venuti prima i tuoi odori, sensazioni indistinte, travolgenti. So che il vero amore non sfama a riflussi, il vero amore accompagna alle labbra, assaggia, centellina...

Chiacchiero, li faccio sorridere, lascio che sorridano a me. In questa terra che è la terra degli occhi, negarsi agli sguardi è rinunciare a essere. Anita, ricercatrice danese a Egilstaðir, conviene con me che entrambe le nostre terre d'origine sono città continue: "A flat, and cities, and cities, and cities..." Tutte le città sono uguali. Entrambi siamo venuti a cercare qui la Terra com'era, ad appoggiare le labbra sulla lucida pelle dei torrenti, sulle rughe create dalla brezza, a berla come i nostri padri. Cercavamo il rispetto misto a paura, la prescienza che contraddistingue gli islandesi, costretti a vivere col terrore della catastrofe. Come racconta Hilmar Hilmarsson, "ci sentiamo delle pedine in un contesto molto più vasto e potente di noi". Qui sanno che la terra non è sempre salda sotto i piedi, "che può iniziare a tremare, spaccarsi, aprirsi in crepe profonde da cui fuoriesce lava". Noi l'abbiamo dimenticato, abbiamo irreggimentato con il morso e la sella un drago addormentato. Accanto a me l'Atlantico infila l'insenatura di un fiordo. Qui è schivo e gentile, eppure sento che da solo non potrei fronteggiare una natura tanto grande. Sono ospite. Ci sono forze più vaste di me che fanno ergere i ghiacci e li spezzano, animano frane celesti, mi fanno subire la terra ed è una fatica inedita, diversa dalle scalate. Vengo scacciato dalle stelle. Per proteggere i pulcini, gli uccelli strillano sulla mia testa, volando in picchiata sul mio berretto.

L'Islanda è la Terra che ci ha preceduti. Il filosofo obietterà che essa non è mai esistita, eppure certe luci e prospettive sono una terra increata. Gli islandesi, sapendolo, hanno eretto pochi monumenti, aperto piazze spoglie. A che scopo costruirne in una terra che ha per piazze i deserti, per chiese i vulcani, per fontane le cascate? Una terra avara d'alberi, dove quei pochi e stentati sono definiti sbarre per la mente. Vivendo io tra piccole piazze e fontane modeste, li ritengo corde sulle quali il mio pensiero riesce a issarsi.

Placati i titani, la Terra rimase in silenzio per miliardi di anni, sinché i procarioti risposero allo scintillio delle stelle. Godo l'antico silenzio, terso come profumo di neve, nella gola di Hengifoss, lungo il greto del torrente tra pareti di basalto venate di rosso. Ecco il salto, centoventi metri, e l'arcobaleno che tinge la pietra coi colori dell'iride. Mi avvicino al velo d'acqua e l'arcobaleno si chiude ad anello. Sotto gli spruzzi è così stretto da giustapporsi allo sguardo, e mi chiedo che colore avranno i miei occhi. Puoi interrogarti sulla possibilità latente, dietro un simile splendore, di un ordinamento divino. Ma se la natura contiene la spiritualità e induce ad essa, allora quel dio non può che essere naturale a sua volta. Un dio che guarda attraverso l'arcobaleno, profuma di ghiaccio ed è onda e corrente.

Elísabet Jökulsdóttir, scrittrice e attivista, ascrive la forte connessione tra terra e popolo islandese al vecchio paganesimo, dai cristiani mai pienamente estirpato. "Qui è

più forte che negli altri paesi dove l'uomo ha praticato un taglio netto con la natura. La gente proprio non si rende conto di essere per metà persona e per metà natura". Nella Voluspà, diversamente dalla Bibbia, si racconta che la terra fu creata a partire dal corpo di un uomo, Ymir, di cui le rocce e gli scogli sarebbero i denti. Quando quel corpo subisce violenze da parte degli umani, dice Jökulsdóttir, anche la gente prova dolore fisico.

V. Il primo amore

Avuta te, non ho più da cercare. Ribatto i sentieri ove altri hanno già camminato...

Quali energie hanno guidato le tue forme? Quali forze hanno prodotto le tue curve e le tue rette? Quale frastuono e quali silenzi ti hanno resa così quieta e così grande? Sogno di comprendere il linguaggio dell'acqua e della terra, il disegno per cui il sasso rotola nel greto, il verbo degli uccelli. Parlando con gli altri, ci siam chiesti quale superpotere vorremmo far nostro. Chi vuol volare, chi la vita eterna. Io ho detto: "Vorrei poter parlare con gli animali."

"Pensa parlare con una pecora, zio bel!" fa Silvia, che è di Modena: "Oggi ho brucato l'erba, domani brucherò l'erba, dopodomani brucherò l'erba!"

Superpoteri inutili, predicano loro. Chissà.

Ho gettato un seme di liquidambar nel gorgo di Dettifoss. È svanito, ma non si può raccontare, solo ammirare. "Pensa che questa è solo una piccola parte della forza dell'universo", ha detto Pier. Lì per lì non ho risposto, anzi, mi ha infastidito. Poi ho annuito. Dettifoss è una montagna rovesciata, fiaccata e disfatta, acqua che precipita e scava la terra un metro all'anno. Dettifoss esplode come il primo amore, rendendo palese la vergognosa piccolezza, l'imperizia dell'umano di fronte alle cose grandi. È un suicidio pieno di coraggio. E se l'acqua è in grado di lanciarsi in quell'inferno, mi son detto, io di tanto in tanto posso tentare qualche follia. Non sarò Dettifoss, che è Adamo ed è Prometeo, ma sarà un cambiamento.

Così mi getto nella corrente altrove, euforico, facendo rafting. Il fiume è una mano forte, una bestia torbida. Lo temo, mi accoglie, sopporta la mia presenza discreta. Smetto di ridere e mi stendo. Il cielo sopra di me, sul canyon, è azzurro. Ecco come cancellare la paura. Devi fidarti, dar spazio alla corrente, abbandonarti a lei, limitarti ad aggiornare il diario di viaggio. E ricordare. Ricordare che Dettifoss non può esser stretta in una morsa di cemento armato. Ricordare che quella stessa forza è viva anche altrove, nonostante ogni angolo sia battezzato e giaccia silente, incarcerato in un nome. Quassù ci sono spazi ove non una sola pista è tracciata. Ricorda i compagni di viaggio, il destarvi assieme, i volti assonnati che si mettono in cammino, desidera questa vita.

Pochi giorni e galleggerò sul diadema alpino gravato dalla malinconia che cinge ogni ritorno. Vedrò la pianura, Torino, e montagne sottoposte a sedute di chirurgia plastica dall'esito discutibile. In città guarderò i passeri, i cani e i colombi, tendendo l'orecchio ai sussurri della Dora e del Po che, pur stanchi e lerci, pazienti scendono il loro letto, proseguono il viaggio, non rinunciano. Ripeterò a me stesso che la natura selvaggia non è un Eden smarrito, ma riposa e ruzzola in ogni sasso, freme in ogni foglia, scruta in

ogni sguardo. Ci sono storie più longeve delle nostre: basterà fermarsi ad ascoltare.
Dovrò trovare il Nord entro un cuore mite e offeso, ma saprò che esistono terre dove
l'umano osserva, è vigile e grato.

Altre terre, e nuovi amori.

Cedevole al tatto To Be in Any Form

Paola Loreto



Tutto, nella natura, ha il suo scopo e il suo senso,
la disuguaglianza tra gli uomini così come la loro sofferenza.

All in nature has a purpose and a sense:
the inequality among men as well as their suffering.

P. D. Ouspensky – G. I. Gurdjieff
Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto
In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an
Unknown Teaching

Nello sguardo di un rapace
c'è l'istinto dell'altro.
È lo specchio più limpido
della coscienza che si interroga
su questa creatura che la guarda
e la trova curiosa, favolosa, tra
le mille movenze della testa,
degli occhi, del collo. Nel soffio
spazzante delle ali nel volo.
Nel grido incolto calato
a piombo nel vuoto. Non c'è cattura
più squisita della lenta rete
di attenzione di una mente che vuole
capire o si sorprende di come
ti stacchi di netto, impercettibile,
da un ramo frusto nella neve e
sosti a piacimento, vibrato,
nell'aria senza alcuno sforzo:
solo con l'imperio, puro,
della tua natura.

In a raptor's regard one glimpses
the Other's instinct.
It is the clearest mirror
of a consciousness in wonder

of the creature that's looking at it
and finds it curious, fabulous, in its
thousands moves of head,
eyes, neck. In the sweeping
whiff of wings in flight.
In the uncouth shriek
plummeting the void.
The exquisitest capture is
the slowly weaving focus
of a mind that wants to
comprehend or marvels at
how you break inaudibly away
from a bare branch in snow,
pause at your ease, vibrating
in the air, with no effort
but the pure, imperative
command of your nature.

* * *

Oggi non hai una nube.
E se ti guardo, rimani.
Non perdi tutto quel blu
quel soverchiarmi di roccia,
di pieghe quasi morbide
nella carne, di liquide
scorrevolezze spumose.
Oggi sei un lontano
vicino, un mondo riposto
a portata di mano.
Spiri e odori
come quando mi avvolge
il viso la stagione
prima che la lasci andare.

Today you are clear of clouds.
And if I look at you, you stay.
You don't loose all that blue,
don't cease overwhelming me
with rock, almost soft folds
of flesh, liquid floats of foam.
Today, you are a near farness,

a hidden world at hand.
You waft and scent
as when the season
enfolds my face
before I let it go.

* * *

Qui è sacro.
Qui non si fanno le cose.
Il buio diventa uno
con la montagna
e io guardo,
a disposizione.

This is the sacred place.
Things are not done, here.
The dark becomes one
with the mountain
and I watch,
available.

Space Junk

Jacob G. Price



I dreamt once that there was
A tree so tall with branches so wide
That it gripped the ends of the earth
And its leaves sheltered all the creeping things
Under the heavens.

Then the scene melted before my watery eyes.
A scarlet blade slid like a windshield wiper
From one end to another.

I saw a planetary phantom drift from star
To star, passing galactic gas stations, running
On empty.

Basura espacial

Soñé alguna vez que había
Un árbol tan alto con ramas tan anchas
Que agarraba los cabos de la tierra
Hasta que sus hojas cubrían toda criatura
Bajo el cielo.

Entonces la escena se derretía ante mis ojos aguados
Un filo rojísimo deslizaba como un limpiaparabrisas
De un lado al otro.

Veía un fantasma planetario flotar de estrella
A estrella, pasando gasolineras galácticas,
Acabándosele el gas.

Review Essay: The Importance of Climate-Change Economics

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Anders Wijkman and Johan Rockström, *Bankrupting Nature: Denying our Planetary Boundaries*, tr. Jim Wine (2011; 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2012), xiii + 206 pp.

William Nordhaus, *The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), xiii + 378 pp.

Michael Grubb, Jean-Charles Hourcade and Karsten Neuhoff, *Planetary Economics: Energy, Climate Change and the Three Domains of Sustainable Development* (London: Routledge, 2014), xxvii + 520 pp.



I.

What are your favorite indicators of the ecological predicament our civilization has produced? CO₂ emissions have now skyrocketed past 400 parts per million, well beyond the 350-part safety limit identified by climate scientist James Hansen (“Science”). One of those unpredictable and irreversible “tipping points” is now locked in to Earth’s future, the melting of the West Antarctic ice sheet. That process alone could eventually raise sea levels by four to five meters (Elliott). This July, Siberian oil and gas workers discovered what might be the beginning of a new, ominous greenhouse-gas phenomenon, a methane hydrate eruption that blew out a sixty-five-meter crater (Phillips). Yet according to the 2014 Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) rankings, not one of the top fifty-eight CO₂-emitting nations in this world “is doing enough to prevent dangerous climate change,” not even Denmark (Burck, Marten, Bals 8). As one travels by train north from Madrid hundreds of wind turbines range across the landscape; renewables supply around 12% of Spain’s energy. But because of substantial economic growth since 1990, Spain’s use of fossil fuels has increased 43% (Giddens 82-83). That is the norm today: growth trumps decarbonization.

Timothy Clark’s essay “Scale” addresses the present reality of global warming and related environmental challenges by reading a contemporary short story from the perspective of a 600-year time scale, 300 years before and 300 after its contemporary setting. The exercise leads Clark to conclude that “the humanities as currently constituted make up forms of ideological containment that now need to change” (164). That is, literature professors like me tend to be more comfortable dealing with what Clark calls “cultural representations” than with “the environmental costs of an infrastructure” such as Clark’s long-time-scale perspective on his chosen story requires. (The “infrastructure” in that case consists of many internal-combustion cars and several

houses widely separated that a single cash-strapped family struggles to maintain). For Clark global warming and related environmental challenges demand a re-thinking of humanistic study.

Addressing that demand could actually re-shape not only many a university curriculum but entire educational systems. And it could also provide valuable perspectives on the concerns of those more attuned to number, weight, and measure. For Clark's call also underscores that the economics of climate change, for instance, are too important to be left to economists. The study of costs and infrastructures, valuable in itself, also needs more contextualizing in the realm of cultural representations. For one thing, beyond the current failures are more destructive ones not yet inevitable.

The economics of global warming and related environmental problems focus on two main areas, mitigation and adaptation. How can the provisioning of technology, goods, and services in societies be modified to *mitigate* the problems, and how can modification help societies and ecologies *adapt* to unavoidable changes? Economic proposals for alleviating global warming have now become especially problematic because warming's destructive effects have so relentlessly overwhelmed preventative steps, and economics is crucial to such steps. Science has learned a great deal about the scope of climate change, promising that technologies are being developed to address it, but more often than not it is economic calculations, proposals, decisions, and agreements that determine how individuals, businesses, and governments act on these insights. Even though climate economics has arguably contributed to a larger "failure of our systems of decision-making" (Jamieson 237), it will remain crucial. And a question that has emerged strongly for me is at once political and economic: the degree to which the twin goals targeted by the UNFCCC in 1992, which remain those of the great majority of economists and have been repeatedly re-affirmed by the U.N., are really compatible: successful climate-change mitigation along with preservation of the economic growth of global capitalism.¹ I have grown skeptical about that.

If, as a growing number of scholars suggest, global warming and related environmental issues must become a basic concern of environmental and humanistic studies (*Symploke*), researchers in these fields should therefore also acquire at least some familiarity with the perspectives that professional economists have taken on these issues. The purpose of this review essay is to take a few steps in that direction. I have chosen three books selected according to the following criteria: recent publication (2012 or later), prominence of the authors in their fields, substantial or total focus on climate and energy economics, diversity of viewpoints, and availability in English.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such a selection is skewed to Western and, to a lesser degree, mainstream-economic perspectives. "Mainstream" here means holding to the view that economic value created by humans can be sustainably substituted for natural "capital" (natural resources including potentially the entire biosphere), and that therefore economic growth can proceed indefinitely despite depletion of natural

¹ Stuart Rosewarne, James Goodman, and Rebecca Pearse (7-9) outline a good case that the 1992 UNFCCC's paired but potentially incompatible goals have licensed the compromise of the science-based first goal in favor of the second, for instance in the 2007 IPCC report and the 2006 Stern Review.

resources. And all the authors, even those who call for a steady-state rather than a growth economy, address and are part of established academic and governmental institutions. Further, some of the ways that one or more of the authors talk about tackling global warming seem to recall or at least accommodate anthropocentric, exploitative, or neo-colonial attitudes that historically have helped bring on this crisis. In all cases, what might be called the market-and-data orientation of economics can render problematic the crucial valuation of all that is outside the market. But these books reveal a good deal of the current state of a field with potentially enormous impact, and they offer ingenious, intriguing, and stimulating ideas about the present and future. Though the authors are all realists in a topsy-turvy realm where realism itself may well be utopian, their books express influential viewpoints that have and will shape discussion and policy in real places. Such studies constitute an important genre of discourse the form as well as content of which should fall under the purview of rhetorical and literary scholars. The genre of inclusive climate-economics proposals has a utopian dimension insofar as it requires imagining a future world, or parts of one, based on reference to the world as it is.²

I consider the three books here in the order of publication. That is convenient because the earliest, with the greatest disciplinary breadth and most heterodox economic orientation, contextualizes the subject and its critical issues best, and because the latest is a veritable *summa economicarum climatum* that offers a partial synthesis.

II.

Bankrupting Nature: Denying Our Planetary Boundaries (2011; 2nd ed. 2012), is co-authored by Anders Wijkman, a long-time Swedish representative in the European Parliament and former Secretary-General of the Red Cross, and by Johan Rockström, a Swedish climate scientist who led a distinguished international team in a landmark 2009 project identifying nine environmental “planetary boundaries.” The book is packed with ideas and with evidence, information, and documentation across scientific, technological, and economic fields. It is an excellent bibliographical source. The authors are familiar with every official report of significance related to global warming, especially European and U.N. ones. They explain that significance clearly enough for non-specialists (despite sometimes skipping from point to point and back), though their primary audience seems to be scientists, economists, politicians, bureaucrats, and business leaders.

Bankrupting Nature is wide-ranging and somewhat loosely organized, with four substantial chapters devoted to economics and a good deal of economically relevant content elsewhere. Two chapters concern climate negotiations at national, European, and worldwide levels, with which both authors have first-hand experience. With frustration and exasperation they speak of politicians and negotiators watering down scientific benchmarks and of disastrous international negotiations from Copenhagen to

² A list of best economic practices would supply content criteria useful in a formulation of this genre. See Ackerman and Stanton (4, 129-133).

Doha (“more like trench warfare than a search for common solutions” [172]). Sometimes they speak with dogged resolve: Rockström will speak truth to power even with “a fool’s stubbornness” (21). Why is progress so difficult? Politicians fear negative reactions from the stock market much more than from the people. The book then is an opportunity for the authors to think beyond current political constraints.

The chapter on the nine planetary boundaries is outstanding, contextualizing the threat of climate instability among the others. Three of the nine have already been breached: climate (of course!), biodiversity (species extinction), and the nitrogen cycle (through use of fertilizers). Other chapters of widely varying lengths and concerns focus on population growth, agriculture, the greenhouse effect, arguments against deniers, the dwindling arctic ice sheet, and skewering an official claim that Sweden is the greenest of nations. There is a chapter outlining seven basic attitudes about climate change that distinguish the authors’ holistic “Earth Systems Science” approach from that of “the IPCC mainstream” (91).

The chapter on agriculture is among the most significant. It focuses mostly on the developing world. The authors identify two concerns relating to a rising world population that will peak in midcentury: decarbonizing agriculture and addressing the tremendous challenge the growing numbers of poor face due to global warming and related environmental issues. Agricultural experts in both developed and developing countries must undertake a tremendous task. The contradictions are stark and staggering. For instance, agriculture currently accounts for one-third of all CO₂ emissions, and yet a 70% increase in food production will be needed by 2050; the developing world needs a lot more fertilizer, but fertilizers in their present form have already breached a planetary boundary; a tremendous amount of water is required, but due to melting glaciers and other factors, considerably less water will be available. Yet the authors conclude that with a great deal of research, dedication, and management, resolutions to all these problems are just barely possible, barring climate surprises.

Disappointingly for our purposes, however, the authors do not venture to address the specifically economic dimension of this topic—how much it will all cost and who will pay. But with this chapter, *Bankrupting Nature* gives more specific attention to nature and to the scope of the problems the developing world is facing than the two other books reviewed here. Still, the chapter does not have much to say about the agency of the people in developing nations as collaborators or leaders, for instance in adapting traditional, currently sustainable farming practices to the more challenging conditions. Its proposals have a top-down feel. Surely, the authors do not mean to impose a series of directives hatched in the Global North on peasants and indigenous peoples, and thus to further entrench the latter’s powerlessness at the hands of corporations or authoritarian political structures (see Shiva, Martinez-Alier). Both here and elsewhere the book tends to throw out attractive ideas but stops short of confronting the controversial issues of their practical application, issues that often have to do with the authors’ challenge to mainstream economics and the expansive globalization it underwrites (to which challenge we shall turn now). As reviewer Helen Koppina puts it, it is lamentable that this “is not an even stronger and bolder book than it is” (85).

The economic portion of the book brings together many principles, critiques, and policy ideas advocated by a range of economists, often alternative ones, and by specialists in related disciplines. The aim is to “initiate a broad discussion among leading economists” (135) at a time when the need is for no less than “a revolution, both in attitudes and social and economic organization,” so as to inaugurate a “radically changed perspective on both the use and allocation of resources on Earth” (175).

Bankrupting Nature draws heavily from ecological economics. It challenges the mainstream economic axiom that the realm of human economic activity is separate from the natural environment from which that realm draws resources: on the contrary, the human economy is just part of the entire ecosphere. That is clearly an economic principle with promising non-anthropocentric implications. The book also sets climate change firmly in the larger framework of related environmental and economic challenges and solutions. The authors thereby express the holistic orientation of their book’s sponsor, the Club of Rome. And they also pursue another signature tenet of that organization, as well as of ecological economics (Daly) and the so-called new economics (Boyle and Simms), one expressed in the title of the Club of Rome’s most famous book, Dennis and Donella Meadows’ millions-selling *The Limits to Growth* (1972; updated 2004). Society needs “a broad discussion” about the dilemmas of growth (158), for we are vastly “overshooting” and polluting Earth’s resources faster than it can replenish them or clean them up: “the economy is growing but the planet is shrinking” (125). Whereas the mainstream economists I have encountered never justify in any detail their assumption that economic growth in its present form should and will continue indefinitely, Wijkman and Rockström provide a great deal of evidence why it shouldn’t and can’t.

For our authors, a big part of the problem is disciplinary: conventional economists don’t know “how nature works” (136) and haven’t noticed “the rapid erosion of the resource base” (125), and yet “the death of several billion people by starvation” is at stake (129). Their indictment of today’s global economy and the economists who legitimize it also points to the economy’s financial busts, unstable energy prices, poor job creation, its long-term trend of increasing income inequality, and the well-established disjunction between material wealth and genuine “wellbeing” (129, *passim*). But now, it seems, many economists and organizations are, to one degree or another, “rethinking economics” (124).

For a host of reasons the standard measure of per capita wealth and of economic growth, GDP (Gross Domestic Product), would be replaced by measures of wellbeing as indicators of a nation’s economic strength, such as those having to do with jobs, health, education, income distribution, and ecological balance. Possessing and preserving valuable natural resources does not count toward GDP figures, nor do pollution and the depletion of resources lower them. The substantial overshoot in resource use taking place now makes this failure of GDP to account for environmental assets and liabilities particularly dangerous.

The reform most emphasized in climate economics is of course precisely accounting for negative market “externalities” obscured by GDP and by market prices.

Although the conventional economic model is a free market one, it institutionalizes “market failure” at the most important level, because the externalities or negative environmental effects of fossil fuel use are generally not included in their misleadingly low prices. Their real social costs are hidden, giving them an undeserved advantage over renewables and inviting the full cargo of climate-change plagues. Either a tax or a cap-and-trade system provides the means of extracting a “social price” for carbon emissions, that is, a price that will effectively drive producers and consumers to alternative fuels and to more efficient use. In cap-and-trade markets, producers buy and sell the right to extract or to pollute up to a certain limit. The authors suggest setting an initial price for a worldwide carbon market of €40 per ton of emissions, a price that would be raised periodically. (The book was published before the collapse of the European greenhouse-gas cap-and-trade system).

But from this holistic point of view, raising the cost of carbon is just the beginning of proposals that would go beyond the notion of externality itself. Values should be determined for “natural capital,” meaning natural resources viewed as economic assets, and “ecosystem services,” the beneficial tasks the natural world performs (as if) for us, such as “purification of air and water, decomposition of wastes and residues, creation of new resources, pollination of plants, the regulation of both climate and water cycle,” (132), and so on, values not usually included in cost-benefit analysis. This means recognizing that the economy is part of the natural world, not “external” to it, and forcing realization that the value of lost natural capital often exceeds the benefits of destruction.

This looks like a crucial reform, but pricing natural capital in monetary terms also introduces an unaddressed danger. When the alter-globalization World Social Forum denounces the “green economy” as a means for “capital [...] to launch a new cycle of expansion [...] [and] to integrate parts of nature into the financial gearbox” (*Another Future is Possible* 17), it is pointing out that the pricing of natural capital can just as well be seen as a way of putting nature into the economy instead of the opposite. It has provided an opportunity—even under U.N. auspices—to incorporate natural resources into speculative financial and real estate markets, to the great detriment of displaced peasants and indigenes, and for little or no good to the environment.³

Regulating the financial system could make it an important contributor to a green economy. A fundamental problem concerns the way money is created in our economy: through bank loans in a process resembling a “pyramid scheme” (139) that stimulates uneconomic growth and therefore pollution, resource depletion, and global warming. Curbs on bank loans and other reforms could suppress that. Another related economic culprit is “short-termism.” As the two books below discuss at greater length, investment in environmentally sustainable projects such as renewable-energy technology and

³ Through the U.N.’s REDD+ program, the so-called green economy aims “to set a price for every one of nature’s goods, processes and so-called ‘services.’ Once everything has a price tag, new bonds could be issued and negotiated in the international financial marketplace [...] [leading] to the destruction of indigenous and rural-community lifestyles and is de facto expropriation of their territories” (World Social Forum 7). See also Anonymous, “REDD.”

infrastructure require a long-term commitment, and financial short-termism has diverted banks from a basic investment responsibility.

The authors join the call, which has since become louder (voiced recently by Robert Rubin, former U. S. Treasury Secretary) for responsible financial valuation of fossil fuel companies and of the risks of investing in them. According to climate scientists, most of the remaining fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground, meaning that the corporate owners of those reserves may be worth considerably less than their stocks are priced. So let political leaders speak out and financial analysts do proper risk assessments; the stocks will plummet and investments will go elsewhere, including to promising renewables. It is important for economists to engage a non-specialist audience so as to encourage investor activism and preferential investment in green companies.

Finally, the most well-developed reform broached in the book concerns the “circular economy” as developed by a number of researchers and addressed in a 2012 McArthur Foundation report endorsed by several multinational corporations.⁴ Such a reform could contribute to a steady-state economy with continued innovation and economic development, along with more efficient resource use and less emissions. The present, mostly “linear” economy is “take-make-dispose”: extract raw materials, manufacture the product, and dispose of it at end of life (163). The linear economy maximizes resource use and waste production, threatening planetary boundaries.

In the circular economy, products are “designed for ease of reuse, disassembly and refurbishment” (165-166), and at end of life their metals, plastics, rare earths, and other materials are reclaimed in vastly expanded recycling industries. The goal is *biomimicry*, a biocentric model that imitates the waste-free web of life. Modeling technology and the economy on ecological processes is a classic green ideal, and the authors return to it later in the context of product design or “biomimetics” (178) and of technology (Benyus; Benyus and Pauli). This business model is centered on services rather than products. This means renting or leasing rather than buying products, which would be long-lasting and upgradeable. Tax reform facilitates transition to the circular economy: just as Sweden lowered income taxes when it imposed a carbon tax, in the circular economy taxes on labor would be reduced in exchange for taxes on use of “virgin materials” as well as on carbon. To “dematerialize the economy” (169) would also require regulations progressively increasing efficiency targets.

The concluding chapters address prospects. Given the sorry track record so far, the world might get down to business only after “large and serious crises” (173)—a possibility others associated with the Club of Rome have addressed in fascinating detail (e.g. Gilding), and which may start to unfold before our eyes. To forestall such an outcome, the authors suggest particular areas where individual nations could agree to move forward. The final chapter offers guidelines for generating climate-mitigation measures.

⁴ For instance Walter Stahel, *The Performance Economy*, 2010; Michael Braungart and William McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, 2002; McArthur Foundation, *Towards a Circular Economy*, 2012.

Bankrupting Nature is at its best when combining that holistic approach to solutions for climate change with an appreciation of natural systems as wise models of efficiency. But for all that, what is at stake here remains only *human* well-being. The book does not accord value to the natural world in itself. The affective spectrum emphasizes anguished concern for the equipment our species requires. In that respect this book is like the other two reviewed below: the environment is perceived and discussed in instrumental terms. Can anthropocentric climate science win over the anthropocentrism intrinsic to global warming? And though the conclusion affirms the importance of “bottom-up solutions” (184) the emphasis has been on top-down ones. That kind of emphasis must be an occupational hazard of writing books to set the world right, but for changes this broad and deep a great deal of activist popular support would be necessary. Yet the authors speak to their peers; the book is neither written nor priced to grab wide attention. As mentioned above, the authors seem to have made a strategic decision not to confront controversial issues entailed by their stance on the limits of economic growth. That is apparently because they hold out a perhaps utopian hope that the political, intellectual, and corporate establishment of consumer capitalism can transform *itself* into a benevolent promoter of green well-being in a steady-state economy.

III.

William Nordhaus’s *The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World* (2103) is a very different kind of book. First of all, while the author demonstrates an impressive knowledge of science, he is a fairly militant mainstream economist who displays almost complete ignorance of (or lack of interest in) the implications of the Earth Systems Science that is central to *Bankrupting Nature*. Nordhaus focuses laser-like on global warming as a problem distinct from others, takes for granted that growth will continue, and seems to view environmental damage as a matter of local dysfunctions. Second, the purpose of *The Climate Casino* is not to suggest a range of intriguing ideas but to develop, step-by-step, a single economic “focal policy” (76), one easy to grasp in its outlines yet with the depth and substance to withstand attack and pass muster in legislatures and international summits. So the only utopia here is the world of conventional economics (which is sometimes confused with reality).

The Climate Casino is elegantly written and organized. Professor Nordhaus addresses both specialists and ordinary readers, often providing masterful summaries of technical findings. His book’s dozens of figures and tables can be challenging, but they empower the reader both to understand and to evaluate the argument as it unfolds, and to appreciate how climate scientists and economists work. There is also an enhanced online version of the book with interactive materials. Yet at several key points, I did stand in need of additional clarification such as a student in a classroom would request the teacher to supply. The book presents a rhetorical pattern pairing the generation of precise calculations with qualifications regarding their unreliability. That pattern is fundamental to the strengths and limitations of the book.

In Parts I-IV, Nordhaus leads the reader systematically from soup to nuts, from the science of global warming to the impacts warming has and will have on the earth and society, to strategies for mitigating and adapting to it, and to a specific set of recommended economic policies. The “focal policy” is actually outlined in the first chapter: the cost of the climate fix will be one-to-two percent of world income a year, and the policy will center on putting a price on emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases, one that rises regularly. Public awareness of what is at stake, along with accelerated technological research, are the other pillars of this policy.

The fifth and last part of the book, “Climate Politics,” addresses not only climate-change deniers, as the above-reviewed book does, but also public opinion and a range of other obstacles to establishing climate-change policies, all with the help of plentiful research and careful thought. It includes a patient, knowing, and direct appeal to what Nordhaus (donning his “conservative cap” [312]) may have chosen to be his primary group of readers throughout, U. S. conservatives of the Republican party—at least ones with open minds and good sense. It would be crucially important to persuade them that climate change is both real and manageable if the U. S. were to approach even the E.U.’s current degree of legislative commitment.

Nordhaus has long been a key figure in climate economics. The book comes with impressive blurbs (including one from President Obama’s former chief economic advisor) and a long Acknowledgment that includes dozens of eminent economists. It is no doubt being read at the highest bureaucratic and political levels in the U. S. At Yale University, Nordhaus led the development of the widely used family of DICE models (Dynamic Integrated Models of Climate and the Economy) for estimating economic impacts of global warming with mathematical specificity—used cautiously because, at least at the present stage of climate research, there is too much that cannot be predicted with the necessary degree of accuracy.

Nordhaus is well aware of the limitations of climate-change economic modeling, including its tendency to underestimate damages under certain conditions (see also “Free Exchange: Hot Air”). For instance, he explains why it is hard to predict “tipping points,” where systems start an irreversible collapse. Sure enough, as also mentioned above, since publication of the book a major tipping point has been passed, making collapse of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet inevitable, though not imminent. If the book had come out a year later, predictions of sea-level rise during the sheet’s post-tip decline could have been included in DICE inputs. And as *The Climate Casino*’s title itself suggest, uncertainty is actually as much the book’s running theme as determining specific figures on, for instance, the economically optimal planetary temperature increase or the wisest initial rate of a carbon tax or cost-benefit ratio. The rhetorical effect is to suggest that, despite the best-laid calculations, things here on Earth could turn on us dreadfully, so we’d better just “turn around and walk back out” of the Climate Casino (4).

Yet at the same time *The Climate Casino*’s number crunching does often seem by comparison, as reviewer Paul Krugman points out, to downplay somewhat the climate threats and the required mitigation efforts. (And in a forthcoming article, two leading British economists claim that the DICE model significantly underestimates warming’s

impact on an economy's productive capacity [Spross]). So should one focus on the math or on the imponderables? If the former, perhaps the idea is to reassure conservative readers that embracing moderate mitigation efforts entails neither a betrayal of their political credo nor a reduction of their living standards. But such a stance can easily lapse into smugness. For instance, one of Nordhaus's bedrock assumptions (shared by many mainstream economists) is that people will be a good deal richer in the future, because economies will continue to grow, and when it comes to climate disruptions they will also have learned how to adapt, so—who knows?—they might not mind much when sea levels rise quite a bit! Because of its paradoxical combination of mathematical specificity and unsettling uncertainty, the book seems to cue divergent responses with regard to the ease with which we can leave the climate casino.

Let's follow our climate economist part way on this book's journey to identify what conditions might be like in the future, how they will affect the economy, and what policies might be adopted in response. This journey includes constant discussion of issues posed by state-of-the-art research. Nordhaus starts by considering how much the planet will warm by a given future date. To that end, we must estimate levels of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions (such as methane from natural gas and thawing permafrost). The three crucial factors determining emissions worldwide will be population growth, the degree to which mitigation efforts reduce "carbon density" in energy production, and living standards as represented by GDP per capita. We plug that data into a computer modeling system which predicts how the level of warming at our specified date will affect Earth's natural systems and features, such as sea level, ocean acidity, hurricane intensity, and so on, always with the qualification that we cannot predict aspects like tipping points and the power of feedback loops (when one warming trend sets off another and the two reinforce each other). Now we can go on to consider the "Impacts of Climate Change on Humans and Other Living Systems," the title of Part II of the book. With the help of DICE or similar modeling systems, which Nordhaus also takes into account, we generate a figure for the economic damage done by a given rise in Earth's temperature. In tallying the damage, Nordhaus considers are diverse areas such as farming and food, human health, engulfed coastal settlements, and the "loss of unique heritage sites" (112). An important finding from examining the data is that in all areas, the resilience of the developed world's better managed productions systems should provide comparative insulation against the worst effects of global warming. However, there turns out to be a major problem with trying to assign monetary value to the environment: in this case what look like the most valuable areas are the ones "far removed from the market and thus from human management," including "human and natural treasures, ecosystems, ocean acidification, and species" (136). It seems that "[e]conomics can contribute the least in areas where we need it most" (136).

Here emerges a great gulf between different economic approaches to valuation of the environment. Nordhaus discusses the difficulty of valuing coral reefs, for instance. He sensibly rejects one mainstream-economic method: polling people about how much they would pay to save, say, Australia's Great Barrier Reef. But coral reefs have tremendous economic value: flood protection, fish habitat, and so on. Ecological

economists estimate that value when assessing kinds of natural capital and ecosystem services. Ocean acidification from absorption of excess atmospheric CO₂ has been eating away at coral reefs for some time, and the lost value of coral reefs to human beings since 1997 as measured by a prominent such economist, Robert Costanza, is well into the tens of trillions of dollars (Zimmer). Nordhaus ends up without any way to value those “most valuable areas” outside of the market, once again emphasizing how uncertain his precise figures are.

His duly qualified estimate of damages focuses in this case on the U. S. economy: with a 2.5C° temperature rise since the year 1900, by 2070 the damage across areas that can be quantified would amount to 1.5% of annual GDP (139). That seems to be staggeringly below what an ecological economist’s estimate would be, because that estimate would be based on a way of roughly determining a price for many of the non-market areas that Nordhaus excludes from his calculations. The difference in approach is that ecological economists are convinced that human capital cannot replace natural capital beyond a certain point, and that therefore the biosphere and Earth’s non-living treasures are more valuable to humans than mainstream economists believe they are. Nordhaus does emphasize the dangerous uncertainty stemming from his view of the unquantifiability of non-market areas, and he indicates that a risk premium needs to be added to his 1.5% estimate of damages. But since there is no agreement among climate economists about the size of the premium, none gets added.

Part III considers step-by-step whether we should aim for the 2 C° limit agreed to at the 2009 Copenhagen summit, or for a different figure. The answer hinges on a cost-benefit analysis, which finds that it would be better to do a certain amount of near-term “economizing” (146) on climate-change expenses now so we can leave more of the cost to those rich, weathered, and adaptation-savvy descendants of ours—although doing so will also bequeath them a temperature rise of 2.3° C.

At this point of the argument, three questions must be asked: why does the author not take more seriously the value of Earth’s natural bounty (in the form of “natural capital” or “ecosystem services”)? Is it reasonable, given ecological overshoot, to expect both continuing economic growth and rising living standards far into the future? And whose growth and living standards is at stake? The benefits of economic growth have notoriously accrued to a wealthy minority, while the majority of the Earth’s population is falling behind, a trend predicted to continue and to increase in future generations (Picketty). Over two billion of us live on the edge, with a billion living near starvation and with dim prospects. The latest IPCC report summary concludes that “climate-related hazards” are very likely to produce “negative outcomes for livelihoods, especially for people living in poverty” (IPCC 7). Are the rich heirs of today’s 1% to be the golden ones who will set things right? Does mainstream economics exist in world in which no explanations of basic assumptions are needed, even when the subject is one of survival?

However, it turns out that limiting temperature rise to 2.3° C under the focal policy is only the best-case scenario, requiring full and maximally efficient participation by all nations starting more or less immediately. Given the slight chance of that, even

with sanctions, continuing to strain for that limit would cause “a horrible economic depression” (180). But must we really accept the view that our only choice is between economic growth and economic ruin? Nordhaus prioritizes growth of the existing economic system over climate mitigation. But what if the limits-to-growth party is right? What if, as Naomi Klein has recently observed, “Our economic model is at war with life on Earth” (Klein)?

Parts III and IV offer an education in cost-benefit analysis and discounting under different assumptions and in different segments of the economy, including households. There are surveys of different mitigation technologies, and assessments of their usefulness and costs. The shrewd and wide-ranging discussion of the two leading carbon-pricing methods, taxation vs. cap-and-trade, is indispensable, and the caveats about depending on government regulations are eye-opening. The work-up predicting U. S. energy production in 2050 based on Obama’s by-no-means radical goals is surprising and somewhat disturbing: even with very high carbon prices, coal and gas would still provide for half of the country’s energy needs, though that would depend entirely on successful development of carbon sequestration technology—which may turn out to be unfeasible. High prices give solar a modest future, though wind could capture a quarter of the market. Our future depends on low-carbon technological innovation spurred not only by high carbon prices but by private and government support that can intervene in the so-called technological “valley of death,” where breakthroughs failing to get prompt investment funds gradually lose exclusivity and no longer remain attractive to developers.

The Climate Casino remains a stellar contribution that increases public awareness of global warming and further commitment to mitigation in the U. S., not least because it is able to present state-of-the-art science and economics to ordinary readers who are prepared for a challenge. Yet despite bits of ethical and aesthetic lip service, the book constitutes a *de facto* affirmation of the ultimate value of human capital, and projects a disturbing sense of human omnipotence over nature and its value. The book’s focus on the quantifiability of capital also throws the emphasis off more relatable and rending losses such as species extinction, forest fires, disease, rising sea levels, dangerous weather, and so on. Given the stakes, Nordhaus’ failure to justify his assumptions or to consider alternatives is unacceptable.

IV.

Published less than a year after *The Climate Casino*, *Planetary Economics* depicts a very different situation, one in which confidence in economic calculations has shrunk, whether concerning damages, temperature targets, costs, or mitigation benefits. If Nordhaus sent Calculation and Uncertainty on a game of hide-and-seek, Uncertainty has decisively won here. If one expert sets the social costs of CO₂ emissions at \$10 per ton, another at \$1000, such calculations must be pointless. The part of the future we can predict is dwarfed by the parts we cannot. Climate economics is really about security, not optimizing costs and benefits.

The three authors of *Planetary Economics* are distinguished academics in the U. K., France, and Germany, respectively, with experience administering or advising national and international organizations on global warming. Two are climate economists; the principal author, Michael Grubb, edits the journal *Climate Policy*. The book comes with glowing endorsements from eight other prominent European and U. S. academics. It is a hefty volume in rather small type, long in the making, meticulously documented, and written at a fairly high level of technical sophistication primarily for those in research or in government, though with equations confined to an appendix. But it provides summaries and substantial overview, introductory, and concluding chapters that make it possible for the dedicated layperson to comprehend its leading ideas.

I will not presume actually to evaluate the book in any detail; to my knowledge, neither has anyone else (but see Barrett). However, the book does convincingly purport to redefine the field of economics, specifically to make it effective at last in spearheading climate policies and programs. And it exhibits awesome practical knowledge of the business landscapes of relevant industries. It also offers specific advice on how to move forward, based on the book's thesis that there are three different economic disciplines representing three aspects of climate policy, aspects that support one another and must be pursued together.

The book implies that the present operating system of the world economy has failed and is leading to ruin: though its stupendous output has transgressed several of Rockström's planetary boundaries, 2.5 billion people "still live in grinding poverty" (1). Here failure is measured against a standard that departs significantly from the "sustainable growth" mantra installed by the UNFCCC in 1992: the proper goal "should be to improve human welfare without exacerbating local or regional environmental damage or risking 'dangerous anthropogenic interference' with the climate system" (12). The goal of welfare has replaced the supposed means to it, growth—though the authors are too canny to leave it just at that (see below). Why has progress toward putting the world on a path to 2° C been so "glacial" (46) even though our economy, as the Appendix argues, has a "large capacity to adapt to a wide range of possible future requirements and constraints" (19)? Part of the answer is that economists (including one William Nordhaus) have been focusing too much on markets and pricing, and on furthering neo-liberal globalization. Markets constitute only one of the three relevant "domains" of economics that need to be co-coordinated to get on the right path to sustainable development.

The fields of behavioral and organizational economics comprise the first contributing domain. The goal is to make consumption of energy more efficient by facilitating "better choices" (68), fostering changes in people's attitudes and habits relating to energy use and climate change. Among the means here are regulations requiring insulation as well as energy-related information and production standards covering product efficiency. The fields of neoclassical and welfare economics comprise the second domain. The goal here is to use the power of the market, pricing, and investment in alternative energy sources to shift the economy toward clean energy consumption for the "collective good" (57). The fields of evolutionary and institutional

economics comprise the third domain. These fields concern long-term trends of economic development in different regions and the roles of institutions and governments. The major goal here is strategic investment through public or other funding to “support the evolution of more efficient and lower-carbon energy systems” (68). The book devotes three substantial chapters to each of these domains.

Energy systems must be coordinated across the three domains through three “pillars” of policy. For instance, pillar-one savings in energy bills help support the payment of pillar-two taxes or cap-and-trade prices for carbon emissions, which in turn encourage more efficiency; pillar-three advanced electrical grids delivering cheaper energy do the same, and their high cost is offset by their long-term benefits. The post-mortems concerning unsuccessful carbon-pricing proposals in different nations, along with pragmatic recommendations about how to achieve success, are especially impressive here. The key to successful reform is to do it in small, patient steps, with coordination across pillars, with deep knowledge of relevant economic and political conditions, and with democratic input.

Perhaps the majority of the broad-ranging economic proposals of *Bankrupting Nature* could be classified in the first or third pillars of this new view of economics. And *The Climate Casino*’s three-part program fits, too: public awareness is mostly first-pillar, the focal policy of carbon pricing second-pillar, and funding for innovation and discussion of the technological valley of death third-pillar. What *Planetary Economics* emphasizes is the need to align reciprocal benefits across the pillars, exploring and developing the resources of the first and third, and keeping second-pillar matters from dominating.

The book’s most theoretically incisive point concerns the contributions of the first and third domains to economic growth, which depends largely on innovation, which in turn must supply crucial climate-mitigating breakthroughs. But economic theory has so far only been able to explain half of the observed quantity of innovation. The authors argue that the unexplained “dark matter” of economic growth must be sought in aspects of the first and especially third domains, for instance “regulation, institutional and technical change, education and infrastructure” (404), as well as research institutions and corporate investments, along with cultural factors.

Further, since many measures to address climate change fall into these categories, perhaps climate change need not comprise primarily an additional set of costs that drag down the economy but a catalyst for beneficial economic transformations—as motivator, stabilizer, and coordinator. Despite their book’s title, the authors show little interest in international agreements, but with climate change as an economic catalyst nations would want to join the cutting-edge “transformers’ club” in order to “to reap the rewards of low-carbon investment and innovation” (485) even without comprehensive international agreements. Climate change could even facilitate Europe’s moribund economic recovery: due to low interest rates, there is much underutilized capital on the one hand, and on the other the “real economy is desperate for investment” (480), so renewables should present a welcome opportunity. Here the selling point for investment in mitigation technology is no longer the usual one, i.e. that

growth will be preserved along with climate mitigation, but simply that the demands of mitigation might stimulate growth in sectors where growth will be truly sustainable.

In addressing a “failure of theory” in economics (2), *Planetary Economics* gestures toward more enduring principles of civilization existing prior to the development of that field in its classical form. Political economy, the authors point out, quoting the *OED*, is the “art of managing the resources of a people and its government,” and civilization involves “development of a social capacity to pursue the common good” (485-486). Possibly, the program outlined here would lead over time to deep economic and social changes ushering in a welfare-first, socialistic economic environment, though the book’s thrust is more toward coordinating elements than replacing them. In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel observes that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk—philosophical understanding matures in an age of decline when action becomes feeble. One hopes this phrase does not turn out to be applicable to this book, Hegelian in its breadth, scope, and boldness of conception. The 2° C goal may have been a dream, but possibly *Planetary Economics’* broad synthesis could still contribute to making climate mitigation and adaptation the creative and organizing center for economies worldwide, as well as an important part of education in cultural and environmental studies.

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Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann (eds.), *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2013), xvii + 290 pp.



In “New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism” (2010), and later in “Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism” (2011), Greta Gaard presented perceptive critiques of the current state of ecofeminism and openly denounced the disturbing effacement of ecofeminist thought from current ecocritical scholarship. In both critical surveys, Gaard lamented the omissions and misrepresentations of feminist literary criticism in the latest works of the most prominent ecocritics to date, and their obvious inability to come to terms with issues raised by feminist arguments and insights. *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* is clearly designed to remedy that state of affairs: the editors have taken up the necessary task of exploring human relations with nature and nonhuman others from a feminist perspective, their professed aims being “to acknowledge not only the feminist roots of ecocriticism but also the centrality of feminist views, methods, and interpretations in building ecocriticism’s future” (3).

As some well-established ecocritics acknowledge in the blurbs, *International Perspectives* is a welcome contribution to the field of feminist ecocriticism, a giant step towards the goal of “reinforce(ing) our understanding of the reasons why feminist views, methods and interpretations must become more central to the field of ecocriticism” (Joni Adamson). This necessary advancement is ensured by the combined efforts of a diverse group of writers and researchers who bring together a diversity of perspectives central to the body of thought of feminist literary ecocriticism. As its title suggests, the volume also tackles intercultural issues, achieving a variety and depth of insight otherwise hard to accomplish.

What might readers hope for from this publication? To begin with, one may expect an integration of the latest theoretical impulses in the feminist ecocritical debate. This integrative effort should suffice to lay the foundations for a reassessment of the major streams of thought in feminism as well as a mapping out of its future territory. I believe that this goal has been successfully achieved. Moreover, it will not come as a surprise to those who have followed developments in the fields of feminism and ecocriticism, that its editors are Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok and Serpil Oppermann, all of whom have previously authored and edited studies in feminist ecocriticism, ecocritical theory, posthumanism and material feminism.

The volume opens up with a foreword by Linda Hogan and an introduction by the editors. It seems appropriate that Hogan—a celebrated poet, novelist and environmentalist who offers not only feminist, but also minority and indigenous

perspectives in her literary works—gets the first word in appraising the volume’s variety of approaches in the fields of “ecofeminist criticism, animal studies, multiple global cultures, and the reinvention of the human being” (xvii). This is followed by the introduction, in which the authors trace the origins and history of feminist ecocriticism, point out the key elements of this theoretical stance, and carefully present the essays by inscribing them inside a larger project of “climate justice, species justice, reproductive justice, food justice [...] and a larger movement for global justice” (15).

International Perspectives consists of four parts: “Feminist Ecocritical Theory”, “Feminist/Postcolonial/Environmental Justice, “Species, Sexualities and Eco-Activisms” and “Apocalyptic Visions”. The different essays included in each section reflect a well-balanced variety of trends within both feminism and environmentalism. They start from the more theoretical issues of Part I, which seems to have been designed to lay to rest the outdated notion that ecocriticism must avoid abstract theorizing. The fact that the editors have chosen to dedicate four theory-laden chapters to pursue thorough revisions of some ecocritical principles proves that a systematic reflection on existing practices has become not only pertinent nowadays, but absolutely necessary. The first essay concentrates on the alliance between feminist ecocriticism and posthumanism: Serpil Oppermann’s “Feminist Ecocriticism: A Posthumanist Direction in Ecocritical Trajectory” covers a field of literary criticism that the author has previously worked on. The political effects of material narratives and the potential use of a feminist epistemology to formulate an ethics of liberation are the issues discussed in Serenella Iovino’s “Toxic Epiphanies: Dioxin, Power, and Gendered Bodies in Laura Conti’s Narratives on Seveso.” In her discussion of the 1976 Seveso spill, Italy’s first widely-publicized ecological disaster, and its literary representation in Conti’s writings, Iovino places emphasis on issues of materialism, transcorporeality and the entanglement of matter and discourse. The issue of feminist essentialism is discussed in Timothy Morton’s “Treating Objects Like Women: Feminist Ontology and the Question of Essence,” which draws on Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology to discuss the reductionism of process-based ontologies in relation to ecofeminism. The first part closes with Simon C. Estok’s “The Ecophobia Hypothesis: Re-memembering the Feminist Body of Ecocriticism,” which spells out the connections between the ecophobia hypothesis and the subjects and concerns of feminist and queer theory, as well as feminist ecocriticism.

Part II trains its sights on the more practical connections between feminist ecocriticism and colonialism and environmental justice. In “Streams of Violence: Colonialism, Modernization and Gender in María Cristina Mena’s ‘John of God, the Water Carrier,’” Chiyo Crawford underlines ecofeminism’s commitment to reflect on the life experiences of indigenous women, who frequently offer the most forceful resistance to environmental injustice. Regina Root’s chapter “Saving the Costa Rican Rainforest: Anacristina Rossi’s *Mad About Gandoca*” examines the autobiographical novel *La Loca de Gandoca*, which documents an ecological disaster caused by the Costa Rican government’s promotion of tourism in a traditionally protected area of Costa Rica. The section concludes with Laura White’s “Re-Imagining the Human: Ecofeminism, Affect,

and Postcolonial Narration”, a thought-provoking attempt to bring together ecofeminism, affect theory and postcolonial narratives.

Moving forward towards interspecies relations, queer sexualities, and eco-activism, part III opens with Chia-Ju Chang and Iris Ralph’s “Women and Interspecies Care: Dog Mothers in Taiwan,” and continues with Lauren Rae Hall’s exploration of the concept of species rights and queer sexualities in “The Queer Vegetarian: Understanding Alimentary Activism.” The issue of antinatalism is tackled in Nicole Seymour’s “Down with People: Queer Tendencies and Troubling Racial Politics in Antinatalist Discourse.” Part IV is dedicated to exploring the literary treatment of apocalypse in novels by Octavia Butler, Cormack McCarthy and Tony Kushner, among others.

The essays included in the four parts cover a wide range of strands within ecocriticism, from more traditional issues and well-known key thinkers such as Greta Gaard, Timothy Morton, Simon C. Estok, Kate Rigby and Rachel Stein, to more recently made connections with a variety of literary and non-literary texts, such as those presented by Serpil Oppermann, Serenella Iovino, Chiyo Crawford, Regina Root and Christa Grewe-Volpp. Among the stand-out pieces of the volume are Kate Rigby’s analysis of Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*, in “The Poetics of Decolonization: Reading *Carpentaria* in a Feminist Ecocritical Frame” (in part II), where Rigby successfully navigates the always risky “confluence of postcolonialism and ecocriticism” (120); equally inspiring is Christa Grewe-Volpp’s reappraisal of Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Cormack McCarthy’s *The Road* in “Keep Moving: Place and Gender in a Post-Apocalyptic Environment” (in part IV), which focuses on the relationship between place and gender in two imaginary post-apocalyptic worlds. Rachel Stein sheds new light on two of Margaret Atwood’s most recent novels, in “Sex, Population and Environmental Eugenics in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” (in part III). An altogether different spin on the familiar issue of species and social justice is provided by Greta Gaard’s concluding chapter, “In(ter)dependence Day: A Feminist Ecocritical Perspective on Fireworks”, which takes a wide-ranging perspective on the phenomenon of fireworks, providing an ecocritical reading of them as symbols of the empire and national identity, as well as an assessment of their effects, both directly on diverse animal species and citizens of the US and indirectly on the third world countries where fireworks are produced.

All in all, *International Perspectives on Feminist Ecocriticism* offers insights into future developments not just for feminist ecocriticism, which it places firmly on the map, but for ecocriticism as a whole, and provides an example to literary scholarship of the way in which theory and practice can be accessibly yet rigorously presented. As the editors acknowledge, there is a sensitive issue at the heart of this edited collection: the need to reclaim ecocriticism’s feminist lineage and to bring ecocriticism into a closer alliance with feminist studies. While they give full credit to earlier ecofeminist theory and criticism, the editors also attain their goal of moving beyond it and offering “a new practice of feminist ecocriticism” (1), opening “new ethical pathways to contest [...] sexist, racist, speciesist, ecophobic, classist, nationalist and homophobic discourses” (2), and proving that the feminist roots, views and methods, which have been sometimes

neglected within canonical ecocriticism, are and will go on being central to the future of ecocriticism (3).

Altogether, the volume is a welcome and necessary addition to the ongoing debate on the future of feminist ecocriticism, as well as a refreshing contribution to the development of literary studies in general. Furthermore, it offers an encompassing horizon for future feminist studies and draws international critical attention to feminist ecocriticism as a critical methodology that cannot but acquire a long-due importance in the ever widening range of concerns in the field of ecocriticism.

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Andrew Smith and William Hughes, (eds.), *Ecogothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 198 pp.



There is an interesting new development in the evolution of ecocriticism that is not entirely being driven by ecocritics themselves. This is evidenced by the book *Eco-Joyce*, edited by Irish Studies scholars Robert Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, and by this book edited by the founder of *Gothic Studies* and a past president of the International Gothic Association. It would be easy to be cynical about finding a new line of research for a long-established narrow field by adding the prefix “eco” to it. But that would be a serious mistake. These scholars have read beyond Buell and Garrard. Some of them are established ecocritics such as Tom J. Hillard and Sharae Deckard in the present volume, together with ecofeminist Emily Carr who has lived most of her life in the twenty-first century (163). And the ecocritical possibilities flagged up by these books should attract further ecocritical interest.

Such books also call for a reconsideration of some ecocritical concepts. In *ISLE* 16.4 Tom J. Hillard had argued that Simon Estok’s notion of ecophobia might be most usefully broadened from hatred of nature to fear of nature in all its dimensions, and that Gothic considered not as a genre but as a mode would provide neglected material for ecocritical consideration. *Ecogothic* is the first fruit of this argument and an indication of the range of material that might be considered. This book opens with the British tradition before considering Canadian and then US contexts and concludes with Sharae Deckard’s brilliant proposal for a global geopolitics of the ecogothic. Because nature in the Gothic is a source of trauma and what the editors call “a space of crisis,” there is a temptation to assume, as they do, that this “conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological” that provides subtle insights into ecological relationships. There is a danger in the word “conceptually” that allows for the ticking of boxes on both sides—the “Gothic” and the “ecological”—and reduces critical analysis to an application of frames of recognition. This is evident in the opening essay by Lisa Kröger which moves from the environment “as a kind of conduit of emotions” (19) for Ann Radcliffe’s characters, to female characters’ identification with a feminized nature, to the conclusion that “the Gothic ecology, then, seems to be one that suggests it is best for humanity and nature to live harmoniously with one another” although apparently “nature [...] will always be victorious in the end” (26).

For all its fascinating detail, Catherine Lanone’s essay on the Gothic literature of ice monsters and the lost Franklin expedition of 1845 struggles to find ecocritical conclusions beyond “the paradigm of colonial misappropriation” (41) of Arctic ice in the capitalist hubris of trade in the light of current global warming. Algernon Blackwood’s strange work should deliver more in the hands of David Punter and it does in the

conclusion that Blackwood “offers no glib answers as to how we might accommodate ourselves to these ‘other lives’” in nature (55). The book now begins to gain an incisiveness of analysis. William Hughes’ critique of the film *The Wicker Man* looks at how various encounters with nature are framed by “perspectives which broker power and knowledge within the film” (58). Hughes unpacks the deceptions that underpin the utopian vision of the film, showing how some alternative Green societies “may carry, occluded within them, traces of the repressive orthodoxies they claim to resist” (68).

The distinctiveness of a Canadian ecogothic seems to have emerged from national tensions between wilderness and a “garrison mentality,” between indigenous cultures and postcolonial identity in relation to land, and, although this is not made explicit by the contributors to this book, a deeply ambivalent view of the USA’s technology, materialism and influence. Perhaps the Canadian “melting North” (100) adds urgency. Using the essential Gothic notion of liminality, Alanna F. Bondar provides a striking overview of a national literature renegotiating “beliefs concerning otherness, multiculturalism and nature” through ecogothic literary modes. Of course, at the centre of this work is Margaret Atwood whose monsters Shoshannah Ganz identifies as products of the “sub-genre of Southern Ontario Gothic” (87), read through the perspective of climate change. “Atwood’s uncanny ability to predict the future” (101) is noted without irony.

Bringing an historicist perspective to the film *The Blair Witch Project* provides a platform for Tom J. Hillard to sharply define aspects of the fear of nature in American culture in “From Salem witch to *Blair Witch*: the Puritan influence on American Gothic.” This is really a companion piece to Kevin Corstorphine’s essay “‘The blank darkness outside’: Ambrose Bierce and wilderness Gothic at the end of the frontier.” which takes its starting point in Emerson’s *Nature* of 1837 and shows how the wilderness and the Indian were used to replace decaying abbeys and decadent aristocracy in making a non-European Gothic in frontier America. Corstorphine’s essay really does not get very much further in elucidating what “an ecocritical analysis would focus on” (131), as his last paragraph has it. Much more revealing are the connections and disconnections between *On the Road*, *The Road* and Jim Crace’s novel *The Pesthouse* in Andrew Smith’s astute comparison of these post-apocalyptic novels. Smith ends with an admission that “the Gothic alignment with an environmental disaster” here is really a vehicle for what is, in effect, a post-pastoral position “in which the way forward seems, politically speaking, to reformulate the way back” (145).

In “‘Uncanny states’: global ecogothic and the world-ecology in Rana Dasgupta’s *Tokyo Cancelled*’ Sharae Deckard makes an ecocritical response to Fredric Jameson’s challenge to find new aesthetic forms to map “the world space of multinational capital” (182) in a discussion of this innovative novel by the British-born Indian, Rana Dasgupta, who lives in New Delhi. The form itself of this story cycle, Deckard argues, mirrors “the systemic structures which connect peripheries and cores” (192-193). The sophistication of theoretical framing, textual discussion and carefully concluded argument offer a corrective to the self-obsessed ranting of Emily Carr’s “Towards an American ecofeminist Gothic” (“I said it before and I will say it again: don’t expect answers” [172-

3]). The final essay of this book surely advances both ecocriticism and Gothic studies, and is one vindication of the many here for the adoption of the prefix. Ecogothic has arrived; ecocriticism has expanded into new shades of potential discussion.

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John Blair Gamber, *Positive Pollutions and Cultural Toxins: Waste and Contamination in Contemporary U.S. Ethnic Literatures* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 248pp.



While the subject of waste has been a mainstay of environmentalist discourse for decades, John Blair Gamber's *Positive Pollutions and Cultural Toxins: Waste and Contamination in Contemporary U.S. Ethnic Literatures* (2012) is, surprisingly enough, one of the few monographs of literary ecocriticism yet devoted to the topic. This relative dearth of waste criticism may indeed reflect, as Gamber's study suggests, a lingering tendency among ecocritics to misconstrue the modern metropolis—a site where the majority of consumer waste is produced—as the antithesis of those redemptive natural places that nature-loving literature professors prefer to read and write about as well as repair (to). Gamber contends that ecocritical practice provides intellectual justification for a thinly veiled species of “white flight” that he dubs “blight flight, a longing to escape urban decay,” that environmentalist discourse both incites and sanctions (56). The express goal of *Positive Pollutions* is thus to combat prejudice against urban spaces by expanding readers' inherited definitions of both nature and community. The book proposes that humans and the things we make, from skyscrapers to landfills, are as natural as anything else in creation and, conversely, that the nonhuman elements of the world, which we all too often disregard in our accounts of the social, should be recognized as an integral part of the communities that define and sustain us. One immediate upshot (or consequence, as some might prefer to put it) of deconstructing the formidably resilient nature-culture binary is that it subverts the metaphysical grounds for ecocriticism's long-standing preoccupation with wilderness. The book thus responds to the directive—proposed by William Cronon almost twenty years ago in “The Trouble with Wilderness” and seconded in Lawrence Buell's analysis of “Toxic Discourse” a few years later—for ecocritics to pay more heed to the environments that the majority of people actually live in, thereby shifting the political focus of ecocritical study, and of environmental activism more generally, from wilderness preservation to environmental justice.

Garbage offers a promising trope for exploring such issues since it permits creative writers and the critics who read them to muse upon the suggestive symmetries between a municipality's castoff things and its castoff people. The book offers close readings of five texts of ethnic American literature in which garbage plays a significant role—Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* and *The Parable of the Talents*, Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*, Louise Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife*, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, and Gerald Vizenor's *Dead Voices*. Most of these writers and texts have already been written about by critics interested in questions of either ethnicity or ecology, but since ethnic studies and ecocriticism (at least of the first-wave,

wilderness preservation variety defined in the book's introduction) initially appear to have so little in common, Gamber's book works toward bridging the two critical approaches by choosing a thematic focus that appeals to the interests of both.

Like much critical writing on the topic of waste, *Positive Pollution's* biggest difficulty is in reining in a signifier whose conceptual malleability entails a playfulness that can easily run amok. In everyday speech, "waste" applies as easily to abstractions (time, talent, and life) as it does to various commodities that have lost their use or exchange value (or even just their novelty). With meanings already so diverse and ambiguous, things only get more convoluted when waste and its cognates (garbage, trash, filth, dirt, pollution) are figuratively equated with the subordinate term in a given conceptual binary (an abject, ethnicized other in the case of Gamber's book). Given waste's susceptibility to semantic slippage and thus its ability to comprise a diverse and even incompatible array of concepts and affects, recognition of waste as a material thing can all too frequently get subsumed in a welter of digressive metaphor.

We find many such digressions in Gamber's book thanks to the protean lodestones of his analysis. The phrases "positive pollution" and "cultural toxin," with few exceptions, focus critical attention on the metaphors rather than the materiality of waste. As readers of the book will discover, "positive pollution" refers more to an action (and one that often exists on a rather elevated plane of abstraction) than a substance. The list of topics that are "positively polluted" in and by the novels Gamber examines includes "static, rigid, or essentialist gendered identities" (61), historiography (62), a character lacking a nose and upper lip (64), "linear and unidirectional time" (64), a garden in which butterflies and hummingbirds fly in and out at will (77), "singular or absolute narrative power" (92), urban Native identities (116), the human-animal binary (117), boundaries between nations (122), and oral narrative (173). The only thing that doesn't seem to register as a positive pollution is actual garbage. The book therefore fails to deliver on its promise to examine waste as a real (not simply metaphorical) source of political resistance: "cast-off places, objects, and people can be regenerative sites of community building" (13). Real garbage's positive potential is addressed briefly in places throughout the book—for example, in a few paragraphs praising the *pepenadors* of Mexico and the related aesthetic ideals of *rasquachismo*, or in his application of the death-is-life tenet of "compost theology"—but these passages are overwhelmed by many others that deconstruct (or "pollute" to use Gamber's preferred metaphor) various binaries that represent deleterious processes of conceptual "purification" that relate only tangentially to garbage. Indeed, to judge by the majority of the examples included in the study, a book might traffic in "positive pollution" even if it contains no references to garbage at all, a versatility that I feel rather undermines the utility of the concept.

The book's second coinage, "cultural toxins," similarly indicates a departure from the material reality of trash with the modifier "cultural" clearly establishing the figurative nature of the "toxins" to be discussed. Despite this bent toward abstraction, this term, unlike "positive pollution," does more than patinate familiar deconstructive maneuvers. Observing that political discourse in the U.S. has long decried influxes of

various ethnic groups as an undesirable pollution of an idealized Anglo-American purity, Gamber suggests a radical reversal—namely, that we instead begin thinking of racism, misogyny, and homophobia as “cultural toxins.” We might note, however, that it’s not as if terms such as racism, misogyny, and homophobia have particularly positive connotations in the first place, so the call to deploy toxic discourse in the way Gamber proposes amounts to little more than a rhetorical nicety unless efforts are made to demonstrate that racism and other “cultural toxins” have a direct, negative impact on the environments in which they circulate. Undoubtedly they do—as long as there is an abject group upon whose homes the dominant industrial culture can foist its toxic waste products, there will be little motivation to deal with these wastes in an ecologically sound manner. The book offers a glancing treatment of this idea, particularly in the analysis of *The Rag Doll Plagues*, but a more rigorous probing of the material effects that various hate-fueled ideologies entail would prove “cultural toxins” to be a sharper critical tool.

The creation of waste is an unavoidable feature of all existence, exponentially more so within the anthropocentric context of industrial consumer culture. Attitudes of revulsion for the wastes we create underwrite a profound disavowal of its existence, a disavowal reinforced by corporate and municipal systems of disposal that ensure the most privileged members of our society need never think about where their trash ends up. Despite its flaws, Gamber’s book encourages readers to bring this disavowal into focus by raising a question that other ecocritics might join him in addressing: How might material waste, which has long been coded within environmental discourse as inimical to ecological well-being, be reconceived as a “positive” thing worthy of our care and concern?

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Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 211 pp.



Sarah Jaquette Ray's first book alerts us to the pernicious process of "ecological othering"—which, as she argues, has been integral to American environmentalist campaigns from the Progressive Era to the present moment. Ecological othering materially and discursively abjects those human bodies considered to be polluting, disgusting, or otherwise undesirable and, in the process, covers up injustice against those bodies. For example, in the book's last chapter, Ray examines public outcry over the ecological impact of border-crossers on Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. As she shows, this outcry not only positions undocumented immigrants as trash, but diverts attention from the injustices that drive migration in the first place—not to mention obfuscating the comparatively greater ecological impact of U.S. border security.

The Ecological Other is divided into three long case studies, framed by an introduction and conclusion, which focus respectively on the ecological othering of disabled persons, Native Americans, and immigrants. While grounded in literary ecocriticism, Ray's methodology is widely interdisciplinary, incorporating historical and field research alongside close textual readings. Her archive is impressively varied as well, including everything from rock climbing magazines to ecopsychology literature to "real" landscapes like Organ Pipe.

The book's wide-ranging diversity allows it to build on several different areas of research, and it does so in innovative ways. First, while disability studies has largely focused on urban space—if it takes up "the environment" at all—Ray looks to outdoor adventure culture to help us see "how the social construction of disability and the social construction of wilderness might reinforce each other" (36). Second, in her focus on material bodies and their experiences of injustice, Ray also participates in the recent surge in "New Materialism"—though with two important twists: she critiques how much of that work idealizes the healthy, able body at the expense of the disabled (8), and she refuses to pit "the material" against "the socially constructed," as much recent materialist work tends to do. Instead, her readings consistently demonstrate that a theoretically-informed understanding of social construction can, and perhaps *must*, coexist with a focus on "real," live bodies and environments.

The Ecological Other also complements recent work in areas such as queer ecology. Just as queer ecology scholars have demonstrated how "the queer" has been excluded from what counts as nature, so does Ray demonstrate how "the invalid, the Indian, and the immigrant" (179) are literally and figuratively excluded from wilderness and natural environments. The book thereby undertakes what Ray refers to as "critical

environmental scholar[ship]" (2). Along with scholars such as Giovanna Di Chiro and David Mazel, Ray understands that environmental discourse does not invariably oppose oppression, but can itself function oppressively, and that U.S. environmentalism cannot always be characterized as a progressive Left movement—as it often appears in contemporary popular culture and media, and as many both inside and outside the movement tend to believe. Thus, in her conclusion, she calls on readers to recognize that “disgust activates our own environmentalism, no matter whether we are mainstream or not” (182). In this sense, I would hold *The Ecological Other* up as positive proof of the ever-increasing self-reflexivity and complexity of ecocriticism and of the environmental humanities at large.

But while the book’s critical environmental scholarship feels urgent and vital, it’s not always staged as carefully as it could be. The main issue is that two of the book’s most central terms, “environmentalism” and “environmentalist(s),” need to be defined and theorized more deeply. For example, one of Ray’s main aims is to draw a line of influence between what she variously calls “early” and “modern environmentalism” (16, 37, 132 and so forth)—largely referring to Progressive Era wildlife conservation efforts such as the development of the U.S. National Parks, which entailed the removal of Native American inhabitants—and “contemporary” or “mainstream environmentalism” (5, 39, 85 and so forth). But she does not offer any in-text discussion of the relationship, not to mention the *differences*, between “conservationism” and “environmentalism.” Such a discussion would make the lineage which Ray proposes more convincing, as would an acknowledgement of the various periodizations of environmentalism that scholars such as Ramachandra Guha and Philip Shabecoff have offered. After all, the environmental imperialisms and exclusions Ray wants to uncover might seem a lot less surprising if we consider the *conservative* roots of *conservationism*. Moreover, one might note, “environmentalism” only appeared in its present connotation in 1966, after landmarks such as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962)—hardly an imperial or exclusionary text by most measures, and arguably a rather anti-imperial one.

Relatedly, *The Ecological Other* vacillates in its conception of “environmentalism,” even as the book tries to pin it down for critique. Most often, it’s something fundamentally bad; at other times, it’s something potentially good; at still others, it’s a blank canvas. Early on in the text, for example, Ray “agree[s] with Laura Pulido’s assessment that *environmentalism is ‘a form of racism that both underlies and is distinct from institutional and overt racism’*” (17; my emphasis). But, later, she declares that “environmentalism can be redefined by a different sensibility, one that values an array of bodies and a wider spectrum of positive ways to interact with nature” (40). If environmentalism is a form of racism, we might ask, how can it ever value a diverse array of bodies? In such cases, more nuanced language and explanatory discussion would obviously be useful, as would an early, in-depth grounding of Ray’s critical position—vis-à-vis, for instance, the deep ecology vs. social ecology debates, or the debates around environmental justice as an alternative to the environmentalism of the privileged. Such foundational work would be particularly helpful for readers new to the

environmental humanities, who might otherwise find an ecocritical book that critiques environmentalism so pointedly to be rather odd.

Finally, *The Ecological Other's* important case would have also been strengthened if it presented more evidence. Chapter 2, for example, discusses indigenous writers' responses to the "ecological Indian" stereotype without offering a single primary example of the stereotype, much less of environmentalists perpetuating it. The most famous example that springs to this reviewer's mind is the so-called "Crying Indian" TV commercials from the 1970s produced by the Keep America Beautiful (KAB) organization; the commercials featured a Native American (played, of course, by a non-Native American) sorrowfully navigating a trash-filled landscape. But as scholars such as Heather Rogers and Elizabeth Royte have shown, KAB's efforts, while seemingly "environmentalist," can also be seen as an instance of corporate greenwashing that shifts responsibility for waste onto individual consumers. In such a case, it would be difficult to say that "environmentalists" are the ones perpetuating the stereotype. But since such perpetuation surely does exist, *The Ecological Other* would be all the more incisive for pointing directly to it.

To be fair, Ray admits the slippery nature of designations like "environmentalism" and "environmentalist(s)" near the end of the book, when she observes that "much environmental discourse has become not *environmentalism* at all, but a green veneer on conservative social politics" (183, my emphasis). One might then ask why "environmentalism" *tout court* is specifically singled out throughout the book (10, 16, 27, 34, 89, 129, 179, *passim*). Arguably, Ray thereby contributes to this very confusion between "environmentalism" and "conservative social politics." Readers might then wonder if there is something more to be learned from the instances of ecological othering described here than that "environmentalism" can be exclusive or oppressive—something, for example, about how conservative, imperial, or colonial projects co-opt environmental and/or progressive tropes and terms, or about how corporate and conservative greenwashing succeeds, and what that tells us about the current status of "green."

If nothing else, though, these aspects of *The Ecological Other* point to the deeply complicated nature of environmental politics. After all, if corporations and conservative groups have been so successful at greenwashing that it's hard even for an ecocritic to define "environmentalism" anymore, and if supposedly progressive environmental discourse and activism can further marginalize underrepresented or vulnerable populations, then there are some serious conversations to be had across both environmental activism and environmental scholarship. *The Ecological Other* can function as a spark for these conversations—and, thankfully, Ray has offered many of the tools needed for them, such as the concepts of "green alarmism" (178) and the "poetics of trash" (33).

And it's clear that Ray has already launched some such conversations. In fall 2014, for example, the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, Germany will host a workshop inspired by Ray's book, titled "Ecological Othering and Biopolitics in the Environmental Humanities." Meanwhile, along with disabilities studies

scholar J.C. Sibara, Ray is editing a collection on disability and environment that will be the first but surely not the last of its kind. The ideas broached in *The Ecological Other*, I expect and hope, will continue to inform debate and inquiry in the environmental humanities for some time to come.

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Ellen F. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape. Environment and Monastic Identity in the Medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 301 pp.



A historical study of two monasteries in the medieval Ardennes may at a first glance not be very attractive reading for ecocritics. Yet Ellen F. Arnold, historian at Ohio Wesleyan University, explores medieval views about nature and the environment not only through historical source material such as charters and annals, but also by way of the huge variety of hagiographic—and thus literary—texts that these monasteries produced. Her study therefore also provides insights into the relation between literature and the environment during the Middle Ages.

The Benedictine monasteries Stavelot and Malmedy were both founded by Saint Remacle in 648. Between the 9th and 12th centuries, several saints' lives, collections of miracle stories and other hagiographic texts were written there, all of which refer in various ways to the monasteries' natural environment. As Arnold demonstrates, forests feature particularly strong in these narratives, which can probably be explained by the monasteries' location in the densely wooded region of the Ardennes. The texts depict the forests in differing and sometimes even contradictory ways. In stories about the monasteries' foundation, forests are typically described as a dangerous wilderness full of threatening creatures—despite the fact that the Ardennes had been settled and transformed into a cultivated landscape long before the 7th century. In other narratives, following the antique pastoral tradition, the same forests could appear as a locus amoenus, a 'pleasant place,' characterized by beauty and an abundance of natural resources.

Since the monasteries constituted not only spiritual communities, but also large economic enterprises, the monks used their natural environment as a material resource base. As a consequence, Arnold notes, these monasteries were frequently involved in conflicts with neighboring landowners who challenged them for resources such as firewood or pastureland. Interestingly, these conflicts are mirrored not only in legal documents, but also in literary sources. Despite referring to a rather distant past, texts such as saints' lives often clearly reflect conflicts of the time in which they were composed. Thus they fulfilled an important function in the construction of collective memory, which served the interests of the monastic communities at the time of textual production through creative reconstruction of the past—often including the rewriting of older texts and the forgery of documents.

Forests, rivers, vineyards and other landscape features served also as spiritual resources. Places that had been visited by saints such as St. Remacle during their lifetimes could become sacred themselves. As Arnold shows, such sacred places could even be actively created by the monks centuries after the respective saint's death, for

example through the transportation of his relics to and from these places, during which new miracles would occur. Written texts played an important role in the fixation of such lieux de mémoire as parts of local religious traditions.

Paradoxically, of all things it is the miracle narratives that provide the most detailed information on medieval views on nature and the environment. Despite the supernatural intervention of the saints (respectively God) in all of these narratives, the starting point—usually an emergency situation—is always narrated in a realistic fashion and often explicitly connected to distinct, identifiable places. This intended “verisimilitude effect” (13), as Arnold calls it, was necessary in order to generate the belief that not only the described problems themselves, but also their unlikely solution through the saints’ intervention had indeed occurred. Thus miracle stories offer more valuable insight into ‘normal’ people’s social and environmental everyday life and the problems these people were frequently confronted with than, for example, medieval epic literature. Then again, miracle narratives were highly standardized and often simply copied from older miracle collections. This intertextuality opens up new dimensions for interpretation through the different ways in which miracles from the hagiographic tradition were selected and adapted to new environments and specific places. As Arnold demonstrates, there was no strict distinction between hagiographic and legal or historiographical texts, but rather a frequent blurring of genres: “Just as religious stories could incorporate legal language to add authority or historicity, charters also reflected the language of religious sources in order to add a sense of sanctity” (119). This means that medieval descriptions of nature and environment even in apparently non-hagiographic sources can be of religious significance.

Lynn White Jr.’s seminal thesis that the Christian Middle Ages constitute the historical root of today’s ecological crisis is based on the assertion that medieval Christianity had a solely exploitative relation towards nature. This thesis (reprinted on the first pages of Cheryl Glotfelty’s and Harold Fromm’s *Ecocriticism Reader* from 1996) has long dominated ecocritical perspectives on the Middle Ages. *Negotiating the Landscape*, however, demonstrates impressively that there was not one single medieval view of nature, but that such views differed considerably depending on the respective environments in which people lived. Even in one and the same place, such as a medieval monastery, extremely divergent and sometimes contradictory descriptions of the surrounding nature could coexist. I can therefore only agree with Arnold that, instead of premature generalizations, more case studies are necessary in order to get a more detailed insight into the broad variety of medieval ‘environmental imaginations.’

Negotiating the Landscape is a very well-founded study of hagiographic literature’s value as a source for environmental history. At the same time, the book also opens up new perspectives for the gradually growing field of medieval ecocriticism; hopefully, Arnold will further pursue environmental issues in the Middle Ages with a wider thematic scope. Arnold’s current study is focused on the monks’ aesthetical perception of nature, on resource utilization and resource conflicts. However, hagiographic texts may also offer an insight into many other issues as well, such as medieval perceptions of environmental change, environmental risks or environmental

pollution. Therefore, *Negotiating the Landscape* can be regarded as a pioneering case study that hopefully will inspire further research on the rich and long neglected source material that medieval hagiographic literature constitutes.

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Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Charlottesville & London: Virginia University Press, 2012), 290 pp.



In this volume Scott Hess seeks to explore Wordsworth's defining role in establishing what he designates as "the ecology of authorship": a primarily middle-class, nineteenth-century conception of nature associated with aesthetics, high culture, individualism and nation. Instead of viewing Wordsworth as an early ecologist, Hess places him within a context that is largely cultural and aesthetic. The supposedly universal Wordsworthian vision of nature, Hess argues, was in this sense specifically male, middle-class, professional, and culturally elite—factors that continue to shape the environmental movement today.

Significantly, the author aims to trace the historical emergence of the ecology of authorship through a focus on William Wordsworth's writing and influence in relation to a broad variety of interrelated nineteenth-century material and cultural practices—from photography and public art museums through the cultural construction of the Lake District, early environmental protests, and the emergence of modern mass tourism. The book's ultimate concern, however, is to infer how these nineteenth-century discourses have framed contemporary ecological consciousness and environmentalism. In Wordsworthian tradition, Nature has become identified with individual consciousness and identity, as opposed to social or communal life; with aesthetic leisure and spirituality, separated from everyday work, subsistence, and economic activity (3).

Wordsworth is read through the social frameworks of ecofeminism, social ecology, and environmental justice, as well as the critical traditions of cultural materialism. Scott Hess focuses on the poems and contexts most powerfully implicated in Wordsworth's ecology of authorship and its legacy for contemporary environmentalism. The book's five main chapters explore Wordsworth's construction of nature in relation to historically specific cultural contexts and practices, including their extension into the Victorian period. Each chapter concludes by briefly tracing the impacts of such discourses and practices on nineteenth-century America, the nature-writing tradition, and current environmental culture (11).

Chapter 1, "Picturesque Vision, Photographic Subjectivity, and the (Un)framing of Nature", argues that while Wordsworth claimed to break from the visual conventions of the picturesque, his poetry remains deeply informed by its imaginative and perceptual structures, including the stationed position of the "halted traveler"; the visual detachment and general disembodiment of the observer; and the tendency to compose the entire landscape pictorially around a single, central point of view. Wordsworth's landscape vision in these ways fashions a version of the paradigmatic modern self with

its “view from nowhere”; looking on and appropriating the world as image as if from outside the frame of a picture. This visually detached relationship to landscape creates a version of “photographic subjectivity” which contrasts with the poetry of John Clare and Dorothy Wordsworth, who offer alternative structures of landscape vision and perception and present a more embodied, participatory, and social version of nature. The chapter explores these constructions in relation to various forms of framing in the Western landscape tradition and the wider contexts of Romantic and Victorian visual culture, to conclude that “we are ecological citizens, immersed in a network of processes we cannot pretend to order, control, or even fully understand” outside the framework (66-67).

Chapter 2, “Wordsworth Country: The Lake District and the Landscape of Genius,” analyzes Wordsworth’s construction of the Lake District in *Guide through the District of the Lakes* (1835), and argues that Wordsworth capitalized on the area’s high-aesthetic reputation as a premier site of picturesque tourism but shifted its focus from the visual arts to literature and poetry. Thus, Wordsworth associated the Lake District landscape with his own literary identity, cultural authority, and “genius” in ways that contested the authority of aristocratic visitors. The chapter also examines the cultural history of Wordsworth’s association with the Lake District, which became known by the end of the nineteenth century as “Wordsworth Country,” and the influence of this version of the literary landscape on the overall modern construction of nature, including the institutional and imaginative model of the national park (13). Nature in this literary landscape became associated with individualized authorship, autonomous personal imagination, and national culture, uniting such constructions in a central imaginative locus (109).

Chapter 3, “Wordsworth’s Environmental Protest: The Kendal and Windermere Railroad and the Cultural Politics of Nature,” brings to the fore Wordsworth’s public campaign in 1844 to avert the construction of the railways in the Lake District. Wordsworth’s protest focused on the working-class excursionists from the industrial towns of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the Midlands who in Wordsworth’s eyes threatened both the natural and the cultural value of the landscape. The chapter goes on to trace the underlying influence of Wordsworth’s protest on later environmental campaigns, including subsequent nineteenth-and-twentieth-century “defenses” of “Wordsworth country.” Such efforts continued to be defined by a nationwide cultural elite of middle-class professionals, often in opposition to small local proprietors and other residents who desired modern amenities such as access to railways and, later, electricity and telephone lines. The chapter concludes by determining the legacy of this class-defined, high-cultural model of nature for American and contemporary environmentalism.

The next chapter, “The Lake District and the Museum of Nature,” compares Wordsworth’s aesthetic construction of the Lake District with the discourses of the nineteenth-century public art museum. Wordsworth tries to define the Lake District as a kind of museum of nature, setting a precedent for the broader aesthetic construction of nature in ways that have continued to shape the environmental movement up to the present day (156). Free access to museums institutionalized the moral and aesthetic

education of its citizens, regardless of class, and thus helped to constitute the new nation-state (157). At the same time, art museums became similarly associated with the genius of the artists whose works they displayed (164). William Wordsworth in this way constructed the Lake District as a kind of public museum of nature, a space of “civilizing ritual” for the formation of both individual identity and high-aesthetic, middle class national culture (164). The chapter concludes by tracing the influence of this museum model on American environmental culture.

Chapter 5, “My Endless Way’: Travel, Gender, and the Imaginative Colonization of Nature,” explores Wordsworth’s tendency to construct the landscape through the wandering and autonomous subjectivity of the male traveler, and interprets the motif of travel in William Wordsworth’s poetry in relation to the rise of modern tourism, arguing that he offers what is essentially a tourist’s imaginative relation to nature. The chapter also offers an ecofeminist perspective of William Wordsworth’s use of women to connect him to the sensual and the particular, while he continues to associate himself with the “superior” subject position of male intellect, autonomy, and abstraction. The chapter concludes by exploring the persistence of this masculine traveler’s subjectivity in various forms of contemporary environmental culture, in contrast to the more social version of nature exemplified by Susan Fenimore Cooper’s *Rural Hours* (1850) and Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge* (1992).

The epilogue, “The Ecology of Authorship versus the Ecology of Community,” begins by comparing the opening of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* with a culminating episode in Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature* (1989). While Wordsworth leaves the city and turns to nature to discover both his “true self” and his poetic vocation, McKibben reverses this process to signal the “end of nature,” which ultimately reveals itself as “offering opportunities for the creation of new, more social ecologies, structured around community, participation, and embodied relationships in everyday environments” (16). The turn to nature becomes, in this sense, part of Romanticism’s overall imaginative flight from the social and the everyday: another version of the quest for “something evermore about to be,” rather than an attempt to ground our lives ecologically in the here and now (17).

The studies contained in this volume provide new and original insights for those interested in Romantic ecocriticism, and they open up new possibilities for significant change and renewal of art, culture and the self.

Book Review: Embracing the End: American Apocalypse in the Twenty-first Century

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Sibylle Machat, *In the Ruins of Civilizations: Narrative Structures, World Constructions, and Physical Realities in the Post-Apocalyptic Novel* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013), 330pp.



Sibylle Machat's *In the Ruins of Civilizations* is an ambitious ecocritical exploration of American twenty-first century apocalyptic writing. The study is serious, well-conceived, analytical, and thorough in terms of scope, theoretical depth, and application. *Ruins of Civilizations* successfully investigates, amongst other issues, the "different levels of knowledge and forgetfulness" between different narrative levels of twenty-first century American fiction. As a result, Machat forces us to reconsider the ways in which we conceive of the twenty-first century American apocalyptic novel. This study is highly recommended for those with interests in ecocriticism and the apocalypse, and more specifically, in recent American aesthetic manifestations of doom.

The book is divided into several sections, including an historical and contextual review, theoretical discussion, and case studies of four American novels that deal primarily with apocalyptic narratives that were published after 2000. The first section is an extensive historical and contextual review. Important is that the background information is efficiently provided, and gradually builds an argument for the theoretical discussion that follows. One of the major questions of the study is: "How does the state of the physical world influence, determine, and limit" the scope of the post-apocalyptic society that develops in the selected narratives? Also important is that Machat attempts to understand better what she calls the different narrative levels of the texts in question. One of the strongest parts of the theoretical section, in my view, is a very helpful table Machat includes called "Nature and Mankind in the Post-apocalypse – a classification of some major examples" (53-54), which will no doubt work as a map for future ecocritical researchers when thinking about important distinctions between different apocalyptic scenarios. The bulk of *In the Ruins of Civilizations* is dedicated to case studies of four central texts: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Bernard Beckett's *Genesis* (2009), and Robert Charles Wilson's *Julian Comstock: A Story of 22nd-Century America* (2009).

The first case study deals with Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and starts by reflecting on narrative structure and world building in the novel. The author emphasizes the motif of "doubling" in the narrative, which in *Oryx and Crake* involves two temporal threads as well as different dystopian visions. Also discussed in this chapter is the importance of names to the characters in the narrative as well as the use of borrowed

quotations from Shakespeare, Coleridge, Babcock, Blake, and the nursery rhyme “Star Light, Star Bright.” Much of this chapter is devoted to the discussion of world construction by different characters in the narrative. It is suggested that the worlds constructed in *Oryx and Crake* happen on different levels, at the level of action in the future-past world, and at the level of quotation, which suggests that poetry remains a potent force in this place. Finally, this chapter puts forward that the importance of names in this world help characters and readers understand this alien environment.

The second case study turns to Cormac McCarthy’s well-known *The Road*. The chapter describes the importance of beats, in the form of action and description tags, quotation marks, speech, and speech tags, to the larger narrative. Machat then considers the use of contractions in *The Road*. What then follows is a detailed reflection on the possible cataclysmic origin of the ecological apocalypse in *The Road*. It is wondered whether an asteroid (146) or an atomic war (148) are the forces that have wreaked such widespread destruction in this world. The discussion of the characters’ allegiance to communities is particularly interesting, since such a development would seem to suggest that even in a destroyed world, forms of human society might still survive. If this is true, then the next thing to consider is whether forms of human hope can still exist. By extension, we might retain hope, even in our own time of ecological destruction. This chapter ends with a discussion of the importance of physical and cultural objects in the destroyed world of *The Road*. Both a wallet and a can of Coke are powerful reminders of desperate human isolation in a truly lost universe. Finally, this chapter discusses world construction by the characters of the narrative.

The third case study is on Bernard Beckett’s 2009 *Genesis*. The thematic concerns of the book are considered in the first part of the chapter. Machat then examines the setting of the narrative, which recalls images of Classical antiquity. A lengthy discussion of the significance of Greek and biblical names in the *Genesis* narrative follows. It is suggested that Bernard Beckett accomplishes world building in *Genesis* partially through the careful use of character names. This section transitions to a wider discussion of world construction in the novel by characters, the academy, and the implied author. This chapter further handles the physical world of *Genesis*, which includes ruins and objects as subjects of sentimental nostalgia. Interesting here is that Machat considers the actual covers of different editions of the *Genesis* narrative. She argues that the book covers help shape the reader’s expectations, and are therefore crucial to the wider reading experience.

The final content chapter of *In the Ruins of Civilizations* takes on Robert Charles Wilson’s 2009 *Julian Comstock: A Story of 22nd-Century America*. After an extensive discussion of the character named Julian in the story, the narrative perspective is considered. More interesting in this chapter is the discussion of the physical world in *Julian Comstock*. It is suggested that “survival concerns primarily code the mental positioning of the land,” which suggests that the human imagination remains a vital component of world construction in this place. Such a development has obvious implications for ecocriticism beyond this study. The chapter ends by arguing that the ruins and residue of the previous civilization not only shapes the world in which the

narrative takes place. Remaining cultural fragments provide crucial knowledge that, eventually, generates the major conflicts that take place in the narrative.

While overall the study is thorough, deliberate and calculated, there are some limits. The use of online dictionaries and encyclopedias devalues what is otherwise a mature and methodical scholarly study. Additionally, the choice of corpus is a little thin and rather conventional. Ecocritical conferences frequently include presentations on Margaret Atwood and Cormac McCarthy. One wonders if the corpus for this study could have included more experimental or unconventional texts, or texts from different periods. Why do a case study on McCarthy's *The Road* and not *Planet of the Apes*? The author was no doubt trying to limit the study to twenty-first century texts, but why was this limitation needed? Would not a study that includes a larger number of cultural texts be more diverse, and potentially even stronger in terms of vision? Thus, in her selection of texts, Machat seems to have been hampered by her desire to play it safe. It would indeed be very interesting to see what she can accomplish with unconventional, experimental, or even irreverent texts. Furthermore, the bibliography is a little thin in places. For example, the theoretical discussion of apocalypse rightfully includes discussion of Gary K. Wolfe's 1983 "The Remaking of Zero: Beginning at the End," but neglects to consider other theoretical approaches to apocalypse in literature, including James Berger's *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (1999), Frederick Buell's *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (2003), Richard Dellamora's *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (1995), and Stephen O'Leary's *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (1994). Why include discussion of Wolfe's paper from 1983 and not Berger's book from 1999? What insights does Wolfe's paper have the Berger's book lacks? Essentially, a better metacritical justification for the theoretical choices the author made would have been desirable. Finally, I find that stylistically, the writing could have been more dynamic. Run-on sentences and excessive paragraph length are problems throughout. Additionally, some typos and grammatical errors should have been eliminated during copyediting.

However, such stylistic complaints are rather minor, and should not detract from the merits of what is overall a comprehensive and convincing study. *In the Ruins of Civilizations* not only marks the arrival of a young scholar with much potential onto the European ecocritical scene, but also opens an ecocritical window into the early 21st century American apocalyptic mindset and how it plays out in the imaginative space we call literature.

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Mission Statement

This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

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