



**T.C.
EGE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü**

**QUEST FOR INTER/CONNECTEDNESS IN A BROKEN WORLD:
21ST CENTURY BRITISH WOMEN'S ECO-MEMOIRS**

Doktora Tezi

Hatice BAKANLAR MUTLU

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

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ETİK KURALLARA UYGUNLUK BEYANI

Ege Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne sunduğum “**Quest For Inter/Connectedness in a Broken World: 21st Century British Women’s Eco-Memoirs**” adlı doktora tezinin tarafımdan bilimsel, ahlak ve normlara uygun bir şekilde hazırlandığını, tezimde yararlandığım kaynakları bibliyografyada ve dipnotlarda gösterdiğimi onurumla doğrularım.

Hatice Bakanlar Mutlu



PREFACE

I have been engaged in doing research for this dissertation since December 2018 excluding the four-year period I spent on taking classes. I now realize that the most challenging task in this seven-year process was to choose my research topic, for it was going to stay with me for the rest of my life. Yet I was lucky enough to decide on my subject matter without wasting time because of a class I took, that is “Women’s Literature” given by my advisor, Prof. Dr. Direnç. In that class, we studied women’s autobiographies and read Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge*. I was already familiar with autobiography as a literary genre, but I did not have the faintest idea about the concept of relationality that expands to the non-human. Thus, I was amazed by Williams’s ability to interweave her own life story with those of her beloved ones as well as the Bear River migratory bird refuge and birds taking shelter there.

Now that we are in the Anthropocene, I thought it would be meaningful and timely to seek other life narratives in which the writers get out of themselves and look outward. To this end, I chose to study eco-memoirs, which are hybrid forms at the intersection of autobiography and nature writing. I focused on women writers because as a researcher I was aware that women have been outshone by men both in autobiography and nature writing, and I wanted to pay homage to women writing about nature. I narrowed down my research to twenty-first century British nature writing because I found out that British nature writing was at the beginning of a resurgence after a period of stagnation in the previous century, and I thought this revival would require a scrutiny. This is how I embarked on this journey and moved on with the company and guidance of my advisor Prof. Dr. Direnç, whose support I never ceased to feel and am grateful for.

Most of this dissertation was written under the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic, which broke out in December 2019 and is still ongoing as I am writing these words. Facing such a crisis, which is said to have resulted from human-inflicted changes in the world’s ecosystems, I have tried not to sink into pessimism and looked for a reasonable hope in the eco-memoirs I chose to study. I believe I have found it, and I hope those who read this dissertation will do so, too.

ABSTRACT

The objective of this dissertation is to discuss how eco-memoirs written by twenty-first century British women writers can contribute to the criticism of the deep-rooted anthropocentric thought system in the west. To do this, this dissertation has been divided into four chapters: The first chapter traces the history of nature writing in the west to understand what kind of a tradition might underlie contemporary British nature writing, which has been experiencing a revival since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The second chapter focuses on the twenty-first century nature writing in Britain, which goes under the name “new nature writing” and reveals how it has emerged and what characteristics it displays. The third chapter is dedicated to women writing about nature with a discussion on the possible link between gender and ecological orientation and a brief insight into the place of women writers in autobiographical writing and nature writing, which are accepted to be the two main pillars of eco-memoirs. The fourth and final chapter posits the eco-memoirs written by selected British women writers, namely Kathleen Jamie’s essay trilogy *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019), Olivia Laing’s *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* (2011) and Carol Donaldson’s *On the Marshes: A Journey into Englan’s Waterlands* (2017) within new nature writing in Britain and offers an analysis of each book in the light of the research question that aims to understand how women’s eco-memoirs can be read as counter narratives in our current age also known as the Anthropocene. Since women and nature have been the two unsettling others of the western dualism, this study argues that it is necessary to study these two “others” together and pay tribute to women writing about nature. Following the footsteps of ecocritics, this study also claims that the current ecological crisis is a crisis of culture that can be challenged through literature in general and eco-memoirs in particular. In this context, this study argues that the selected eco-memoirs might help counter anthropocentrism as they tend towards ecocentrism, raise awareness of the current ecological problems, dismantle the logocentric western dualism with their turn to body and materiality and merge the personal with the ecological through autobiographical accounts that establish relationality with the non-human as well as human.

ÖZET

Bu tez çalışmasının amacı Britanyalı kadın yazarların yirmi birinci yüzyılda yazdıkları eko-hatıratların, batıda köklü bir geçmişe sahip olan insan-merkezci düşünce sisteminin eleştirilmesine nasıl bir katkıda bulunabileceğini tartışmaktır. Bu amaçla, tez dört bölüme ayrılmıştır. İlk bölümde, çağdaş Britanya doğa yazınının nasıl bir miras üzerinden şekillenmiş olabileceğini anlayabilmek için batıda doğa yazınının tarihine odaklanılmıştır. İkinci bölümde, Britanya’da “yeni doğa yazını” adıyla bilinen ve yirmi birinci yüzyılın başından beri bir hareketlilik içinde olan çağdaş doğa yazınının nasıl ortaya çıktığı ve ne gibi özellikler sergilediği incelenmiştir. Üçüncü bölüm, toplumsal cinsiyet ile ekolojik yönelim arasındaki olası ilişkiye yönelik bir tartışmanın ardından doğa hakkında yazan kadın yazarlara ayrılmıştır. Tez çalışmasının konusu olan eko-hatıratlar edebi bir tür olarak otobiyografi ve doğa yazınının kesişim noktasında konumlandırıldığı için, bu bölümde kadın yazarların otobiyografi ve doğa yazını gelenekleri içindeki konumu da incelenmiştir. Tezin dördüncü bölümünde Kathleen Jamie’nin *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) ve *Surfacing* (2019) üçlemesi, Olivia Laing’in *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* (2011) ve Carol Donaldson’un *On the Marshes: A Journey into England’s Waterlands* (2017) isimli eko-hatıratları yeni doğa yazını çerçevesinde okunmuş ve bu eserlerin İnsan Çağı’na (Antroposen) karşı nasıl bir anlatı oluşturduğu tartışılmıştır. Kadın ve doğa, batıda yer etmiş ikili düşünce sisteminin rahatsız edici iki “ötekisi” olarak konumlandırıldığından, bu çalışma bu iki “ötekiyi” bir araya getirmenin ve doğa hakkında yazan kadın yazarlara hak ettikleri saygıyı göstermenin gerekli olduğunu savunmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışmada eko-eleştirisinin izinden gidilerek içinde bulunduğumuz ekolojik krizin bir kültür krizi olduğu savunulmakta ve genel olarak edebiyatın özel olarak eko-hatıratların bu insan yapımı krize karşı bir anlatı oluşturabileceği iddia edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu tezde, çalışmaya konu olan eko-hatıratların sergilediği eko-merkezci eğilim, gezegenimizi etkileyen ekolojik sorunlar hakkında oluşturduğu farkındalık, batının insan aklına ayrıcalık tanıyan ikili düşünce sistemine karşı bedene ve maddeselliğe dönerek gösterdiği eleştirel tavır ve insanlarla olduğu kadar insan dışı varlıklarla da ilişkisellik kuran otobiyografik anlatılar yoluyla kişisel olanı ekolojik olanla bir araya getirme özelliği sayesinde insan merkezci düşünce sistemini sarsabileceği iddia edilmektedir.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ÖZET.....	iii
CONTENTS.....	iv
TABLES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF NATURE WRITING

1.1 An Attempt to Define Nature	14
1.2 <i>Natureculture</i> against Culture/Nature.....	17
1.3 Nature Writing in the Antiquity	22
1.3.1 Pastoralism	22
1.3.2 Fables and Anthropomorphism.....	26
1.3.3 Natural History	28
1.3.4 Plato and Human/Nature Dualism	32
1.4 Nature Writing in the Middle Ages	36
1.4.1 Pre-Christian Cultures and Cosmological Worldview	36
1.4.2 Christianity and a Gradual Shift to Anthropological Worldview.....	39
1.4.3 Natural Disasters and Calamities	46
1.4.4 Influence of Translations and Universities	49
1.5 Nature Writing in the Early Modern Era.....	51
1.5.1 Natural History on the Rise.....	51
1.5.2 Colonial and Aristocratic Interest in the Exotic Non-human.....	52
1.5.3 Local Natural Histories	55
1.5.4 Natural History Versus Religion	55
1.5.5 Influence of Humanism	56
1.6 Nature Writing in the Age of Enlightenment	58
1.7 Nature Writing since the Romantic Era	62
1.7.1 Shift to Agrarian Capitalism and Enclosures.....	63
1.7.2 Industrial Revolution and Darwin.....	66
1.7.3 From Sense of Loss to a Holistic Approach	69

1.7.4 The Picturesque, the Sublime and the Wilderness.....	72
1.7.5 Beyond Aesthetics	83

CHAPTER 2

NEW NATURE WRITING IN BRITAIN

2.1 Twentieth Century Nature Writing in Britain	93
2.2 Anthropocene and New Nature Writing.....	101
2.3 Environmental Movement and New Nature Writing	108
2.4 Problems around the Term “New Nature Writing”	115
2.5 An Attempt to Topographize New Nature Writing	118
2.6 Features of New Nature Writing	121
2.6.1 Ecological Awareness and Activism	123
2.6.2 A Move from Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism.....	127
2.6.3 Porosity and Enchantment.....	132
2.6.4 Stylistic Hybridity and Multidisciplinarity.....	138
2.6.5 Parochialism Coloured by Universalism.....	143
2.6.7 Self Narrative and Personal Sense-making	147

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN’S ECO-MEMOIRS

3.1 Gender in Ecological Orientation.....	153
3.2 Discussions around Ecofeminism	161
3.3 Eco-Memoir as a Hybrid Form	167
3.3.1 A Brief Look at the History of Autobiography	170
3.3.2 A Brief Look at Women’s Autobiographies	172
3.3.3 Women in Nature Writing	178

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN’S ECO-MEMOIRS AS COUNTER-NARRATIVES

4.1 <i>Findings, Sightlines and Surfacing: An Eclectic Trilogy</i>	185
4.1.1 <i>Findings</i> (2005)	188
4.1.1.1 A Move from Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism and More....	190
4.1.1.2 Stylistic Hybridity and Multidisciplinarity.....	200
4.1.1.3 Anthropocene and Ecological Awareness	206

4.1.1.4 Self-narrative and Personal Sense Making.....	207
4.1.1.5 Gendered Experience of Nature	211
4.1.1.6 Enchantment.....	212
4.1.2 <i>Sightlines</i> (2012).....	214
4.1.2.1 Parochialism versus Universalism	215
4.1.2.2 Bodily Experience	216
4.1.2.3 Dismantled Dichotomies	219
4.1.2.4 A Move from Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism	229
4.1.2.5 Anthropocene and Ecological Awareness	234
4.1.2.6 Porosity and Enchantment.....	236
4.1.3 <i>Surfacing</i> (2019)	240
4.1.3.1 Anthropocene and Ecological Awareness	241
4.1.3.2 Environmental Justice	247
4.1.3.3 Relationality.....	254
4.2 <i>To the River: A Meandering Walk and a Meandering Story</i>	268
4.2.1 Place Attachment	274
4.2.2 Rivers as Agentic Matters	277
4.2.3 From the Ouse to the Planet	285
4.2.4 Challenge against Dualist Thinking	289
4.2.5 A Humble “Authorial” Voice.....	295
4.3 <i>On the Marshes: From a Therapeutic Journey to a Political Call</i>	300
4.3.1 A Woman on the Edgelands.....	302
4.3.2 Justice for All: Human Dwellers of the Marshes	308
4.3.3 Justice for All: Non-human Dwellers of the Marshes.....	313
4.3.4 Finding a Personal Meaning on the Marshes	319
CONCLUSION	324
WORKS CITED	336
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	374
CURRICULUM VITAE	376

LIST of TABLES

Table 1 Topography of New British Nature Writing	119



INTRODUCTION

We are destroying life on our planet, and some have already begun to make plans for a possible life on Mars. Those of us, who have no means to start or look for a life on another planet nor desire for being multiplanetary for ethical reasons like the fear of the harm our species might cause once again, will have to stay here trying to figure out how it will be possible to survive altogether, as humans and non-humans in this broken world. We are now in the Anthropocene, an era which “is characterized by the unprecedented fact that humanity has come to play a decisive, if still largely incalculable, role in the planet’s ecology and geology” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 1). Some crude figures from the 2019 UN report might help us to see the bigger picture, to a very limited extent though: 75% of terrestrial environment has severely been altered to date by human actions ... More than 85% of wetlands present in 1700 had been lost by 2000 ... There has been a 16-21 cm rise in global average sea level since 1900 ... 17% of infectious diseases are spread by animal vectors, causing over 700,000 annual deaths (“UN Report”).

In our current state, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic, which broke out in December 2019 and is still continuing as these words are being written, millions of people have awakened to the consequences of an anthropocentric intervention in non-human lives while millions of others have died. From now on, one can barely deny the harm our kind has done to the Earth, including itself. Even our ice breakers in daily chats tend to involve the effects of the Anthropocene as Timothy Morton, a prominent British ecologist and philosopher underlines: “We can no longer have those reassuringly trivial conversations about the weather with someone in the street ... The conversation either trails off into a disturbingly meaningful silence, or someone mentions global warming” (*The Ecological* 28). In this alarming situation, humanity has already developed a new psychological disorder, namely eco-anxiety, defined by American Psychological Association as “a chronic fear of environmental doom” (Clayton et al. 29). In his article “Can environmental Imagination Save the World?”, Lawrence Buell, one of the pioneers of ecocriticism in the US also notes that it is hard not to feel anxious with all the facts we face: shrinking icecaps, encroaching drought, biodiversity loss, atmospheric degradation, acidification of lakes and oceans, ecosystemic pollution etc.

(407). “It gets worse, because we’re losing the ground under our feet at the exact same time as we’re figuring out just how dependent upon that very ground we are,” writes Morton (*The Ecological* 31).

At this point, whether there is any way out of this worryingly serious planetary crisis is an inevitable question. The United Nations tried to provide an answer to this question in 2012 with its Global Environmental Outlook document. The report explains in detail how we can shift towards a more sustainable planet by navigating a wide range of highly complex political, social, governmental, technical, demographic, economic and ethical issues simultaneously (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 12). Assuming that there might be a solution which involves vigorous and multilateral efforts, the second question might be if literature can do anything in such a crisis which apparently requires tangible and immediate actions. This question has, indeed, constituted the starting point of this study. Ecocritics from diverse backgrounds have been trying to show that literature and humanities can and should do something since early 1990s, when “ecocriticism had emerged as a recognizable critical school” (Glotfelty, xviii). Cheryll Glotfelty, who is a co-founder of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) and the first professor of literature and environment in the US (“Cheryll”), made one of the earliest academic moves to bring literature and the physical world closer with her frequently cited remark in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996): “Literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter and ideas interact” (xix).

Since Glotfelty, many ecocritics have drawn attention to the role literature and arts can play against the ongoing ecological crisis. For example, in his *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Buell argued that literature can help us develop ecocentric¹ values and reorient “human attention and values to a stronger ethic of care for the nonhuman environment” (Buell, *Writing* 6). Similarly, a prominent British ecocritic Jonathan Bate closes his famous *The Song of the Earth* (2000), whereby he discusses the possible roles of poets in the middle of an ecological crisis, with the claim

¹Ecocentrism is “a worldview that recognizes intrinsic value in ecosystems and the biological and physical elements that they comprise, as well as in the ecological processes that spatially and temporally connect them” (Gray et al. 130).

that “poetry is the place where we save the earth” (283). Though not as confident as Bate, Morton, too, believes in the role of arts in expanding the limits of our perception when it comes to beings other than us: “Poetry won’t save the planet. Sound science and progressive social policies will do that. But art can allow us to glimpse beings that exist beyond or between our normal categories” (*The Ecological* 60). Likewise, Daniel J. Philippon, an American ecocritic, highlights the “explicitly political agenda” of nature writing, which contains “a desire to reorder individual and societal priorities” (397). Richard Kerridge, another leading British nature writer and ecocritic, notes: “Ecocritics hope to influence readers and writers so that works concerned with environmental values will become more popular, and new works will emerge to inspire change” (“Ecocritical” 361).

Since the establishment of ecocriticism as an academic field, leading ecocritics from the US and UK have trusted in the power of literature and arts to change our attitude to and perception of nature. In explaining how she decided to study environment and literature, Glotfelty once stated: “If there can be professors of African-American literature and professors of women’s literature and feminist studies I thought to myself, why couldn’t there be a professor of literature and the environment? ... Why couldn’t the same thing that is happening there be happening on behalf of the environment?” (“Cheryll”). This statement itself shows that early ecocritics had already faith in the ability of literature to motivate change in the society, for they had observed it with postcolonial and feminist literary critics. They were already hopeful when they set out to bridge the gap between literature and environment. They believed that providing people with ecocritical lenses would change the way they imagine themselves as a species and the planet as a whole. In fact, ecocriticism targets people’s way of thinking as it analyses the “history of concepts such as ‘nature’, ‘wilderness’, ‘humanity’ and ‘progress’ looking for the cultural origins of attitudes implicated in the present crisis and asking how these concepts should now be modified” (Kerridge, “Ecocriticism” 13). To put it differently, “The work of an ecocritic is seen as one of ‘reimagination’ to change the ‘imaginary’ of his or her culture” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 19).

Based on the legacy of ecocriticism so far, it would not be wrong to assume that in this ecological crisis, literature, which has a potential to affect our imagination and

way of thinking, can be of help, especially on an ethical level, if not with economic and political measures that the current ecological crisis urgently requires. Morton thinks that rather than individual acts like recycling or other forms of local initiatives, which are still helpful, the planetary crisis necessitates a collective change starting with our contemporary capitalist lifestyles (*The Ecological* 30). Literary people may not be the decisionmakers or policymakers charged with effecting changes immediately; however, on a global scale, they can act as agents in spreading the ecological thought, which Morton defines as “a practice and process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings- animal, vegetable, or mineral” (7). This study has been fed by such an ecocritical hope that when subjected to an ecocritical viewpoint, literature might enable us to become aware of “what” we, humans, are and revise our attitude to ourselves as a species cohabiting this planet with fellow creatures.

Yet in the middle of a frightening ecological crisis, hope might sound like a naïve notion. The feeling of most ecologically oriented people might be that ecocriticism must surpass hope. In fact, ecocritics worldwide have tried to go beyond hopeful theorization and actively been engaged in spreading ecocritical values. For instance, some ecocritics like Cheryll Glotfelty, Greg Garrard and Richard Kerridge have worked at college to teach green studies. Garrard writes in the introduction to his *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (2017): “Teaching undergraduates environmental theories and literatures is the central kind of ‘activism’ to which busy humanities academics can aspire, and arguably the most effective too” (1). Simon. C Estok regards the classroom activism of environmentally oriented scholars as “slow activism”, whereby they expect to see the results of their teaching in the future (267). On the other hand, several ecocritics and ecologically oriented writers like the American author, Terry Tempest Williams, the Indian eco-philosopher Vandana Shiva and Australian scholar and ecocritic Val Plumwood have fought environmental battles as activists along with their intellectual or academic endeavours. Whether in the classroom working with students or out in the streets walking at the marches or narrating a story through pages, ecocritics have had an activist spirit regardless of the degree and kind of their activism. As Estok argues, they have been politically engaged (263). “Practicing environmental criticism may not mean that as individuals we can safeguard coral reefs

or ensure environmental justice,² but it might mean that we cultivate enough hearts and minds, and spark enough action, to help accomplish such goals together,” indicates Karan L. Kilcup (855). This political agenda and the belief in the possibility of triggering ecocritical action both in the short and long run have been the underlying motivation of this dissertation.

In this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on the memoirs of ecologically oriented women writers from contemporary Britain. This study is centred on eco-memoirs, which can broadly be defined as a hybrid form between life writing and nature writing, mainly because of the practical advantages they offer compared to other forms of writing. As it is known, ecocriticism has conventionally tended towards poetry (Estok 269). From an historical point of view, the reason for preferring poetry over other literary genres when the subject matter is nature could be the deeply rooted pastoral tradition that dates back to Antiquity as well as the more recent Romantic tradition of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that inspired ecocriticism putting emphasis on the natural world. In both traditions nature comes to the forefront either as the idyllic setting of a peaceful life in the countryside or as a retreat where poets try to find a self and meaning in life. Calling the poems “the song of the earth”, Bate argues that although poets may not be the moralists to tell people what their primary concern should be nor philosophers to explain the world and humankind’s place in it, they can be exceptionally good at establishing a bridge between internal and external worlds (*Song* 251-2). In this angle, poetry, seems to be an ideal genre for ecocritics as it takes readers closer to the physical world offering them unmediated encounters with the natural world (Estok 269). There is also novel, which some critics find suitable for conveying environmental messages. Novel is thought to be convenient for discussing environmental questions because in a novel “It is free to trace all imaginable scenarios and to survey how prejudice, personal background, cultural assumptions, scientific research and the complacencies of day-to-day life all form part of how people engage or evade environmental questions” (Clark, “The Challenge” 78). Frederic Jameson particularly draws attention to science fiction novels as “the literary

²Environmental justice is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (“Environmental”).

genre that most explicitly deals with the planet and with humanity as a whole” (qtd. in Clark 96). Similarly, Kerridge claims that science-fiction, horror and road novels with apocalyptic plots all stand out with their ability of shocking and scaring readers (“Ecocritical” 372). Conversely, utopian eco-fiction demonstrates the possibility of a society based on environmental principles (373). Thus, both dystopic and utopic science-fiction novels seem to be appropriate for raising awareness about ecological problems.

However, this study has excluded these forms in favour of memoirs because, as Kerridge puts it, “The environmental problems already developing fast call for stark realist representation, in works exploring particular instances of damage and the ecological and human consequences” (“Ecocritical” 372). Also, Clark maintains that the challenge in representing the Anthropocene is not teaching people environmental problems but integrating this knowledge into their routine modes of thinking and acting (“The Challenge” 98). Given that ecological concerns have now become a part of daily conversations, awakening to ecological problems is no longer the prioritized task in the Anthropocene, which rather calls for a critical eye and immediate action, if possible. “Images of flooding, social collapse, drought, water wars and so on are clearly the expression of an acknowledged, and growing, social anxiety, and yet also and contradictorily, of its denial through its transformation into forms of spectacle and thriller,” writes Clark (98). From this perspective, literary accounts that aim to shock readers or give them a sense of horror may less ideally fit the Anthropocene because the sense of thrill that such books might promote risks overshadowing the reality. Eco-memoirs, however, appear to be a proper choice with their realistic representations and exclusion of images that may turn the narrative into a thriller causing the real ecological concerns to be undermined.

Though a hybrid form, eco-memoirs are, after all, personal narratives. In her *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* (2008), Ursula K. Heise, an eminent American voice in the field of ecocriticism, argues that we need forms of literature that reach beyond the narratives of individual lives and help us see the global context (Kerridge, “Ecocritical” 372). Heise highlights the importance of stories and images that promote the idea of an eco-cosmopolitan environmentalism in a world where global connectivity is steadily

increasing (210). Personal narratives inspired by locality do not seem to be overlapping with the global framework drawn by Heise. Similarly, Mark Cocker, a contemporary British nature writer, is also worried that too much focus on self might cause nature to be relegated to the background (“Death”). Although this dissertation accepts and shares the anxiety that self-centred narratives might lead contemporary nature writing to end up in anthropocentrism³ and deviate from the main concern, which should be the current planetary crisis and humankind’s place and role in it, it is against silencing the personal voice speaking from a locality. As Kerridge argues, there is also a need for “writing that combines ecological, social and individual perspectives, showing us the costs and consequences of different choices” (“Ecocritical” 372). Eco-memoirs, which have the potential of showing the results of individual acts, might meet that need as they allow for individual perspectives. In addition, the personal voice in a narrative might enable readers to identify with the narrator more easily, which eventually gets them closer to thinking ecologically. It is argued that in the US readers turned their attention away from poetry and serious fiction to nature writing that includes autobiographical elements mainly “for the lyrical element once found in poetry, and for the concrete narratives- the vernacular storytelling- once found in serious fiction” (Bass et al. 74). This sense of familiarity and relationality may more easily be conveyed to the reader via memoirs.

It is not only technical reasons that make eco-memoirs a convenient form for our times, though. This study argues that eco-memoirs have the potential of creating a counterculture as the writers start from a personal story, and then expand their scope by establishing relations to earth others⁴ and progressing their narratives towards the criticism of the entrenched anthropocentric thinking in the west. Clark indicates that “A crucial claim of green criticism has always been that the environmental crisis is a crisis of imagination, that new ways of imagining and conceiving humanity’s relation to the natural world are needed” (“The Challenge” 84). The eco-memoirs chosen for this study are experimenting exactly with these “new ways of imagining and conceiving humanity’s relation to the natural world”. To be more specific, Kathleen Jamie’s essay

³Anthropocentrism is a worldview, whereby the focus is primarily or exclusively on humans, with the non-human nature ignored or reduced to an instrumental value (Barnhill).

⁴Earth other is a term used by some theoreticians like Val Plumwood and Karen Warren to refer to non-human natural entities.

trilogy *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019), Olivia Laing's *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* (2011) and Carol Donaldson's *On the Marshes: A Journey into England's Waterlands* (2017) can all be posited within the effort of reviewing humankind's relation to the natural world.

In fact, all these British writers can be seen as part of a recent movement in Britain, which Jason Cowley called "new nature writing" in the 2008 special edition of the literary magazine *Granta*. Cowley, who coined the term, explains the emergence of new nature writing in his editor's note in *Granta*'s special issue "The New Nature Writing" as follows: "When we began to commission articles for this issue we were interested less in what might be called old nature writing – by which I mean the lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wanderer – than in writers who approached their subject in heterodox and experimental ways" (10). The importance Cowley attaches to keeping away from lyrical accounts does not mean the erasure of personal voice, though. In fact, while collecting the articles for the new issue, they "also wanted the contributions to be voice-driven, narratives told in the first person, for the writer to be present in the story, if sometimes only bashfully" (10).

There have been arguments about the naming of this movement in British literary landscape, but despite the disagreements, the practitioners of new nature writing have followed the same motivation that makes it possible to group them under the same title: They want to put forward a personal response to the current ecological crisis, call for a critique of anthropocentrism and trigger action. Deborah Lilley, in her introductory essay "New British Nature Writing" suggests that the unmatched scale of environmental harm has led British authors to respond with a new terminology and new possibilities blending elements of autobiography, travelogue, natural history and popular science to explore and critique the interweaving of human–natural forces (3). Because of this commonality, this dissertation has adhered to the term new nature writing and examined the eco-memoirs within the framework of new nature writing.

With its choice of the memoirs all published in the twenty-first century, this study is also an attempt to contribute to the solidification of new British nature writing. Thus, it can be seen as part of an effort to revitalize British nature writing that remained relatively weaker compared to its American counterpart. While American nature writing

has remarkably flourished since the nineteenth century and received popular interest and critical acclaim in the twentieth century, British nature writing was in decline since Romanticism for various reasons. Contemporary British nature writer and ecocritic Robert Macfarlane's explanation about this difference between the two sides of the Atlantic merits attention. Macfarlane thinks that the weakening in Britain is partly due to the kind of an acquisitive-materialist and the secular-humanist selfhood that has predominated the country as well as a diminished sense of interest in any place in particular because of new ways of employment that keep people away from place attachment ("Call").

Notwithstanding its slowdown in the previous century, as Smith underlines, nature writing in Britain is currently regaining impetus as it can be seen in the opening of new publishing houses such as Little Toller that was founded in 2008, the issuing of new magazines such as *Earthlines* and *Archipelago* and the launching of new literary awards dedicated to nature writing like the Nan Shepherd Literary Prize that started in 2019 ("The New" 267). In addition to these, given the appearance of many diverse and young literary voices on the scene such as the fifteen-year old award winner Dara McAnulty and Zakiya McKenzie a young black woman, who, as Patrick Barkham, *The Guardian's* editor of nature writing column, informs, was chosen for Forestry Commission to write about the British woodland life ("Enchanted"), the recent nature writing movement in Britain is hard to ignore.

Accepting new British nature writing as an emergent field, this dissertation has focused on women writers. The first and the most important reason for such a choice is to pay tribute to women writing about the natural world and increase their visibility in this arena. Several writers and critics including but not limited to Miriam Darlington, Jay Griffiths, Patrick Barkham, Robert Macfarlane, Timothy Morton and Kathleen Jamie have raised concerns about the white male wanderer image that predominates nature writing. Katherine Norbury, who is the editor of *Women on Nature*, which was published in May 2021 with contributions from one hundred nineteen women, implies the same concern in the introduction: "Until very recently, in our east Atlantic archipelago at any rate, it is true that what we think of nature writing has been associated with almost exclusively with men" (9). Pointing at cultural and economic

factors, Norbury argues that as nature writing involves travelling to a certain degree, men have been in a more advantageous position, for they have had the time and resources to do both travelling and writing though it does not mean that women have not produced in this field (*Women* 9). In fact, in addition to time and resource issue, “the Western myth of mobility which implies men gain status by rejecting rootedness and ‘family values’, but which condemns women for the same”, as Phil Hubbard and Eleanor Wilkinson put it (258), seems to have played a major role in this inequality, too.

Also, this dissertation has been inspired by anti-essentialist ecofeminist ideals, which make it possible to bring together nature and women without establishing any deterministic link between the two. An influential anti-essentialist ecofeminist thinker, Plumwood argues that “Dominant western culture is androcentric, eurocentric and ethnocentric, as well as anthropocentric” (*Environmental* 101). Plumwood’s point is that western dualism has oppressed nature and woman among many other “others” (*Feminism* 43). Plumwood opposes dualism because it creates a sharp break and discontinuity between the privileged centre and the oppressed other (*Environmental* 101). In this destructive dualist schema, women and nature have been two of the unsettling others, and this study suggests that featuring women writers writing about nature can be a meaningful act against the anthropocentric western dualism.

When it comes to the selection of writers and their memoirs, landscape diversity has been the main concern. Nature writing is inevitably engaged with the territory whether the writer focuses on non-human beings living in a particular geography or the geography itself. Because of this direct link between the land and writing, some even use the term “landscape writing” as an alternative although it is not as inclusive as nature writing, which contains writing about non-human animals, too. Based on this reliance of nature writing on geography, a variety of landscapes have been included in this dissertation.⁵ Accordingly, the British topography covered in this study extends from the remotest Scottish island in the north to the more easily accessible Thames estuary in the south. Besides, this dissertation rejects binary oppositions, primarily culture-nature and

⁵British nature writers have also written about their relationship with non-human animals. Please see Chris Packham’s *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar* (2016), Helen MacDonald’s *H is for Hawk* (2014) and Miriam Darlington’s *Owl Sense* (2018) and *Otter Country* (2012). However, this dissertation excluded such memoirs because they would require readings into animal studies, which constitute a separate field.

favours polyvalence in the definitions of nature. This has been the factor in the selection of the related books, which, as detailed in this dissertation, blur the boundaries between culture and nature in many ways.

In this context, Kathleen Jamie, with her essay collection *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019), not only provides landscape diversity but also stretches the artificially imposed boundaries between culture and nature. Jamie takes her readers from the backyard of her house in Fife to isolated Scottish islands and even to Quinhagak, an Alaskan village. Her essays cover rocky islands that physically and psychologically test humans as well as inner-city views such as a whale skeleton in a natural museum or cancerous cells in a pathology laboratory. With such diverse views and landscapes, Jamie urges her reader to wear various lenses while looking at the natural world.

Olivia Laing, the writer of *To the River* (2011), sets out on a journey along the River Ouse in the north-central England. The river and its bank are a familiar landscape for Laing because this is where she grew up. Since Laing decides to walk by the river after a series of crises, this journey looks like a healing journey on the surface. As she progresses, however, her narrative gets less and less self-centred due to her frequent references to historical, literary and scientific figures who have been around the Ouse. It appears that with every meander and every tributary, the river reminds Laing of another story related to it. Just as a river divides into branches, Laing's writing centred on the Ouse splits making the reader question if one can separate writing about nature from writing about culture.

Donaldson's *On the Marshes* (2017) offers us a glimpse of the lives on the North Kent marshes in the south-east of England. After Jamie's abruptly changing landscapes from windswept islands to pink human tissues seen through the microscope and Laing's peaceful and industrial river that carries the load of history, Donaldson's marshland helps to diversify the topography in this dissertation even further. The marshes are portrayed with their natural beauty and biodiversity as well as socio-ecological conflicts which concern their human and non-human inhabitants. Donaldson, too, sets off on this journey after consecutive crises in her life, but her therapeutic story changes into a

critique of the profit-oriented capitalist system as she walks, again making the reader question what nature is and where it starts or ends.

When considered together, all these five books demonstrate the heterogeneity and diversity in the natural world through a variety of landscapes in today's Britain. In all this diversity, this study aims to discuss how a personal narrative can turn into the criticism of the anthropocentric dualist thinking system and if such a criticism might trigger change in this age of Anthropocene. In the light of all these, this dissertation is divided into four parts. The first chapter has been dedicated to the history of nature writing in the west from Antiquity till the nineteenth century. The objective of this chapter is to reveal how human perception of and approach to nature has changed throughout history so that we can see what kind of a legacy might underlie new British nature writing. This chapter, which starts with an attempt to define nature, covers references to pastoralism, dualism and natural history in Antiquity; the supposedly cosmological viewpoint of pre-Christian cultures; the shift to an anthropological worldview with the advent of Christianity; the impact of colonial aspirations on the thingification of the non-human nature; the role of Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution in the rise of human against the non-human; the effect of Darwinism on humankind's understanding of nature and finally a brief analysis of the Romantic era in terms of its effect on our approach to non-human nature.

The second chapter, which opens with a brief discussion on the decline of nature writing in the twentieth century in Britain, focuses on new British nature writing. Because the selected eco-memoirs are posited within this developing movement, this chapter traces its emergence and tries to highlight the features commonly observed in this contemporary form of writing. As it is known, ecological concerns have been on the rise since the environmental movement in the second half of the twentieth century. On that premise, the extent of environmental deterioration and the resulting response have been taken into consideration in mapping out new British nature writing.

The third chapter, which is divided into two sub-sections, aims to discuss why women and nature should be studied together. Accordingly, the first sub-section has been fed by environmental sociology, feminist political ecology and ecofeminism in an effort to discuss the place of gender in ecological orientation. The second part, however,

presents eco-memoir as a hybrid form at the intersection of autobiography and nature writing, and thus discusses the positioning of women writers in these two main pillars. This part also covers some contemporary women writers' ideas and feelings about being a woman writing on nature in today's world.

The fourth and the final chapter is divided into three sub-sections, each devoted to the selected writers and their books. The first sub-section is on Kathleen Jamie and her three memoirs written in the form of essay from 2005 to 2019. Since there is a traceable continuity in these three books, they have all been included in the analysis. The second sub-section is on Olivia Laing and her riparian journey, and the third is on Carol Donaldson and her marshland memoir. On the whole, this chapter reveals the common threads in the selected eco-memoirs that help to group them under new nature writing and tries to feature the specific contributions of each book to the emergent genre. Each memoir requiring a specific approach because of the writer's focus or foci, the analysis has essentially been shaped around the main research question: "How does a personal narrative turn into a critique of anthropocentric dualist thinking system?" Thus, this dissertation ought to leave us with a clearer mind about the recent movement in British nature writing and its ability to create the counterculture required by the Anthropocene.

CHAPTER 1

History of Nature Writing

Simply put, nature writing is writing concerned about nature. However, this definition is too broad and vague to elaborate on nature writing as a genre. In fact, throughout history various terms such as natural history, natural philosophy, environmental literature and nature writing have been employed to refer to writings about nature depending on the emphasis of the writing as well as the period it was written in (“Nature Writing”). In *This Incomparable Land: A Guide to American Nature Writing* (2001), Thomas J. Lyon points at three dimensions of nature writing, which are natural history facts, personal responses to nature and philosophical interpretation of nature (20). This tripartite approach to the definition of nature writing encompasses respectively natural history, environmental literature and natural philosophy. In this dissertation, the term nature writing is preferred as an umbrella term that covers these three dimensions.

Richard Mabey claims in the introduction to his anthology, *The Oxford Book of Nature Writing* (1995) that regardless of the culture and time period it is produced in, all nature writing is structured around one single theme, which is our “relief and pleasure at not being alone on the earth” (x). In this part of this study, following Mabey’s assumption that nature writing has developed on a common ground for centuries and across cultures, I attempt to provide a brief history of nature writing in the west, essentially in Europe, before narrowing down my research into British nature writing. This historical review is basically aimed at seeing what might have fed into contemporary British nature writing throughout centuries.

1.1 An Attempt to Define Nature

To trace nature writing back to its origins, it might be expected to clarify first what nature is. Defining nature as a word is a challenging task, though. Maurice-Merleau Ponty rightfully questions if we can justifiably study the notion of nature and if nature is not something other than a product of a history, throughout which the word was attributed a series of meanings rendering it unintelligible (*La Nature* 19).⁶ Ponty’s thought-provoking questioning brings us to an impasse and an outlet simultaneously.

⁶Translations from this source are mine unless otherwise noted.

On the one hand, it causes us to reach deadlock because if we accept nature to be the sum of meanings attributed to it, then there remains no nature *per se* and any attempt to study nature and nature alone proves to be futile. On the other hand, it contains an opening because it involves suspicion of the meanings attributed to it to the detriment of its intelligibility.

Bearing that suspicion in mind, I would still like to provide dictionary definitions for the word nature as they might show why there should arise question marks about what nature is. In *Oxford Dictionary*, the word nature is defined as follows:

- 1) all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people, like in the “beauties of nature”; 2) the way that things happen in the physical world when it is not controlled by people, like in the “laws of nature”; 3) the usual way that a person or an animal behaves that is part of their character, like in “his nature, by nature”; 4) the basic qualities of a thing, like in “the changing nature of society”; 5) a type or kind of something, like in “books of a scientific nature”. (“Nature”)

In fact, Latin roots of the word partially overlap with the definitions above. The word nature derives from the Latin word *natura* which is defined as “1) course of things; 2) natural character, constitution, quality; 3) the universe; 4) literally “birth”, from *natus*, which means “born” (“Nature”). *Natura* was a Latin translation of the Greek word *physis* which “correlated plants, animals, and other features of the world as developing of their own accord” and “the word *physis* was first used in connection with a plant in Homer in reference to the intrinsic qualities of a plant” (“What’s Nature?”). At this point, it would be useful to consider Ponty’s remark. In Ponty’s view, the word’s Greek root, which alludes to the vegetal, and its Latin root, which alludes to birth, both imply that nature is where there is life (*La Nature* 19). In Ponty’s understanding of nature, life in nature has an inherent meaning; however, according to Ponty, this meaning is not imposed by human thinking but exists by itself, through *auto-production* (19). Thus, Ponty seems to be affirming the intrinsic value of nature.

The word nature has apparently gone far beyond its initial use, which mainly connoted plants and animals:

In late thirteenth century, the word nature was used to define “restorative powers of the body, bodily processes, powers of growth” and in the mid- fourteenth century it came to define “the forces or processes of the material world; that which produces living things and maintains order”, while it also gained the meaning of “creation, the universe” as well as “heredity, birth, hereditary circumstance, essential qualities, inherent constitution, innate disposition”. (“Nature” [Online])

It is notable that the place of humans appears as an evaded issue in all these definitions. Ponty’s definition of nature alludes to human aspect, however: Nature is an enigmatic object, an object which is not an object at all... It is our ground, not the one that stretches out in front of us, but the one that carries us (*La Nature* 20). Ponty’s definition of nature not only refers to nature as a power by itself but also implies human’s dependence on nature. Regarding nature, Morton writes in the introduction to his *Ecology Without Nature* (2007): “The more we study it, the more we see that, beyond the fact that many different people have many different opinions about it, nature in itself flickers between things-it is both/and or neither/nor” (18). It is apparently difficult to reach a consensus about what nature is. Clark, on the other hand, offers a comprehensive set of definitions, which offers a summary of all definitions mentioned so far and thus needs to be quoted in full.

At its broadest nature is the sum of the structures, substances and causal powers that are the universe. In this sense, evidently, humanity is part of nature, could never be anything else and even a radioactive waste dump is as ‘natural’ as a snowdrop or a waterfall. A second sense of nature is that usually at issue in environmental politics. Here, ‘nature’ names the non-human world, the non-artificial, considered as an object of human contemplation, exploitation, wonder or terror. In this sense culture and nature are opposed. Being other than or superior to nature in this sense forms a definitive part of many modern conceptions of human identity, and of the enlightenment project of the ‘conquest of nature’. At the same time, non-human ‘nature’ also acquires connotations of the untouched, the pure, the sacral. Thirdly, nature may mean simply the

defining characteristic of something, as in the ‘nature’ of democracy, or the nature of ‘nature’. (*The Cambridge* 6-7)

1.2 Natureculture against Culture/Nature

It can be claimed that the difficulty in reaching an agreement on the definition of nature springs from the many diverse and complex ways humans have positioned themselves vis-à-vis nature. In this dissertation, nature, with its intrinsic value, is accepted as a whole including human, and if there occurs a need to refer to the non-human, it is specified accordingly. Since this study is built on the idea that human is part of nature, culture, which is taken as the binary opposition of nature in western thought, is not considered to be categorically separate from nature. In fact, the definition of the word culture also justifies why the two should not be positioned as distinctively opposite. In *Oxford Dictionary*, the word culture is defined as follows:

1) The customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group; 2) A country, group with its own beliefs; 3) Art, music, literature; 4) The beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organization share; 5) The growing of plants or breeding of particular animals in order to get a particular substance or crop from them (e.g. the culture of silkworms); 6) A group of cells or bacteria, especially one taken from a person or an animal grown for medical or scientific study, or to produce food; the process of obtaining and growing these cells (a throat culture). (“Culture”)

Of the six definitions above, the last two includes the non-human, which can be taken as a simple sign that culture should not definitely be confined to human. Apart from that, as its etymological development reveals, the word culture was originally used in connection with what people do to land. In other words, even at its birth, culture was bound by nature: “The word culture derives from the Latin word *cultura*, which means “cultivating, agriculture” and which is the past participle form of the verb *colere*, which figuratively means ‘care’” (“Culture”). Its diverse uses throughout previous centuries show how the word came to connote human intervention in the non-human nature:

The word appeared in English in the fifteenth century to mean “the tilling of land, act of preparing the earth for crops” with an expansion in the seventeenth

century to “the cultivation or rearing of a crop, act of promoting growth in plants”, “the cultivation of fish, oysters, etc.” in the eighteenth century and “the production of bacteria or other microorganisms in a suitable environment” in the nineteenth century. (“Culture” [Online])

Association of culture with intellectual human achievements, however, came nearly four centuries after its first recorded use in English. In fact, although the figurative sense of “cultivation through education, systematic improvement and refinement of the mind” was first confirmed in the sixteenth century, it was not widespread before the nineteenth century to use the word culture in that sense (“Culture” [Online]). To be more specific, it was in 1805 when the word culture started to mean the “learning and taste, the intellectual side of civilization” and in 1867 it was associated with “collective customs and achievements of a people, a particular form of collective intellectual development” (“Culture” [Online]).

At this point, it is important to remember the influence of Matthew Arnold’s major work of criticism, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) on the definition of culture. To Arnold, culture was “the best which has been thought and said in the world” (2). Arnold regarded culture as the only means to correct faults and reach perfection in the society which he found to be going through difficult times because of rapid industrialization: “Now, then, is the moment for culture to be of service, culture which believes in making reason and the will of God prevail, believes in perfection” (14). Kevin Avruch states that “in Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), culture referred to special intellectual or artistic endeavours or products, what today we might call ‘high culture’ as opposed to ‘popular culture’” (qtd. in Spencer-Oatey 1). Arnold’s elitist definition of culture was, however, disproved by anthropologists pioneered by Edward Tylor, who used culture to refer to “a quality possessed by all people in all social groups” in his *Primitive Culture* (1870) (qtd. in Spencer-Oatey1). In *Cultural Anthropology* (1987) Conrad Phillip Kottak notes that culture includes “rule-governed, shared, symbol-based, learned behaviours and beliefs transmitted across the generations. Everyone is cultured, not just people with elite education” (qtd. in Berger 136). The definition of culture from this anthropological standpoint obviously reduces it to human society, but it can be argued that since the doings of human have an impact on the non-human, culture

inevitably contains nature. In the *Dictionary of Sociology and Related Terms*, culture is defined as follows:

A collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for all the distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool-making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects. (qtd. in Berger 136)

If the tools and artefacts are accepted to be part of human culture and if the non-human is named and represented through the human language, the impact humans exert on the non-human through their tools and language becomes evident, which shows how culture can dissolve into nature. In this perspective, there seems to be no nature left without human impact. Clark points out that if nature encompasses places unaffected by human activity, there is no such nature on the planet (*The Cambridge* 6). As Timothy W. Luke underlines, “Much of the earth is a ‘built environment’, a ‘planned habitat’, or ‘managed range’ as pollution modifies atmospheric chemistry, urbanization restructures weather events, architecture encloses whole biomes in sprawling megacities, and biotechnology reengineers the base codes of existing biomass” (qtd. in Clark, *The Cambridge* 6).

On the other side of the medallion, ethology, the study of animal behaviour shows that some animals develop a culture, too. Garrard informs us that ethologists use the concept of culture to explain certain hunting practices of killer whales and tool-making practices of primates, which change from region to region but are not transferred across generations through genes (*Ekoeleştiri* 211).⁷ In fact, there is suggestive evidence for culture in killer whales that show a number of pod-specific behaviour patterns, including foraging specializations, migration patterns and vocal dialects as well as in some bird species that have specific song variants and mating preferences which are not genetically but culturally transmitted (Laland and Hoppit 154). It appears that ethology with its research into animal behaviour and culture

⁷Translations from this source are mine unless otherwise noted.

scientifically blurs the boundaries between the human and the non-human. Nilsen Gökçen also highlights that by presenting evidence of emotional links between human and the non-human and cognitive abilities shared by the two, ethology helps to close the gap between humans and nonhuman animals pointing at a continuum between the two (9).

As the examples above show, the influence of culture on non-human nature is obvious. Yet nature melts into culture, too. In the first place, if culture encompasses art objects, where the inspiration to produce art comes from if it is not nature remains as an intriguing question. In his introduction to his anthology, Mabey mentions the 20, 000-year-old vivid boar and bison paintings discovered in caves in southern Europe and argues that the natural world may be the oldest subject of human art (vii). Mabey claims that our interest in the non-human to the point of including it in arts results from our fascination with the non-human which look different from ourselves but which are filled with the same capacity for movement, fear, pain and caring (*The Oxford* vii). He clearly notes: “It is a perennial interest which continues to permeate art, poetry, and mythology throughout the world” (vii). In this respect, art seems to be narrowing the gap between the human and non-human. Gary Snyder states that dance, myth, sculpture or a poem should be interpreted not as a cultural self-assertion of a certain group but as the wildness of human creativity responding to other modes of meaning and significance in the world (qtd. in Clark, *The Cambridge* 54). When art is accepted as a human response to the non-human modes of being and knowing, it gets meaningless to draw an impermeable line between culture (human) and nature (non-human). Above all, as Clark argues, “Culture itself has a context- the biosphere, air, water, plant and animal life” (*The Cambridge* 4). In this regard, separating culture from nature would be stripping culture off its context.

Donna J. Haraway introduces the compound word *natureculture* to highlight the falsity of separating the one from the other (Clark, *The Cambridge* 161). In *The International Encyclopaedia of Primatology*, Nicholas Malone and Kathryn Ovenden define the word *natureculture* as “a concept that emerges from the scholarly interrogation of dualisms that are deeply embedded within the intellectual traditions of the sciences and humanities (e.g., human/animal, nature/culture) (“Natureculture”).

Haraway's questioning of the separation between fact and fiction starting from primatology can account for her rejection of the opposition between nature and culture. Haraway argues that since the first recorded sightings of primates, humanity's knowledge of primates has been shaped through stories:

First came the original intimations of primate form, suggested in the pre-scientific mists in the inventive stories of hunters, travellers and natives, beginning perhaps in ancient times, perhaps in the equally mythic Age of Discovery and of the Birth of Modern Science in the sixteenth century. Then gradually came clear-sighted vision, based on anatomical dissection and comparison. (*Primate Visions* 4)

According to Haraway, from immature sciences based on description and free qualitative interpretation to mature sciences based on quantitative methods and falsifiable hypotheses, scientific practice has involved story-telling: "Scientific practice may be considered a kind of story-telling practice- a rule-governed, constrained, historically changing craft of narrating the history of nature" (*Primate Visions* 4). To Haraway, what a biologist does is, in fact, to read the performance of the living organism and turn it into a story (5). Thus, Haraway's interpretation of science as narrative explains why nature and culture cannot easily be separated. From Haraway's perspective, what we know to be natural turns out to be a product of human language, and thus, a cultural product. Haraway's argument is confirmed by biological anthropology. Biological anthropology is "the study of the evolution and ecology of humans and other primates" ("Biological"). The biological anthropologists who focus on humans deal with how humans respond to environmental stresses through an examination of their physical forms as well as their survival and reproduction capabilities ("Physical"). In a way, biological anthropologists remind us of the fact that humans cannot be thought independently of the non-human nature that shapes them and that they simultaneously shape. Malone and Ovenden also state that with its emphasis on the biocultural nature of human beings as well as the recognized importance of social and ecological niche construction for humans and other organisms, biological anthropology justifies the validity of the concept of *natureculture* ("Natureculture").

In this dissertation, although the term *natureculture* is not employed as a term *per se*, its underlying idea is wholly accepted. However, this does not mean a denial of non-human nature as an agent in itself. Haraway uses the term *coyote*, which is the wily actor or trickster spirit in some Native American cultures, to affirm the natural world in its otherness from human conceptions (Clark, *The Cambridge* 161). Similarly, when the issue is to refer to nature as an agent with its intrinsic power and value, I will use the word non-human. Following the attempt to define nature, the next part of the study provides a historical review of nature writing in Europe with references to how the approach to nature has changed. I am aware that, as Freytag underlines, attempts at periodisation of the changes in the perception of nature have always been debated (18); however, I think that such periodisation, though not accurate, is needed to understand how contemporary nature writing has been shaped throughout centuries.

1.3 Nature Writing in the Antiquity

1.3.1 Pastoralism

Don Scheese states that modern nature writing emerged in response to the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century it was consolidated as a particularly forceful form of pastoralism (6-11). The earliest entry of the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is in 1901 with Paul E. More's comparison of Thoreau and Wordsworth within the framework of nature writing (Philippon 392). According to Scheese, the pastoral, which he regards as a tradition integral to the development of nature writing, dates back to the Ancient Greece, where it appeared as a literary type featuring shepherds in a bucolic setting taking care of their animals and singing for the good of the rural life (4). Grahame J. Lavis states that pastoral writing originated in the third century B.C., in particular through the poetry of Theocritus (11). Raymond Williams also agrees that it is in the Hellenistic world of the third century B.C. that pastoral emerged as a literary form, but he goes further back to the time of Hesiod, namely the ninth century B.C. to look for the traces of nature writing in his famous book *The Country and The City* (1973), which offers a survey of English literature focusing on the representations of country and city (14). Hesiod, one of the earliest Greek poets often called the "father of Greek didactic poetry" is famous for his epics, *Theogony*, which relates to the myths of the gods and *Works and Days*, which

describes peasant life (Solmsen). Williams quotes the following passage from Hesiod's *Works and Days*: "remote and free from evil and grief ... (mortal men) had all good things, for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint" (14). Analysing Hesiod's poetry, Williams asserts that Hesiod's writing is both marked by the myth of Golden Age and determined by the character of his own "iron age" involving recommendations about practical agriculture, social justice and neighbourliness (14). Williams suggests that Hesiod's writing relates more to working because the poet puts emphasis on ploughing, tending vineyards, keeping pigs and sheep and goats (14). It can be inferred from Hesiod's writing that before the pastoral emerged as a literary form, humans' relation to land was already a topic of interest in the literature of the time.

As a literary work, pastoral is "dealing with shepherds or rural life in a usually artificial manner and typically drawing a contrast between the innocence and serenity of the simple life and the misery and corruption of city and especially court life" ("Pastoral"). The pastoral is obviously appreciative of nature. Scheese notes that writers of this tradition have tended to represent or construct nature as a retreat or sanctuary, as Arcadian Garden or wilderness refuge (4). According to Grahame J. Lavis, too, whether in the form of poetry or prose, pastoral writing is characterised by the celebration of rural life depicting serenity and tranquil happiness and the praise of simple pleasures generally derived from nature (11). Scheese underlines that pastoral tradition grew in popularity especially when the rural landscape started to be threatened by urban space and as a result, the city-based poets tended to write about nature by epitomizing bucolic contentment and simplicity (14). Garrard also points out the large-scale urbanisation in the Hellenic period as the promoter of pastoral tradition, with its spatial contrast between town, which was associated with corruption and country, which was associated with peace and abundance (*Ecocriticism* 35).

Williams distinguishes the pastoral of the Antiquity from the Iron Age of Hesiod, where the emphasis was on working, and informs that the pastoral of Hellenistic world of the third century B.C. developed from singing competitions in local peasant communities (14). The literary centre of the movement being Alexandria, the landscape of the pastoral covered Sicily of Theocritus, the Greek islands and Egypt

(Williams 14). Theocritus (300 B.C.- 260 B.C.), the Greek poet from the Alexandrian school, who is known as the creator of pastoral poetry, contributed significantly to nature writing of his time with his idylls depicting “a pastoral setting in which shepherds wooed nymphs and shepherdesses and held singing contests with their rivals” (“Theocritus”). Idyll, from the Greek word *eidyllion*, which means short poem or little picture, was a term initially used to refer to Theocritus’s poetry (“Theocritus”). Idyll is defined as “a short poem of a pastoral or rural character in which something of the element of landscape is depicted or suggested” (“Idyll”). Williams cites an idyll by Theocritus drawing attention to its celebratory tone:

All rich delight and luxury was there;
Larks and bright finches singing in the air;
The brown bee flying round about the well;
The ring-dove moaning; everywhere the smell
Of opulent summer and of ripening-tide:
Pears at our feet and apples at our side
Rolling in plenteousness; in piles around
Branches, with damsons burdening to the ground
Strewn for our feast. (15)

Though Williams highlights Theocritus’s praise of the rural, he also asserts that Theocritus did not overlook the working conditions of the peasant life and that the working context of his idylls was at times persistent (14). Nevertheless, the idealization of rural life by Theocritus seems to have set the tone of nature writing of his time: idyllic. In fact, the adjective idyllic has in time come to mean “pleasing or picturesque in natural simplicity” (“Idyllic”). It can be claimed that it is from these idyllic origins that all subsequent variations and refinements of nature writing evolved gradually coalescing into the literary convention of pastoralism (Lavis 11). However, Williams underlined that this idyllic tone was challenged by the Roman poet Virgil (70.- 19 B.C.), who continued the tradition of pastoral maintaining its contact with the real social conditions of country life (16). Lavis also informs that Virgilian pastoral introduced subtle complexities and tensions into pastoralism (11). The following excerpt from Virgil quoted by Williams reveals the clash between idyllic pastoral and social reality:

Ah fortunate old man, here, among hallowed springs
And familiar streams you'll enjoy the longed-for shade,
the cool shade
Here, as of old, where your neighbour's land marches
with yours,
The sally hedge, with bees of Hybia sipping its blossom,
Shall often hum you gently to sleep. On the other side
Vine-dressers will sing to the breezes at the crag's foot;
And all the time your favourites, the husky-voiced wood
pigeons
Shall coo away, and turtle-doves make moan in the elm tops
But the rest of must go from here and be dispersed-
To Scythia, bone-dry Africa, the chalky spare of the Oxus
Even to Britain- that place cut off at the very world's end.
Ah, when shall I see my native land again? After long years,
Or never? – see the turf-dressed roof of my simple cottage,
And wondering gaze at the ears of corn that were all my
kingdom
To think of some godless soldier owning my well-farmed
fallow,
A foreigner reaping these crops! To such a pass has civil
Dissension brought us...
No more singing for me. (16)

Williams underlines that Virgil, who was the son of a smallholder whose land had been threatened by such a confiscation, pointed out the contrast between the pleasures of rural settlement and the threat of loss or eviction (17). According to Williams, in some earlier literature, the peace of country life was contrasted with the disturbance of war and civil war and the political chaos in the cities (17). Regarding Virgil's poetry, Garrard draws attention to the fact that this Roman poet also alluded to environmental problems of his time, mainly deforestation, which according to some environmental historians accelerated the fall of Roman Empire (*Ecocriticism* 36). For example,

Virgil's shepherd Menalcas says of the mountains where the trees were cut down: "For gladness, even the unshorn [intonsi] mountains fling their voices/ Toward the stars" (qtd. in Garrard 36). Given these examples, it can be inferred that despite the celebratory tone of pastoralism in Ancient Greek and Rome, there also appeared writings that blended the beauty of nature with bitter social reality, and even environmental problems.

1.3.2 Fables and Anthropomorphism

Nature writing in Antiquity can be expanded to fables as well. Mabey cites Aesop's fables as he tries to chart the development of nature writing from past to today (*The Oxford 2*). As it is known, "A fable is a short piece of fiction that features animals in the role of the protagonist and usually includes or illustrates a moral" ("Fable"). Many early Greek authors including Hesiod incorporated fables in their work, but Aesop, a Greek storyteller who is believed to have lived in the sixth century B.C., has become one of the most prominent ancient figures to whom fables were attributed (Seittleman 17). His fables including but not limited to "The Fox and The Grapes", "The Frog and The Ox", "The Lion and The Mouse" and "The Oak and The Reeds" all display the common characteristic of fables, which is anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism basically means attributing human characteristics to the non-human ("Anthropomorphism"). In *A Dictionary of Ecology*, anthropomorphism is defined as "the attribution of human characteristics to non-human animals, most commonly by supposing non-human behaviour to be motivated by a human" (Allaby). In this definition, human stands out as the trigger of the action.

Stewart E. Guthrie, who respectively summarizes the views of David Hume (1711-1776), Freud (1856- 1939) and Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001) on anthropomorphism, lists three reasons to explain why people tend to anthropomorphize: 1) Intellectually, people want to explain the unfamiliar through a model they know best, namely themselves. 2) Emotionally, they make a hostile world seem more familiar and therefore less threatening. 3) Practically, humans need to discern humans as they are predisposed to perceive shapes, sounds, and other things in terms of human form ("Anthropomorphism"). Whatever the cause of anthropomorphism, it is clear that humans take themselves as a reference point when they attribute their characteristics to

the non-human. Clark indicates that to describe a specific representation as anthropomorphic already makes certain assumptions about what human nature is in the first place (*The Cambridge* 193-94). Apparently, anthropomorphism implies not only separation of human from the rest but also human superiority as it is the human that is taken as a norm.

Claiming that questions around anthropomorphism are irresolvable, Clark argues that all human knowledge is anthropomorphic in a way because we already try to make sense of the non-human through our language, which is inherently anthropocentric (*The Cambridge* 192-95). The reason for and the degree of anthropomorphising might, however, justify an act of anthropomorphism. Plumwood suggests that instead of rejecting any form of anthropomorphism, we need to be questioning if an act of anthropomorphism is damaging or assimilating in itself because when one addresses a human audience about something which relates to the non-human, such representation inevitably covers an interpretation in human terms (*Environmental* 58). Garrard also accepts that there are justifiable concerns about anthropomorphism, and he invites us to distinguish between different types of anthropomorphism, namely crude anthropomorphism and critical anthropomorphism (*Ekoeleştiri* 208). While crude anthropomorphism involves the stupidification of animals with a denigrating tone, critical anthropomorphism considers the homology between human and nonhuman and has a more empathetic and bio-centric stance (209- 212). In Aesop's fables, it is significant that the objective is not to caricaturise animals but to give a moral lesson by offering a satirical criticism of negative human traits and praising the positive ones. This inevitably involves the objectification of the non-human, but it is important that the real motivation underlying Aesop's fables is not an absolute praise of the human to the detriment of the non-human. Moreover, in Aesop's fables, when human characters are used, they are not necessarily given superiority. His following fable, "The Boys and The Frogs" is an example:

Some boys were playing one day at the edge of a pond in which lived a family of frogs. The boys amused themselves by throwing stones into the pond so as to make them skip on top of the water. The stones were flying thick and fast and the boys were enjoying themselves very much; but the poor frogs in the pond

were trembling with fear. At last one of the frogs, the oldest and bravest, put his head out of the water, and said, “Oh, please, dear children, stop your cruel play! Though it may be fun for you, it means death to us!” (Aesop)

‘Do not think about your fun if it is at the cost of other people’s happiness’ could be the moral lesson to be drawn from this fable. However, from an ecological point of view, humans are warned against harm caused to the non-human. Similarly, in his fable “The Fisherman and the Little Fish”, where the fish begs for its life, the fisherman turns a blind eye to the little fish’s plea and puts it in its basket thinking that small as it is, it is better than nothing (Aesop). At first glance, the moral lesson might be to be content with small gains, but it is undeniable that from an ecological perspective the fisherman in the story appears as a cruel and opportunistic human who does not care about the fish. It is seen that in some of his fables, Aesop’s anthropomorphism contains an ecocritical eye whether or not he meant it.

1.3.3 Natural History

Anthropomorphism was not peculiar to fables in Antiquity. It is possible to claim that the writings that fell into the scope of natural history were also anthropomorphic and anthropocentric. Yet rather than their anthropomorphism, the scientific effort put into the writing of natural history back in Ancient Greece and Rome is primarily worth attention. Mabey shares an excerpt from Aristotle’s *Historia Animalium* (344 B.C.) as well as passages from Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis* (A.D. 77) in tracing nature writing back to its origins (*The Oxford* 3-5). Scheese also refers back to Aristotle (384- 322 B.C.) and Pliny the Elder (23-79) when he argues that the roots of nature writing are traceable to a form older than the pastoral, namely natural history which involves the scientific observation and recording of natural phenomena (13).

Aristotle is known to have created the framework of modern biology (Anderson 14). He was also the first to attempt to create a grand classification system for nature beginning with a division between animals with and without blood (Scheese 13). Some authors, however, suggest that Thales of Miletus (624–540 BC) was the real founder of modern scientific ideas with his search for rational explanations for natural phenomena, but since little of his research survived, Aristotle’s work, *History of Animals*, comes to the forefront as a pioneer in natural history (Anderson 16). *History of Animals* is an

extensive work that consists of nine books, in which Aristotle tried to classify animals including “man”, offered a description of their body parts and how they use them and attempted to explain how they hunt, eat, pair, reproduce and nest without ignoring their psychology and behaviour. In addition to *History of Animals*, Juliet Clutton-Brock lists the *Generation of Animals*, and *Parts of Animals*, *Movement of Animals*, and *Progression of Animals*, which all comprised Aristotle’s work on zoology (424). In all of these books, Aristotle wrote about more than five hundred species, including shellfish, insects, birds, reptiles, and quadrupeds, with humans being elaborated in the same way as all other animals (424).

What makes Aristotle’s *History of Animals* pioneering is that he chose to write about animals after direct observation and consultation with practical people like beekeepers, fishermen and sponge divers instead of relying on theistic explanations that dominated much of western thought up until his time (Anderson 17). Aristotle is also known to have dissected dead animals to obtain information (Clutton-Brock 424). Scheese underlines that Aristotle practiced natural history with care and circumspection whether writing about the hunting techniques of the octopus, nesting habits of the cuckoo or sleeping patterns of mammals (13). Aristotle’s work was not free of errors, arbitrariness or hearsay, but still with his comprehensive observation and classification of animals, it was a break from earlier periods and a breakthrough in laying the foundations of natural history (Anderson 16-21).

The scientific errors Aristotle committed have been corrected by scientists throughout centuries. However, I would argue that what matters for nature writing from an ecological standpoint is the writer’s attitude to what she or he is writing about rather than the scientific or methodological mistakes which can be remedied through advanced research. Aristotle’s work on biology was an absolute leap in writing about animals from a scientific perspective, but this does not mean that his attitude to animals was truly biocentric. The following passage from Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, Book IX, in which he intended to remark on animals’ psychology, shows how he was inclined to anthropocentrism and how he took humans as a reference point in his efforts to understand non-human animals: “The characters of animals, as has been observed, differ in respect to timidity, to gentleness, to courage, to tameness, to intelligence, and

to stupidity” (610). Aristotle clearly attributes human characteristics to animals, but his descriptions sometimes sound biased. For example, his description of the sheep’s behaviour is depreciative.

The sheep is said to be naturally dull and stupid. Of all quadrupeds, it is the most foolish: it will saunter away to lonely places with no object in view, oftentimes in stormy weather it will stray from shelter; if it be overtaken by a snowstorm, it will stand still unless the shepherd sets it in motion; it will stay behind and perish unless the shepherd brings up the rams; it will then follow home. (610)

With its denigrating tone, Aristotle’s definition appears to be mechanomorphic. Mechanomorphism in zoology occurs when the difference between humans and non-human animals is construed as a deficit for the non-human (Garrard, *Ekoleştiri* 207). It seems that Aristotle did not question whether there could be something which is inaccessible to the human mind and which could explain the sheep’s orientation to an object invisible by human eye or its insistence on standing still in a snowstorm. Even this short excerpt suffices to infer that Aristotle attached superiority to human mind over the rest. Aristotle divided the world into three: the intellectual nature which was seen as peculiar to the human, the soul which characterised animate beings including vegetative forms, and the rest of inanimate nature, and in this tripartite vision of the world human was at the peak (Plumwood, *Feminism* 105). In fact, Aristotle’s approach to the natural world was teleological, which meant he believed everything in nature had a purpose and this purpose was ultimately for the benefit of mankind (Clutton-Brock 24). Seen from this perspective, his privileging of the human is not incomprehensible. Aristotle openly wrote that “Plants are evidently for the sake of animals, and animals for the sake of Man; thus Nature, which does nothing in vain, has made all things for the sake of Man” (qtd. in Clutton-Brock 24).⁸

Moreover, just as Aristotle privileged human against the non-human, he obviously privileged man in his understanding of human. To illustrate, the following passage reveals his sexism even in such biological account on animals.

⁸Plumwood warns that although Aristotle favoured humans against the rest of the natural world, he did not consider humans as a unified group, so a generalised human/nature dichotomy is not to be found in Aristotelian philosophy. For further information please see Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. 1993.Routledge, 2003.

In all genera in which the distinction of male and female is found, Nature makes a similar differentiation in the mental characteristics of the two sexes. This differentiation is the most obvious in the case of humankind and in that of the larger animals and viviparous quadrupeds. In the case of the latter the female is softer in character ... In all cases, excepting those of the bear and leopard, the female is less spirited than the male. (Aristotle 607-8)

Aristotle goes as far as to claim that the qualities and capacities he mentions are found in perfection in man, whose character is more developed and whose nature is “the most rounded off and complete” (608). As these examples reveal, Aristotle was not just anthropocentric but also androcentric when he set out to conduct this comprehensive and leading research on the natural world. Aristotle’s work on zoology can be criticized for its anthropocentrism and androcentrism, but the hierarchy he imposed in his classification of the non-human also merits attention. Clutton-Brock argues that Aristotle privileged viviparous animals against the oviparous and vermiparous, for he thought the offspring of the viviparous came to world in perfection (427). In Clutton-Brock’s view, Aristotle’s privileging of the viviparous is in parallel to his privileging of the warm-blooded against the cold-blooded, which results from his view of the elements and belief that hotter things were superior to the others (427). Similarly, David Sedley maintains that Aristotle found uprightness as a privilege in living beings, and he, thus, positioned man superior to other animals with his body that can face up the sky coinciding with the cosmo’s upward direction (171). Ponty also draws attention to the hierarchy Aristotle imposed in nature as he suggested that animals with light bodies are bound to ascend, which implies, in Ponty’s view, that Aristotle divided nature in qualitative regions like the ground and the sky (*La Nature* 23). If the destiny of the animals is to ascend, which Aristotle suggested according to Ponty, then the reptiles are automatically positioned below birds.

Aristotle’s taxonomy has been criticized for the hierarchy he is claimed to have suggested among animals. In fact, Aristotle’s writings on nature are important not only because he paved the way for scientific research into nature but also because he exerted a long-lasting influence on western thinking about it. Clutton-Brock indicates that his classifications have affected our attitudes to animals, and his philosophy is still the

backcloth to our attitudes to them no matter how much his views have been criticized as from the eighteenth century (421). In fact, Aristotle's description of the sheep's behaviour as foolish as mentioned in the passage taken from *Historia Animalium* justifies Brock's point. In English language, the association of the sheep with stupid behaviour dates to 1540s ("Sheep"). Though Aristotle himself cannot definitely be held responsible for this negative perception, it is worth attention that he prioritized this animal over that animal and his prioritization seems to have permeated into our thinking. The idioms such as "as meek as a lamb, like a lamb to the slaughter, as gentle as a lamb" dovetail with Aristotle's view of the sheep. Sheep has, consequently, been known as a meek and stupid animal with no will of its own.

Concerning the natural history writings of the Antiquity, Pamela O. Long, in her review of Brian Ogilvie's *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (2006), suggests that the way the ancients studied plants and animals was highly instrumentalist. Some such as Aristotle studied plants and animals as adjunct to natural philosophy, some like Dioscorides (40- 90), the Greek physician and pharmacologist who wrote *De Materia Medica*, studied them for pharmacological and medical purposes, and some agricultural authors studied them in relation with the cultivation of crops and animal husbandry (Long 314). In this sense, it can be argued that natural historians of the ancient period showed interest in the non-human to obtain benefits for humans in a way to support Aristotle, who claimed that everything in nature was made to serve "mankind". At this point it is necessary to go back to Plato to understand how the natural historians came to consider the non-human within the framework of the benefits it provided to the human.

1.3.4 Plato and Human/Nature Dualism

The earliest examples of natural history writings dating back to ancient era suggest that there was a separation between human and the non-human back then. Plumwood goes back to the emergence of rationalism in Ancient Greece and to Plato in particular to trace the separation of human from the non-human (*Feminism* 72). Although Plato himself is not a natural historian or a pastoral poet nor a fable narrator, whose writings or sayings can be analysed within the framework of nature writing, his

legacy in dualistic thinking giving priority to human against non-human makes it necessary to refer to him in this dissertation.

According to Plumwood, there are obvious parallelisms among human/animal, soul/body and man/woman dualisms suggested by Plato (86). That Plato gives absolute superiority to Form against matter can explain how he privileges human to the non-human and soul to body. Gregory Vlastos writes:

Everywhere Plato gives the Form pre-eminence. In epistemology it is the object of knowledge; sensible particulars can only be objects of that low-grade cognitive achievement, opinion. In cosmology only the Forms represent completely lucid order: physical individuals, enmeshed in brute necessity, are only quasi-orderly, as they are only quasi-intelligible. In ontology there are grades of reality and only Forms have the highest grade. So too in the theory of love the respective roles of Form and individual are sustained; the individual cannot be as lovable as the Idea; the Idea, and it alone, is to be loved for its own sake. (qtd. in Plumwood, *Feminism* 81)

Accordingly, it is possible to argue that in Platonic thinking whatever is material is inferior to the Form or Idea it corresponds to: “For Plato, any particular material thing, such as an actual dog, is subject to change; for the particular dog can die and when it does, it is no longer “a dog”—it is merely dead matter. The Idea of dog (dogness), however, does not change. It is eternal” (“Form and Matter”). Such denigration of matter in favour of Form or Idea clarifies multiple exclusions in Platonic worldview. For example, regarding human self, Plato separates the real self from the body, the senses, emotions, animal passions and appetites, all of which belong to the realm of appearances, and he aligns the soul with the immaterial and divine order (Plumwood, *Feminism* 89). In this way of thinking, body is posited outside the soul but within the realm of nature, and body and sexuality are considered as obstacles against the soul to reach the higher realm of the Forms (90). According to Plato, “The soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintellectual, and multiform, and dissoluble, and changeable” (qtd. in Plumwood, *Feminism* 89).

Plato's divided approach to the self overlaps with his human/nature dualism. According to Plato, human, with his soul and reason, cannot be considered in continuity with the non-human animal that lacks soul and mind, which marks the distancing of human from the non-human (Plumwood, *Feminism* 92). The following remarks summarize Plato's view of the human/non-human. In Platonic thought, humans are held superior to the rest of living beings.

We should think of the most authoritative part of our soul as a guardian spirit given by god, living in the summit of the body, which can properly be said to lift us from the earth toward our home in heaven; for we are creatures not of earth but of heaven, where the soul was first born, and our divine part attaches us by the head to heaven, like a plant by its roots, and keeps our body upright. (qtd. in Plumwood, *Feminism* 69)

Plumwood thinks that underlying the entire Platonic dualisms is Plato's philosophy of death (92). As she explains, "Death is the goal of the philosopher because it is the final and most complete attainment of these goals of separation and denial of dependency" (92). What Plumwood means by dependency is the dependency of soul on body and what she means by separation is the separation of soul from body. In this understanding, death irrevocably separates soul from body. In other words, death is "the ultimate in attainment of distance from the body and the ultimate separation from the entire lower order of nature" (92). In this framework, not only is body denigrated but also the material world where humans live is reduced to a transitory and unimportant dwelling where humans have to stay before reaching the world of Ideas. Plumwood thinks that it is exactly this way of thinking which instrumentalised the non-human nature and stopped the earth from being a home to be protected and cherished (92).

Plato's hierarchies are manifest also in his conceptualisations of the non-human animals. The following excerpt from his *Timaeus* (360 BC), which evokes Aristotle's hierarchical classification of animals, shows his demeaning attitude to the non-human animals.

The race of wild pedestrian animals, again, came from those who had no philosophy in any of their thoughts, and never considered at all about the nature of the heavens, because they had ceased to use the courses of the head, but

followed the guidance of those parts of the soul which are in the breast. In consequence of these habits of theirs they had their front-legs and their heads resting upon the earth to which they were drawn by natural affinity; and the crowns of their heads were elongated and of all sorts of shapes, into which the courses of the soul were crushed by reason of disuse. And this was the reason why they were created quadrupeds and polypods: God gave the more senseless of them the more support that they might be more attracted to the earth. And the most foolish of them, who trail their bodies entirely upon the ground and have no longer any need of feet, he made without feet to crawl upon the earth. The fourth class were the inhabitants of the water : these were made out of the most entirely senseless and ignorant of all, whom the transformers did not think any longer worthy of pure respiration, because they possessed a soul which was made impure by all sorts of transgression ; and instead of the subtle and pure medium of air, they gave them the deep and muddy sea to be their element of respiration ; and hence arose the race of fishes and oysters, and other aquatic animals, which have received the most remote habitations as a punishment of their outlandish ignorance. (Plato, *Timaeus*)

In this excerpt, not only are the non-human animals despised for their supposed lack of reason and soul, but they are also subject to discrimination based on their physical characteristics. Besides, there is also a hierarchy between the sea and the land with the sea being belittled. Indeed, prioritising the world of Ideas to the material world, Plato displayed a hostile attitude even to the landscape as can be seen in the following passage: “For our earth, and the stones, and the entire region which surrounds us, are spoilt and corroded, as in the sea all things are corroded by the brine, neither is there any noble or perfect growth, but caverns only, and sand, and an endless slough of mud” (Plato, *Phaedo*).

To sum up, nature writing in Antiquity seems to have been construed on three pillars, namely pastoralism, fables and natural history. Pastoralism with its eulogy of nature and partial neglect of real working and living conditions in the countryside, fables with their anthropomorphism, and natural history with its mostly scientific but anthropocentric and sometimes speciesist eye put on different perspectives on nature

writing. Underlying this anthropocentrism, it is possible to see Plato's legacy that started dualistic thinking denigrating the material world and non-human. After Aristotle and Pliny the Elder who wrote on natural history, the Dark Ages that followed witnessed no new observation or understanding of nature (Mabey, "Introduction", viii). Throughout the Dark Ages, natural history writing was an amalgamation of fact and fable, where the natural world was found to be too mystifying and too fearful to be faced with without the help of myths and relieving interpretations (Mabey, *The Oxford* 2). Nevertheless, in tracing nature writing, I find it necessary to refer to the Middle Ages because as Mabey puts it, the mythology that flourished then still had an imaginative aspect (1), which would give us clues about medieval conceptualisation of nature. Also, as Christopher Manes mentions, the Middle Ages was an intellectually and institutionally diverse period involving multiple approaches to nature (20), which needs attention.

1.4 Nature Writing in the Middle Ages

1.4.1 Pre-Christian Cultures and Cosmological Worldview

In 1972, German historian Rolf Sprandel mentioned three steps in people's interpretation of nature: First come the myths, supernatural beings and divine influence to explain nature. Then, people consider nature unpredictable while trying to cope with it through technical knowledge. Finally, they regard nature as an aesthetic world, which offers enjoyment to them (qtd. in Rohr "Men and natural" 128). According to Christian Rohr, a professor of environmental history and historical climatology, all these three steps were observed in the Middle Ages ("Man and nature" 5). In fact, given that the early medieval period witnessed Christianity's settling itself as an institutionalised religion together with its intellectual, cultural and social consequences, it can be argued that both pre-Christian belief systems and Christianity itself played an important role in people's perception of nature and writings about it in the Middle Ages.

When it comes to pre-Christian belief systems, paganism comes to the forefront. With all its variations, paganism can broadly be defined as a polytheist and pantheist belief system in which gods are not considered distant from or superior to the living things and what is divine is sought everywhere, in every part of nature (Atay 31-

32).⁹ Thus, according to Tayfun Atay, nature worship constitutes the essence of paganism (30). Ken Dowden verifies Atay's point with various examples of sacralised natural things in his book *European Paganism* (2002). For example, the worship of springs and streams was widespread among Indo-European pagans (Dowden 41). Similarly, in Italy before the Empire, groves were highly esteemed and respected as sacred places (106). Ancient Greeks associated trees with gods or goddesses: "Myrtle tree at Boiai (Lakonia) was worshipped as Artemis Saviour (Soteira) ... at Karyai (on the borders of Lakonia and Arcadia) was the cult of Artemis of the Nut Tree (Karyatis)" (69). Fiona Bowie states that in paganism every living thing was regarded as sacred, and they were all considered in connection with each other (qtd. in Atay 33). Gökçen, on the other hand, makes a distinction between pagan societies and the societies that preceded pagans: "Before the emergence of paganism, humans imagined the cosmos as a whole suffused with sacredness and explained the source of this sacredness by totemic traditions and their belief in *Magna Mater*" (6-7). According to Gökçen, these societies venerated and respected that world, where humans were interconnected to all beings in constant flux through a cosmic bonding, and they thought of themselves as descendants of totem animals or plants (7). In Gökçen's view, paganism, which transformed the all-embracing *Magna Mater* into Earth Mother, the divine fertility figure, turning the land and animals into resources, and the following monotheism, which introduced a celestial god reigning over the material world marked a break from the idea of total sacredness (7-8). Following Gökçen, it is possible to argue that first it was pagans who gradually turned away from the idea of total sacredness, while according to Atay pagans continued to worship nature as sacred. One might question if pagans held a less holistic worldview than their predecessors, but whatever the answer is, it is plausible to argue that in both pagan societies and societies that came before them, the worldview was obviously more holistic than the worldview imposed by monotheistic religions.

In his book *Re-Visioning the Church* (2014), Neil Ormerod claims that pre-Christian cultures were shaped by what he called a cosmological worldview. In cosmological worldview, the cosmos was taken as a whole and a being in its own intrinsic dynamism, and nature was the embodiment of that great whole operating

⁹Translations from this source are mine unless otherwise noted.

according to a principle which animated this whole and its parts through a vital force diffused among natural beings (Solere 1). In Ormerod's standpoint, in cosmological cultures, "The individual was ordered to the society and the society to a cosmic ordering- either the gods as in paganism or the one God, as in Israel" ("The Early" 211). What distinguishes Ormerod's cosmological societies is that the well-being of the society was closely linked to its relationship to the cosmological order, namely the gods ("The High" 243). Consequently, in such a world, social, cultural, personal and religious values were all intermingled ("The Early" 212). Therefore, when things went wrong at individual or social level, people in cosmological cultures tended to explain this through their failure to please the gods. Thus, in pre-Christian cultures people thought natural disasters were divine judgements, which they still could avoid through proper rites and sacrifices (Ormerod, "The Early" 211).

James G. Frazer informs that in "primitive" societies people tended to create gods to explain natural phenomena, the cause of which they did not know, and they believed themselves to be more or less dependent on gods' good will wooing their favour through prayer and sacrifice (20). In fact, myths verify pre-Christian inclination to explain natural events through gods and supernatural beings. In a lecture he delivered at the Novosibirsk State University in 2002, Rohr exemplified Germanic-Nordic mythology to prove this. In Germanic mythology, Niflheim that represents the Nordic coldness and Muspelheim that represents southern heat met and created the first giant Ymir, who was killed by Asen, and the earth was created out of his flesh, the sea from his blood, the mountains from his bones, sky from his skull, clouds from his brain ("Man and nature" 5). Similarly, the creation of man in Nordic mythology is explained through natural elements. According to Nordic sagas, an ash tree and an elm tree washed ashore and the three gods Odin, Hönir and Loki carved out of the trees the first pair of human beings, the man from the ash tree and the woman from the elm tree (6). In addition, natural forces such as wind and fog were attributed to elves that were believed to have lived in the water; and thunderstorms, heavy snow and ice to the giants that were believed to have preceded the Asen dynasty (8-9). Even nightmares (*couchemar* in French, *alpträum* in German) were imputed to ghosts, the so-called Alp

or mare (Mahr) who was held responsible for breathing problems that occurred at night (“Man and nature” 8).

In his book *The Agricultural Revolution in Prehistory: Why did Foragers become Farmers?* (2006), Graeme Barker, an archaeologist claims that modern ethnographic research has proven that hunters-gatherers made no distinction between their fortune and the world around them using procreation, parenthood and kinship metaphors to describe their relations to the environment and considering territory as something not to be possessed, but to be associated with (58). Also, in their animistic world, they had no words to distinguish people, animals and plants, and they treated non-human animals as persons viewing their environment “as a treasure house of ‘personages’, each with language, reason, intellect, moral conscience, and knowledge, regardless of whether the outer shape is human, animal, reptile or plant” (Barker 59). Barker suggests that with their myths which include all kinds of animals as humans changing shape, animistic hunters-gatherers trusted in continuity between human and non-human communities (59).

1.4.2 Christianity and a Gradual Shift to Anthropological Worldview

In pre-Christian era, people seem to have avoided doing harm to the natural world for their fear of gods and positioned themselves as part of this whole, neither separate nor superior. The advent of Christianity did not erase that cosmological worldview overnight. Starting from the early Middle Ages, Christianity struggled to transform a largely cosmological culture towards what Ormerod called an anthropological worldview (“The High” 241). According to Ormerod, this anthropological turn which appeared in late Middle Ages helped exorcise the natural world of the gods and demons of the pagan world (254). The following poem known to have been written by a young Anglo-Saxon ornithologist around 685 and cited by Mabey reflects this transition:

There heard I naught but seething sea,
Ice-cold wave, awhile a song of swan.
There came to charm me gannets’ pother
And whimbrels’ trills for the laughter of men,
Kittiwake singing instead of mead.

Storms there the stacks thrashed, there answered them the tern
With icy feathers, full oft the erne wailed round
Spray-feathered. (*The Oxford* 5)

This seventh century ornithologist observed the gannets, whimbrels, kittiwakes and the tern patiently and described them in detail expressing also his amazement by them. In other words, the poet relied on his own observation and feelings but not this or that god in his depiction of the birds. Thus, it can be argued that the medieval conception of nature was not limited to the fear of the unknown. Yet it should be acknowledged that Christianity's rejection of pagan cosmological worldview in favour of a more anthropological one was not essentially aimed at the promotion of human reason.

Christianity adopted the concept of nature as a whole but added the view that the entire world is a creation that depends on God, its creator (Solere 1). In this conceptualisation, nature was accepted to be good not because of its intrinsic value but because it was created by God (Ormerod, "The High" 254). To understand this conceptualisation, it is useful to turn to attention to *exegesis*, the medieval Christianity's mode of interpreting biblical texts: "Exegesis concluded that behind the *littera*, the literal meaning of a biblical passage lay some *moralis*, a moral truth established by God. And beyond that lurked some divine purpose, almost certainly beyond the ken of human intellect, unless divine revelation obligingly made it evident" (Manes 19). Exegesis, thus, posited "God as the transcendental subject speaking through natural entities, which had a symbolic meaning but no autonomous voice" (20). This kind of understanding obviously condemns nature to the service of one god and grants absolute power to that one god only. Manes argues that with exegesis medieval commentators strengthened the idea of the so-called *scala naturae*, namely the "Great Chain of Being" that depicts the world as a wide arena populated by lower and higher forms of being from zoophytes to Godhead with humankind positioned higher than beasts and a little lower than angels (20).

Peter Damian, an influential eleventh-century monastic leader that largely contributed to the early medieval philosophy promoted the idea of divine omnipotence ("Peter"). He wrote in his *Letter on the Divine Almightiness*: "The one who founded Nature is the one who changes it" (qtd. in Solere 4). According to Damian, because God

created the world from chaos, He was the direct and immediate cause of nature's laws and beauty (Grant, "Science" 227). In fact, much earlier than Damian, St. Augustine (354- 430) had pointed out divine omnipotence to persuade pagans that the things whose reason cannot be discovered such as salamanders not being consumed in fire are still undoubtedly true, and it is only God who can explain facts which we do not understand (Solere 2-3). Thus, Christianity's rejection of a multiplicity of gods that were held responsible for diverse natural phenomena paved the way for the miracles and marvels that were left to the decision of one God (1-3). It seems that from paganism to Christianity, miracles and mysteries remained a part of human's perception of the natural world, but the Judeo-Christian tradition reduced the ownership of such mysteries and marvels only to one god.

Concerning Christian conceptualisation of nature, Lynn White Jr. (1907-1987), an American historian and professor of medieval history, whose 1967 article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" was reprinted as a forerunner of ecocriticism in *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), the first reader in literature and environment (Rigby 4), argues that with Christian victory over paganism, a divide between man and nature emerged.¹⁰ According to Christian doctrine that inherited Judaism's linear perception of time, at the very beginning an all-powerful God created light and darkness, heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants and animals for the sake of man, who was made in God's image but not conceptualised as part of nature despite having been made of clay (White 1205). According to White Jr., Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion which is in absolute opposition to ancient pagan religions and Asiatic religions except probably Zoroastrianism not only because of the dualism it established between man and nature but also because of its insistence that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his own purposes (1205).¹¹ Garrard also claims

¹⁰At this point, I would agree with Plumwood and argue that at intellectual level the gap between man and nature was opened much earlier by Plato in Ancient Greece. Plato's thoughts on material world and after world as well as his conceptualisation of soul/body and human/nature hierarchies seem to be anticipating Christianity (Plumwood, *Feminism* 89). For more information, please see Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. 1993. Routledge, 2003.

¹¹Nils Freytag argues – but does not show concrete examples- that many examples of pre- and non-Christian exploitation of nature and environmental destruction as well as Christian-inspired preservation practices disprove White Jr.'s point about the contrast between pre-Christian and Christian conceptualisation of nature. Please see www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/nature-and-environment.

that Judeo-Christian conceptualisation of man as superior to nature, which was to be fostered by Enlightenment thinkers, represented a blow to the organic universe of Palaeolithic people, who venerated a fecund Magna Mater or Great Mother figure, and he adds that the annihilation of Magna Mater in favour of a sky God was started by Judeo-Christian tradition (*Ecocriticism* 61).

Although Christianity apparently differed from the afore-mentioned pre-Christian belief systems in its approach to nature, considering the early years of Christianity, they look somehow similar in the way that natural world was considered the host of mysterious, divine and miraculous phenomena. In this context, in medieval conception of nature, in addition to the influence of pagan myths and early Christianity, *Physiologus* merits special attention, too. *Physiologus* was an anonymous work written in Greek in the second or early third century, but it became very popular and authoritative in Middle Ages and was, thus, translated into vernacular languages (Rohr, “Man and nature” 10). This book offers descriptions of animals with allegorical interpretations promoting Christian ideals (“Physiologus”). For example, the snake shedding its old skin and getting a new one is interpreted as the renewal of a Christian after confession (Rohr, “Man and nature” 10). It is important to note that *Physiologus* is not comparable to Aristotle’s and Pliny the Elder’s works on natural history, for its purpose was not to know the nature but to derive the allegorical meaning supposedly embedded in nature, (“Physiologus”). Still, it reflects the medieval perception of nature, which was heavily tainted by Christianity.

Regarding medieval conceptualisation of nature, the changes in agricultural implementations need to be considered as well. White Jr. alleges that with the invention of a new kind of plow equipped with a vertical knife, peasants’ relation to the land was significantly altered in northern Europe of the seventh century, where the land was sticky and wet making cross-ploughing difficult (1205). Different from the Roman plow (scratch) that was used in western Europe to break the surface of soil with the help of two oxen, the new plow, known as the *carruca* in contemporary documents, was a wheeled plow that aerated and turned over the heavy soil of northern Europe with the help of eight oxen (Frassetto 10). According to White Jr., initially families did subsistence farming, whereby fields were distributed to meet the needs of a single

family that owned the plow run by two oxen, but with the advanced plow that tilled the earth violently, the land was distributed based on the number of families' oxen (1205). That being the case, man became the exploiter of nature with his new technology (White Jr. 1205). White Jr. adds that man's exploitative attitude to nature is also confirmed by the illustrated Frankish calendars of the ninth century, in which men were shown coercing the world around them by ploughing, harvesting, chopping trees and butchering pigs, and thus gradually becoming the master of nature (1205).¹²

Edward Grant informs that until the twelfth century, when ancient Greek natural philosophy and science were slowly put under scrutiny, western Europe mostly relied on theology to interpret nature, and science was held in secondary position ("Science" 225-226). At this point, it is necessary to remember the influence of St. Albertus Magnus (1200- 1280), also known as Saint Albert the Great. Saint Albert the Great is important to medieval science because he brought Aristotelian knowledge of nature to the forefront despite reactions from the church and enriched it through his own observations in all branches of the natural sciences finally establishing the study of nature as a legitimate science within the Christian tradition. ("St. Albertus"). Ormerod goes back to late eleventh and twelfth centuries as he alleges that the anthropological turn deepened with the influence of theologians such as St. Francis of Assisi (1182- 1226) and Thomas Aquinas (1225- 1274) ("The High" 256- 260). Aquinas, who was a student of St. Albert the Great, highlighted human reason and asserted that it is the human reason that leads us to God, and any mystery in the created order that remains inexplicable to human is attributable to some higher-order, namely the God (Ormerod "The High" 259). Aquinas merits attention also because of the way he elaborated on the Great Chain of Being, which, according to Manes, evokes remarks made by a "conservation biologist condemning monoculture".

[T]he goodness of the species transcends the goodness of the individual, as form transcends matter; therefore, the multiplication of species is a greater addition to the good of the universe than the multiplication of individuals of a single species. The perfection of the universe therefore requires not only a multitude of

¹²To see an illustration, please visit: www.flickr.com/photos/28433765@N07/3084933554/.

individuals, but also diverse kinds, and therefore diverse grades of things. (qtd. in Manes 20)

Similarly, St. Francis, whom White Jr. calls the patron saint of ecologists (1206), got rid of all his possessions, renounced his old life and undertook to help the poor, which he thought was the primary mission of the Church, going from one city to another to meet their preaching and catechizing needs (Ormerod 257). In other words, he approximated the people and church shifting attention to the former rather than leading a monastic life far away from people to be close to God. White Jr. regards St. Francis as the greatest Christian radical due to “his belief in the virtue of humility not merely for the individual but for man as a species” (1207) and praises him for the spiritual autonomy he thought all parts of the nature had. White Jr. indicates that St. Francis wanted democracy for all God’s creatures and tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation (1206).

Giraldus Cambrensis is another remarkable figure from the Middle Ages. Giraldus Cambrensis, also known as Gerald of Wales (1146-1223) was an archdeacon and historian whose writings in the late twelfth century stand as an important historical source (“Giraldus”). In one of his books, *Itinerary Through Wales* (1188), which he wrote after his Welsh tour undertaken to raise soldiers for the Third Crusade (“Giraldus”), Cambrensis consecrates a long passage to the beaver, and he writes: “This animal can remain in or under water at its pleasure, like the frog or seal, who show by smoothness or roughness of their skins, the flux and reflux of the sea” (qtd. in Mabey, *The Oxford* 8). It is important that Cambrensis based his writings on scientific observation. In the same excerpt, he also notes that the beaver does not fear any violence except that of mankind and not even that if it is well armed (8). It is worth attention that Cambrensis refers to the beaver’s psychology and hints at man’s violence against the non-human though he does not sound critical of such violence. It can be inferred from this example that towards the end of Middle Ages there appeared little efforts to observe nature from a scientific point of view and strip it off gods.

Another medieval example that verifies the shift in human perception of nature and matches particularly the last stage of Sprandel’s three-step model, which is the acceptance of the natural world as a beauty in itself, is by a Welsh poet and prose writer,

Gruffy Ab Addaf Ap Dafydd. Dafydd (1340-1370) writes of a birch-tree cut down for a maypole: “No good place is it for you for putting out green leaves, there where you make grimaces. Every town has gardens with leafage green enough; and was it not barbarous, my birch, to make you wither yonder, a bare pole by the pillory... No more will the bird sleep, no more will they sing in their shrill note on your fair gentle crest” (qtd. in Mabey, *The Oxford* 10). Dafydd’s account of the birch tree does not involve any scientific description but reflects his emotional response to the cutting of the tree. Dafydd criticizes the thingification of the tree and laments for its felling for human purposes. “You were made, it seems, for huckstering, as you stand there like a market-woman; and in the cheerful babble at the fair all will point their fingers at your suffering, in your one grey shirt and your old fur, amid the petty merchandise” (qtd. in Mabey, *The Oxford* 9-10). As he was grieving over the loss of the tree, Dafydd was apparently aware that the tree was not just a physical shelter to birds but also a psychological shelter to humans: “No more will the bracken hide your urgent seedlings, where your sister stays; no more will there be mysteries and secrets shared, and shade, under you dear eaves; you will not conceal the April primroses” (10).

Dafydd’s sensitivity to the cutting of a tree can be related to the increased settlement and visible degradation of the woods especially in the High Middle Ages. Rohr informs that the clearing of the large forests for agricultural soil, which had started back in the eighth and ninth centuries in eastern and central Europe, continued throughout the Middle Ages to meet the demands of an increased population (14). In the High Middle Ages, people needed more wood for the construction of houses, heating, coal and gas production, building ships and alike (15). However, there also arose a sense of responsibility particularly in some big German towns, where it was forbidden to cut down the big woods without a special permit of the authorities, and the woods they attended to still survive around Nuremberg, Munich and Frankfurt (15). The awareness that appeared in some German towns may not be directly linked to Dafydd’s sensitivity, but the survival of the medieval woods in Germany as well as a poet’s lament over a felled tree can serve as a proof that the people in the Middle Ages were not totally unaware of the importance of the natural world as an entity itself.

1.4.3 Natural Disasters and Calamities

Thinking about writings that contain references to nature in the medieval period, calamities and disasters need special attention. Rohr indicates that in many narrative sources dating back to the Middle Ages there is a significant tendency to report the unusual, particularly the natural disasters and calamities (“Man and nature” 18). Medieval historiography and hagiography are marked by disasters and epidemics along with miracles concerning the healing of diseases (11). Rohr alludes to Gregory of Tours’s *Historia Francorum*, in which epidemics, atmospheric abnormalities and disasters of the year are summarized along with the political developments and conflicts (10-12). Gregory of Tours (538- 594) was a Gallo-Roman bishop, whose book *Historia Francorum* also known as *History of the Franks* is a major historical source composed of ten books, the first five of which were devoted to the events that took place in today’s France between 397 and 575 and the remaining of which were devoted to the events Gregory himself witnessed or had personal knowledge of (“History”).

According to Rohr, Gregory tended to interpret natural disasters or illnesses as a sign of a decline or a punishment by God (11). Indeed, Gregory’s remarks in the closing paragraph of his tenth and last book verify Rohr’s point. He was inclined to interpret the bubonic plague as a fulfilment of God’s prophecy. He quotes from the Gospel to confirm his point: “There shall be pestilence and famines and earthquakes in different places and false Christs and false prophets shall arise and give signs and prodigies in the heavens so as to put the elect astray” (Gregory). Similarly, the way he reports the outbreak of dysentery in 579 or 580 reveals his inclination to link the epidemic to God’s will (Rohr, “Man and nature” 12). It appears in the following passage that Gregory indirectly related the epidemic to the quarrels of the kings, because of which, he suggested, God punished people by killing even the little children.

For while the kings were quarrelling and again preparing for civil war, dysentery seized upon nearly the whole of the Gauls. The sufferers had a high fever with vomiting and excessive pain in the kidneys; the head and neck were heavy... This sickness began in the month of August and seized upon the little ones and laid them on their beds. We lost dear sweet children whom we nursed on our knees or carried in our arms and nourished with attentive care, feeding them

with our own hand. But wiping away our tears we say with the blessed Job: 'The Lord has given; the Lord has taken away; the Lord's will has been done. Blessed be his name through the ages.' (Gregory)

While Rohr claims that Gregory generally tended to associate calamities and epidemics with God's will, he also accepts that this sixth century historian held the Frankish politics of his time responsible for all the natural abnormalities ("Man and nature" 12). According to Rohr, Gregory at times showed a tendency to provide a scientific explanation to natural phenomena as well (12). In fact, as Rohr puts it, the way he remarks on the moment a fire broke out does not evoke God's engagement but a scientific effort to explain things (12):

There were rains and heavy thunder and lightning ... The star which I called above the comet, appeared in such a way that there was a great blackness all around it and it was placed as it were in a hole and gleamed in the darkness, sparkling and scattering rays of light. And a ray of wonderful size extended from it which appeared like the smoke of a great fire a long way off. (Gregory)

As is seen in this passage, Gregory suggested a link between the thunder and fire. However, Gregory's weak efforts to have recourse to science in explaining natural events do not suffice to set the tone of his writing as scientific. After all, his main tendency was to couple natural calamities with God's punishment. Rohr calls attention to the plague of 1347- 1352, namely Black Death, in explaining people's predisposition to read natural phenomena as God's intervention in the world: Stricken by the epidemic, late medieval people believed that Black Death was God's answer to human faults and the theologians of the time cited passages from the Old Testament to prove that prostitution, fornication, sodomy, luxury, negligence in praying and other human sins caused God's rage ("Man and nature" 26). To show that people then believed that God's rage caused the Black Death, Rohr alludes to 1428 "Little Chronicle of Klosterneuburg", in which we read about the self-flagellation among the common people as a reaction towards the pestilence (24). Considering this collective penance act, it can be stated that people held themselves responsible for a disease which they thought was God's wrath.

In one of his studies on the perception of nature by medieval people, Rohr focuses on the 1348 earthquake and the reaction it caused among people. The earthquake, whose intensity is estimated to have been 9 or 10 in Mercalli-Sieberg scale, hit the north of Italy on 25 January 1348 causing great damage to the buildings and putting people in panic (Rohr, "Man and Natural" 131). Though not much data has survived, it is now hypothesized that the earthquake affected a very large area including today's Austria, Slovenia and Gemona (Galadini et al. 741). The earthquake triggered fires and is thought to have accelerated the spread of Black Death due to the unhygienic conditions it caused (Rohr "Man and Natural" 132-33). According to Rohr, the experience of the tremors and people's interpretations varied depending on their social background ("Man and nature" 25). For example, Giovanni de Bazzano (1285-1363) noted in his "Chronicle of Modena" that three Augustinian eremites who were travelling through the disaster area, regarded the earthquake as God's punishment for the sinful lives of the people (qtd. in Rohr, "Man and natural" 135). In addition, with the tremors killing allegedly 500 people in sermon in a church in Villach, it is thought that the survivors, particularly the pious ones questioned if God punished both the good and the bad (Rohr, "Man and natural" 136). Moreover, the bankers of Udine who feared the tremors and took them as a sign of remorse forgave their debtors' interests for eight days (134). Finally, among common people, there were some who believed the reason for the earthquake was a big fish called Celebrant and the earth trembled when the fish put its tail in its mouth (137).

Referring to Konrad von Megenberg's (1309-74) *Book of Nature*, the first natural history book in middle high German, Rohr alleges that Konrad tried to look at the earthquake from a scientific perspective as he described in detail the vapour that came out of the earth after the earthquake and petrification of the living things by the fires inside the earth: "You should also know that the earthquake causes many miraculous things: a vapour coming out from the earth by the earthquake is responsible for transforming human beings and other animals into stone and in particular into pillars of salt" (qtd. in Rohr, "Man and natural" 136). As the reactions from different segments of the late medieval society show, the Middle Ages were not confined to moralizing, mystifying or religious explanations for natural phenomena. There were also efforts to

employ a scientific perspective. Indeed, this movement towards scientificness can be attributable to the translation of the Latin, Greek and Arabic works on natural philosophy as well as the foundation of universities. Rohr claims that Konrad's scientific efforts are largely informed by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, whose ideas were slowly disseminated by the scholastic scholars like Albertus Magnus and Thomas of Aquinas at occidental universities ("Man and natural" 135).

1.4.4 Influence of Translations and Universities

By the first half of the twelfth century many scientific works had already been translated from Arabic to Latin and Aristotle's works on natural philosophy were translated in Spain in the second half of the century (Grant, *A History* 134). Western interest in Arabic and Greek works developed as Christians slowly took control of much of Spain and Sicily from Islamic rule and came into contact with the Arabic language and treatises in Greek (130). According to Grant, the translation activities that started in the twelfth century are possibly "the greatest intellectual exploration of knowledge by one culture and civilization from other cultures and civilizations" (130). As a result, by the beginning of the thirteenth century the forthcoming treatises in Greek and Arabic on science and natural philosophy had already been translated into Latin, and it is known that lectures were being given on Aristotle's works on natural history (143).

The reception of Aristotle's work by some medieval Christian theologians is worthy of attention, though. Grant informs that Aristotle's work on natural philosophy was seen by some as a threat against Christian conceptualization of the world because of his secular tone and denial of an after-life and suggestion of pre-existing matter, which implies the rejection of God as the sole creator, and as a result a ban was introduced on Aristotle lectures then (*A History* 242- 43). Despite such objections, there were still lectures on Aristotle's natural philosophy at the newly founded universities of Oxford and Paris (143), and in the second half of the thirteenth century, natural philosophy was integrated into universities' education programmes (152). Grant informs that the foundation of university as an institution, the origin of which could be traced back to the cathedral schools of eleventh and twelfth centuries, was a unique and vital event in the history of not only western Europe but also the entire world (*A History* 144). It is worth attention that medieval universities were, as Grant indicates, largely autonomous and

were able to control their own affairs (145). This autonomy must have contributed to their institutionalisation as respectable entities.

Another important aspect of medieval universities is the fact that “whatever their future careers might be- whether as professors in arts, or practitioners or professors of theology, law or medicine, or as clerks in royal courts or municipalities- all students acquired a basic knowledge of logic and natural philosophy, subjects that were valued for their own sakes and also regarded as useful” (Grant, *A History* 146). The importance attached to natural philosophy in medieval universities contributed to the consolidation and flourishing of the field in the modern era. It should, however, be noted that this high interest in natural philosophy in the late Middle Ages partly resulted from a theological orientation. For example, Grant indicates that William of Auvergne (1180- 1249), a theologian and one of the most prolific medieval authors, used natural philosophy to serve the ends of theology (*A History* 148). In fact, up until the thirteenth century, philosophy as a whole, and natural philosophy in particular, were regarded as the handmaidens of theology, and natural philosophy was, thus, utilized as a tool for explicating theology and the articles of faith (Grant, *A History* 247). However, the theological intent in the studies on natural philosophy apparently did not prevent universities from sticking to natural philosophy as an important element of their curricula. After all, by the second half of the thirteenth century, the lectures about Aristotle’s works on natural philosophy were made mandatory at the faculty of arts at the University of Paris (Grant, *A History* 152). According to Grant, the integration of Aristotelian influence into western universities gradually helped to focus attention on natural philosophy as a field of study in itself rather than a handmaiden to theology (247).

In conclusion, it appears that medieval conception of nature was influenced by four main factors: Paganism with its various tendencies; Christianity with its alternative voices, technological advances in agriculture and a gradual but perceivable shift towards scientificness. The mythology of pre-Christian cultures, where a more cosmological worldview shaped people’s understanding of nature, caused them to consider themselves as part of an organic entity, which could mysteriously be both fearsome and amazing. Then, Christianity emphasized God as the sole creator and master of all living

things giving superiority to man over the rest of the created universe and fostered the feeling that natural disasters were God's punishment of sinful lives while encouraging an anthropological worldview against the pagan demons and evils. Next, the invention of the *carruca* in Northern Europe helped to obtain better yields altering people's relation to the non-human nature to the detriment of the latter. Finally, science started to become important with the translation of Arabic and Greek works on natural philosophy and the foundation of first universities of the world, where natural philosophy was introduced as a basic form of knowledge for all students. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that the Middle Ages set the scene ready for a more scientific and human-centred approach to non-human nature, which would mark the modern era.

1.5 Nature Writing in the Early Modern Era

1.5.1 Natural History on the Rise

As highlighted in the previous part, as from the twelfth century, the western conceptualisation of nature started to have a less theological and more human-centred tone, especially with the translations of classical texts. Arthur MacGregor notes that different from the natural history studies that heavily relied on classical sources in the Middle Ages, naturalists of the Renaissance period trusted in their own personal observations (75). The humanist culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries obviously encouraged the practitioners of natural history to consider themselves as part of an intellectual community capable of studying plants and animals as a distinct subject (Long 314). Ogilvie talks of four generations in natural history studies during the Renaissance period:

First generation (1490s- 1530s) was of humanists and physicians, who still relied on ancient sources in trying to identify plants. Second generation (1530s-1560s) slowly turned away from ancient sources and set out to create their own catalogues, like Caspar Bauhin (1560- 1624), who catalogued more than six thousand species and Carolus Clusius (1526- 1609), who travelled to Spain, Portugal and Vienna to collect specimens. In this generation, naturalists began creating gardens to observe the cycles of plants and herbaria to study the collections of specimens. Third generation (1560s- 1590s) was the generation of cataloguers and collectors who were concerned with accumulating and studying

natural objects, while fourth generation (1590s- 1620s) turned their collections to independent sites of research leaving field study to students and transforming their herbaria from collections of personal memoranda to loci of documentation. (qtd. in Long 315-16)

A sentence by the famous Italian Renaissance naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) characterises the empirical natural history studies of the 1600s: “I have written only of those things that I have seen with my own eyes and touched with my own hands, and anatomized, both the exterior parts and the interior” (qtd. in MacGregor 76). Thus, personal observations and experiments started to come into prominence shaping people’s understanding of nature as a subject of study. Eva Del Soldato claims that the importance attached to empirical studies in the field of natural history in the Renaissance period was also linked to the rise of geometry, maths and astronomy: As scientists like Copernicus (1473- 1543) and Galileo (1564- 1642) offered mathematical reasoning to study the universe as a measurable unit, the quantitative vision of the world gained popularity among scientists (“Natural”).

1.5.2 Colonial and Aristocratic Interest in the Exotic Non-human

While the naturalists of the Renaissance period highlighted natural world as an object of scientific study, the Renaissance perception of nature was also being affected by class-related issues and colonialism. According to Ogilvie, for example, it was the elite humanists and physicians that set out to shape natural history as a discipline ignoring the local knowledge held by the non-elite sources such as wise women and apothecaries in the countryside (qtd. in Long 316). MacGregor draws attention to cabinet collections owned by the rich in explaining Renaissance perception of nature. Cabinet collections, gardens and menageries, where natural rarities inaccessible to ordinary men were assembled and displayed, were all owned by the elite of the time who wanted to demonstrate their wealth, influence and scholarship (76). Cabinet collections of the Renaissance period, also known as “cabinets of curiosities” and thought to be the ancestors of modern museums, commonly featured rare, eclectic and esoteric objects of natural history such as stuffed animals, insects, shells, skeletons and fossils (“The Cabinet”). The reason why they were used to attract admiration by the elite of the time could be that these cabinets, as Anthony Alan Shelton mentions,

“attempted to incorporate representations of the fourth continent” (177). Through their cabinets, the Renaissance elite proved that they had access to the New World and its most “unusual” animals in particular. While ordinary travellers could bring parrots, macaws and monkeys from their voyages to South America and East Indies, the royal ambitions were set much higher: For instance, Alfonso Albuquerque (1453- 1515), who was the governor of Portuguese Indies, brought a rhinoceros from Cochin to the royal menagerie, where there were already gazelles and antelopes (MacGregor 76).

The animals brought from other countries were regarded as the subjects of the king as in the case of acquisition of Anjou by Louis XI, who had already opened a menagerie at Fontainebleau filled with lions, leopards, cheetahs and other animals: When Louis XI annexed Anjou, the menagerie in Anjou, where there were animals, was transferred to Louis XI with the animals becoming the king’s subjects (MacGregor 76). The use of exotic animals as a means of demonstrating wealth and prestige was widespread in Renaissance Europe. The Medici family, for example, established a menagerie at Vatican housing big cats, apes and bears (MacGregor 77). Also, in the sixteenth century Europe, while lions were taken as the strongest currency in gift-exchange among the aristocrats, animal combats were an entertainment activity to be watched in the courtyards (MacGregor 77-80). Animals were, thus, turned into valuable commodities to be exchanged as gifts among the elite and royals and into an object of gaze to be viewed as pleased.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the colonial interest in the New World enriched scientific efforts of the time, too. The discovery of a new continent which contained plants and animals never known or described before in classical sources stimulated scientific studies into the natural world (Del Soldato). For example, Harold John Cook, the author of *Matters of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (2007) focuses on early Dutch colonialism and argues that Dutch naturalists and physicians studied the plants of the new regions to find new medicinal remedies even with some investigators using local knowledge of particular plants and animals though they failed to appreciate the general cultural framework of indigenous cultures (qtd. in Long 318). Also, Renaissance lords and patrons cultivated an interest in the natural world for scientific reasons as well: Disciplines like zoology and botany

depended on collections and botanical gardens owned by the rich; thus, Renaissance rulers patronized and participated in first-hand investigations of the natural world (Del Soldato). In this context, it is possible to claim that the Renaissance attitude to newly discovered plants and animals was marked not only by aristocratic and colonial ambitions to display wealth, prestige and hegemony over the scholars but also naturalists' scientific and empirical efforts to identify new animals and plants and find new medicinal remedies in the new territories.

At this point, Scheese points at travel writing which emerged in the form of exploration and discovery literature merged with natural history during the struggle over the colonization of the Americas from 1500s to 1800s (15). Robert White indicates that of over “100 travel books by observers from the British Isles or by English colonials written between 1600 and 1750, 40 were by preachers and missionaries, 30 by government officials, 12 by merchants and fur traders, 10 by doctors and scientists, and others by ship captains, land speculators, and surveyors”, who all made allusions to Native Americans and natural history along with the unpleasantness and difficulty of travel (160). Apparently, whatever their purpose of travel was, the travellers to the new continent all showed interest in the natural world contributing to the formation of nature writing through travel writing. In fact, American nature writing starts with travel writing dating back to the letters of Christopher Columbus (“Nature Writing”). Columbus was the first European to record his impressions of the new continent leading the writing of American natural history (Scheese 15). Scheese refers to William Wood, an Englishman who lived in Massachusetts between 1629 and 1633 and catalogued the land, rivers, flora and fauna of New England in his book *Prospect* (1634) always focusing on their commodity value (15). It is apparent that while colonial aspirations were embodied in the curiosity cabinets, menageries, zoos and herbaria back in Europe, they paved the way for the emergence of a new genre, namely travel writing which would signal the birth of American nature writing in the newly discovered continent.

1.5.3 Local Natural Histories

It would be wrong to conclude that Renaissance perception of nature relied solely on exotic plants and animals. In her book *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe* (2007), Alice Cooper highlights that especially in German speaking lands, there was an interest in local natural histories in response to oceanic explorations: Paracelsus (1493- 1541), a physician and alchemist, who was proud of the nature in German lands, worked specifically on medicinal remedies that originated in German regions (qtd. in Long 319). Similarly, the university in Altdorf, a small German town in the south of Nuremburg encouraged the study of local floras with students and professors making excursions to the countryside to identify local plants (318-19). The Swiss physician Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672- 1733) wrote a natural history of Switzerland setting a model for the territorial histories written in Europe (320). Moreover, towards the end of seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century, naturalists started to show interest in mineralogy, a less popular aspect of natural history, and worked on local minerals and metals to gain wealth advocating at the same time territorial self-sufficiency through the richness of local sources (319). The promotion of localism in natural history studies of the early modern Europe seemingly helped Europeans to turn their attention to the continent whether for scientific or commercial reasons. A much later but essential example of the importance attached to local natural history is *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne, in the County of Southampton* (1783) by Gilbert White (1720- 1793), who, according to Scheese, was the most famous and important natural history writer in England prior to Darwin (15) and who, according to James Canton, could be seen as the reverend father of British nature writing (12).

1.5.4 Natural History Versus Religion

Long argues that the economic, cultural and intellectual developments of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries helped to consolidate natural history as an important field of scientific study without ignoring its colonial and commercial connotations or efforts to improve local natural history (322). Yet the consolidation of natural history as a discipline did not bring about a sudden rupture from religion although, as Del Soldato argues, many doctrines of natural philosophy were in conflict of the teachings of

religion (“Natural”). For example, Phillip Melanchton (1497-1560), a German humanist, Reformer and theologian tried to reconcile religion and science of nature by underlying that nature was the creation of God with everything in it (Del Soldato). Similarly, John Amos Comenius (1592- 1670) promoted the alliance between religion and natural science, too (Del Soldato). Comenius was a prolific scholar on pedagogical, spiritual, and social reform who advocated *pansophy*, namely the lifelong study of an encyclopaedic system of human knowledge which would help humans see the harmony among everything in the universe and thus appreciate God’s glory and presence in themselves and in nature (“Johann”). The idea that a scientific study of nature would help to value God’s splendour was supported by some Jewish thinkers as well. Jewish thinkers such as Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1520- 1609) and Azariah Figo (1579–1647) considered natural science a mere system of hypotheses that can grasp only the superficial appearance of things and that is subordinate to the truth offered by Torah (Del Soldato). It can thus be argued that privileging of religion over natural history was, thus, still observable in the sixteenth century and even in the seventeenth century, not persistently though.

1.5.5 Influence of Humanism

Regarding natural history studies of the Renaissance period, it is possible to conclude that while empirical and scientific research was gradually turning nature into an object of study with the establishment of natural history as a discipline to be mastered by humans, colonial desires, commercial interests, aristocratic ambitions and religious concerns collectively left a mark on the study of nature. In other words, together with the early modern period and Renaissance, nature was slowly but firmly positioned separately from humans as something which can be dominated for different purposes, be it scientific, commercial or even faintly religious. In fact, the separation of nature from humans and the hierarchy gradually imposed between the two to the detriment of nature can be seen in Renaissance representation of the non-human as well. The illustration of a sloth covered in MacGregor’s article might serve as an example. MacGregor informs that the sloth was acquired by an Amsterdam dealer but died on the voyage from South America, and later it was sent to the naturalist Carolus Clusius who

illustrated it in his *Exoticurum Libri Decem* (1605) (83).¹³ Regarding this illustration, it is noteworthy that the sloth was depicted with an obviously terrifying facial expression inviting us to question the objectivity of the illustrator in drawing the animal, especially considering that the animal was dead when it was presented to him. Based on this representation, it can even be claimed that a distance is put between the sloth as the violent animal and the human as its meek and curious viewer. MacGregor argues that although meant for scientific purposes, some catalogues prepared in the sixteenth century included an element of interpretation in the illustrations of the non-human (83). The reason could be that the Renaissance, as MacGregor alleges, was still not the period to faithfully record the non-human (84). Also, even though people had the chance to see some imported animals exhibited alive in local zoos, illustrations of exotic and classically unprecedented animals from the New World and East Indies by Renaissance naturalists were still widely based on fantastic observations and stories told by contemporary observers (Cohen 174).¹⁴ Bearing those biased humanist representations in scientific catalogues in mind, it would be wise to turn to Renaissance artists and their perception of the non-human nature to see if they also displayed a discriminatory attitude to nature.

Until Renaissance nature was considered superior to human art as in the case of Dante, who regarded human art as only a child of nature and grandchild of God, and St. Augustine, who believed that man's efforts would never suffice to reflect the grandeur of God as can be seen through the beauty of nature (Bialostocki). Together with the Renaissance, this view was attacked by Neo-Platonists who categorically privileged mind over nature claiming that nature was opposed to mind and nature was the lowest degree of being (Bialostocki). Looking at the classical artists' works, Neo-Platonists thought that they would surpass the beauty of nature by using the general mathematical laws and proportions already employed by ancient artists, which meant the source of art

¹³For the image itself, please see: MacGregor, Arthur. "Renaissance Collecting and Understanding of the Natural World." *Changing Perceptions of Nature*, edited by Ian Convery and Peter Davis, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, 2016, pp. 75–88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt19x3hsb.¹⁴

¹⁴For further information on the role of images in the Renaissance natural history, please see: Kusukawa, Sachiko. "The role of images in the development of Renaissance natural history." *Archives of Natural History*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2011, pp. 189–213.

stopped being nature itself with the attention directed to ancient works of art in whose perfection there was an absolute trust (Bialostocki).

In fact, featuring of the human mind in Renaissance arts is most visible in Renaissance artist and art theoretician Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-72) theoretical essays on sculpture, painting and architecture. In his essay on sculpture Alberti advises the sculptor not only to observe nature and but also to rely on academic study including knowledge of proportional theory, whereas in his essay on painting he deals with human proportions and insists on the necessity of knowledge of poetry and rhetoric as well as a certain amount of general knowledge to be a good painter (Gadol). Following the footsteps of Alberti, Renaissance artists were ready to select the best not from nature but from the ideal art, namely the Antiquity (Bialostocki). As a representative art theoretician of the Renaissance period, Alberti points at the human mind to excel as an artist further contributing to the humanist tone in the Renaissance conceptualisation of nature. While Renaissance scientists and artists relied on humanism in natural history and arts, the intellectual divide between nature and human was, thus, being widened. Renaissance humanists, who inherited the concept of Great Chain of Being from medieval Christianity, insisted that there was an ontological difference between *homo sapiens* and the rest of the biosphere, privileging humans to whom they attributed the capacity of rationality, over the natural world which, they thought, lacked the same capacity (Manes 20-21). In what follows, I would like to focus on the Enlightenment era to discuss more how this divide, which had already existed since at least Plato, was made even wider and deeper in the Enlightenment and onwards.

1.6 Nature Writing in the Age of Enlightenment

Plumwood points at the Age of Enlightenment as a critical period in history when nature was positioned as "passive, non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place" (*Feminism* 4). In fact, most ecocritics turn to Scientific Revolution and philosophers such as Francis Bacon (1561- 1626), René Descartes (1596- 1650) and Isaac Newton (1642- 1727) in their attempt to explain how the view of the universe as a machine replaced the view of an organic universe inhabited by our

ancestors (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 61).¹⁵ Francis Bacon's empiricism, Isaac Newton's physics and René Descartes's philosophical concept of the world as a clock-work universe all helped to separate humans from nature assigning humans the role to dominate and appropriate the natural world (Hutchings 178). With the Enlightenment, "Natural philosophers posited a universe reducible to an assemblage of parts functioning according to regular laws that men could, in principle, know in their entirety" (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 61-62). Manes also agrees that the Enlightenment, together with the Renaissance, veiled the processes in nature and silenced the natural world by elevating human mind and discourse (15).

Grant alludes to Francis Bacon as a spokesperson for the new age of learning and science (*A History* 278). As a matter of fact, Bacon is significant in understanding Enlightenment concept of nature, for he strongly favoured humankind's mastery and control over nature. He supported human mastery over nature so strongly that acquiring power in one's own country and helping to extend the country's power were, in his view, overshadowed by exerting power over nature. Bacon wrote: "If a man endeavours to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe, his ambition (if ambition it can be called) is without doubt both a more wholesome thing and more noble than the other two" (qtd. in Grant 278). Apparently, Bacon was in favour of human hegemony over nature because he thought man deserved it due to his alleged superiority to the rest: "Man, if we look to final causes, may be regarded as the centre of the world; inasmuch that if man were taken away from the world, the world would seem to be all astray, without aim, or purpose" (qtd. in Manes 21). Like Bacon, Descartes sought a new philosophy to turn man into the master of nature (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 62). Descartes thought that by knowing "the force and the actions of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us", we might be able to use them for appropriate purposes and become masters and possessors of nature (74). As Garrard underlines, in Descartes's point of view, reason

¹⁵ It should be remembered that whereas the period of Enlightenment obviously deepened the human/nature gap and attached unquestionable superiority to human mind, this divide had been opened much earlier. As mentioned under "1.1 Nature writing in the Antiquity" in this dissertation, Plumwood herself points at Plato as the starter of this dualistic thinking in the west.

becomes the means to totally master nature, which is now conceptualised as a big, soulless mechanism that operates according to knowable natural laws (62).

Another reason why Descartes is criticized by ecocritics is the mind/body opposition he is claimed to have supported. Descartes's privileging of mind caused, according to Bate, the exaltation of human consciousness and denigration of the material nature, boosting the idea that non-human nature is there only to be harnessed by inventive mind (*The Song* 137). Similarly, Garrard also thinks that Descartes's prioritization of mind over body brings about further dualisms that separate human from the non-human: "Descartes hyperseparated mind and body and denied to animals not only the faculty of reason, but the whole range of feelings and sensations that he had associated with thought. As a result, he saw animals as radically different from, and inferior to, humans. They were bodies without minds, effectively machines" (*Ecocriticism* 25). In fact, in his "Meditation Six: Concerning the Existence of Material Things, and the Real Distinction between Mind and Body", Descartes does accept the materiality of the body and his dependence on it, but this does not prevent him from concluding that mind is superior to body:

There is a great difference between a mind and a body, in that a body, by its very nature, is always divisible. On the other hand, the mind is utterly indivisible ... Although the entire mind seems to be united to the entire body, nevertheless, were a foot or an arm ... to be amputated, I know that nothing has been taken away from the mind on that account. (139)

Also, in "Meditation Two: Concerning the Nature of the Human Mind: That It Is Better Known Than the Body", Descartes already declares himself to be nothing but a thinking thing: "I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason—words of whose meanings I was previously ignorant. Yet I am a true thing and am truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thinking thing" (107). Moreover, he attributes the capacity to think only to men and sees no harm in mankind's supremacy over the rest: "As for the intelligence or the thought that Montaigne and some others attribute to beasts, I cannot agree with them. Not that I am disturbed by the statement that men have an absolute empire over all the other animals" (275). In Descartes's opinion, though some animals might

overcome some men with their strength or cunningness, man remains superior as long as he puts his thinking capability into use: “I declare there are some animals stronger than us, and I believe there can be some which have a natural cunning capable of deceiving the subtlest men. But I consider that they imitate or surpass us only in such of our actions as are not controlled by our thought” (275).

Plumwood argues that with the attribution of capability of thinking to mankind, Enlightenment intensified the dualism between human/nature as made explicit by Descartes (*Feminism* 107). As mentioned earlier, Enlightenment thinkers are targeted by most ecocritics for the gap they are thought to have widened between human and non-human in a way that is harmful to the latter. Among leading Enlightenment philosophers, Isaac Newton’s place in the mechanization of the world should be underlined. With his universal theory of gravitation, Newton introduced a completely new conceptualisation of the world and its physical operations reducing the world to a sum of particles of matter, all of which attract each other with a force proportional to the products of their masses (Grant, *A History* 282). Thus, as the world was being demystified, it was also being mechanized. Seventeenth century philosophers ended up viewing nature as a machine, particularly as a clock that could be taken apart to see how one piece acts on another and this mechanical view of the natural world was accompanied by the invention of scientific instruments to study the natural world (284). Ponty claims that it was not the scientific discoveries that changed the idea of nature, but it was in fact the already changed idea of nature that made such discoveries possible (25).

As is seen, with the rise of humanism in science and arts in the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, the split between human and nature was severely deepened. To Garrard, this dualism marked the western thinking: “In the dominant Euro-American culture, humans are not only distinguished from nature, but opposed to it in ways that make humans radically alienated from and superior to it” (*Ecocriticism* 25). This dissertation will focus on how this divide, which had been construed and widened by prominent western thinkers and naturalists throughout history as I have tried to demonstrate so far, can be contested through nature writing.

In fact, the seventeenth century examples provided by Mabey in his anthology are worthy of attention as they help to prove the view that writing about nature can be a means to challenge the dominant thinking. Despite their humanistic and scientific tone that matches the tone of their era, Mabey's examples are, in fact, far from denigrating the non-human for the sake of human mind, which had marked the intellectual atmosphere of their time. For example, Robert Plot (1640-1696) an English naturalist wrote of the toads of Staffordshire basing his writings on direct observation and previous research and published *The Natural History of Staffordshire* in 1686 (Mabey, *The Oxford* 18- 20). The way he wrote about toads living inside rocks shows he was very much concerned about their well-being: "Now how these animals should come at all to be thus included, in the middle of such entire and solid substances? and when enclosed, how maintained either with breath, or ailment? and how long they may have been presumed, to have continued there?" (qtd. in Mabey 19).

Similarly, Francis Willughby (1635- 1672) got his book *The Ornithology* (1678), which is the first compilation in ornithology, published posthumously by his friend and colleague John Ray (1627- 1705) ("The World"). It is interesting that even though it was a scientific account, *The Ornithology* still reflected its author's personal response to birds, for Willughby does not endeavour to hide his amazement, admiration and wonder upon hearing the nightingales: "But I who could not sleep whole nights together, did greedily and attentively hearken to birds, greatly admiring their industry and contention" (qtd. in Mabey, *The Oxford* 21). Separation and alienation of human from nature was an undeniable fact of the Age of Scientific Revolution; however, as the above-mentioned exceptions and the coming Romantic era would also prove, nature writing was not always condemned to total obedience to such alienation and separation.

1.7 Nature Writing since the Romantic Era

Clark indicates that modern ecocriticism can be traced back to the Romantic era, which was a complex cultural movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when "a romantic tradition of opposition to the destructive tendencies of the enlightenment ideals of the conquest of nature, the market-based economy and industrialism" emerged (*The Cambridge* 13). Bate also notes that the idea of respecting the earth with an ecological mindset and the questioning of the prevailing attitude that

unconditionally approves economic growth and material production emerged in the Romantic tradition (*The Romantic* 9). It is since 1790s that various countercultural and alternative cultural movements dealing with notions of nature, health, vitality and beauty, which have been suppressed by commercial and industrial society, have taken the stage (Clark13). Likewise, Keith Thomas talks of the interest shown in nature during the early modern period and the eighteenth century: “The growth in towns had led to a new longing for the countryside. The progress of cultivation had fostered a taste for weeds, mountains and unsubdued nature. The new-found security from wild animals had generated an increasing concern to protect birds and preserve wild creatures in their natural state” (qtd. in Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 40). Similarly, Scheese informs that as historians such as Raymond Williams, Paul Shepard and Roderick Nash have shown, it was in Romantic era that a paradigmatic shift in intellectuals’ and artists’ attitude to nature became obvious (20). Romantic era was clearly a period when there appeared an emotional and intellectual reaction to human separation and alienation from nature. To discuss the romantic influence on writings about nature, this part focusses on three important concepts which can in different ways relate to romanticism, that is picturesque, sublime and wilderness along with some representative names of British romanticism, namely William Blake (1757- 1827), John Clare (1763 – 1864), William Wordsworth (1770- 1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772- 1834).

1.7.1 Shift to Agrarian Capitalism and Enclosures

Before discussing the influence of Romanticism on nature writing, it would be wise to have a very brief look at the socio-economic changes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Britain, which paved the way for the afore-mentioned romantic response. Williams reads the transition from feudal order to agrarian capitalism in England as from the sixteenth century as the replacement of one form of domination by the other throughout which the small farmers and the cottagers who had been enjoying the benefits of common lands were oppressed by the great landowners: “A more settled and centralised order – a system of social and economic rather than directly military and physical control- was now fully in being, in a more prosperous and populated country” (39). While towns were getting bigger in this new post-feudal and agrarian capitalist order, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries what counted in the society was still

property in land and consequent rural production (Williams 48). As castles were being replaced by the country houses possessed by big landowners (39), in other words, as feudalism was dissolving in favour of agrarian capitalism, there was a complex shift in the ownership of the land (49). In Williams's analysis, during this complicated process, great landowners along with the merchants and lawyers, whose wealth was constantly accumulating, were on the rise, while the hired landless labourers, freemen, villeins and small farmers and cottagers were going downhill (39-40). By the eighteenth century, half of the cultivated English land was owned by five thousand families, four hundred of whom owned nearly a quarter of the cultivated land in a country of seven or eight million people (60). The gap between the landowning aristocracy and the landless wage-labourers was, thus, severely widened. The polarisation between these four hundred families and rural proletariat being deepened, the intermediate classes between the two poles such as small landowners, middle and small tenants and small-free holders were being stratified (61).

It is important to concisely mention the role of enclosures in this polarised state of the English countryside: "Enclosure, also spelled inclosure, is the division or consolidation of communal fields, meadows, pastures, and other arable lands in western Europe into the carefully delineated and individually owned and managed farm plots of modern times" ("Enclosure"). Back in medieval times, there existed open fields, where individual yeomen and farmers cultivated scattered strips of land, but starting with the early twelfth century agricultural land was gradually enclosed, which means cultivated land was fenced off and hedged holdings being consolidated into individually owned or rented fields ("Enclosing"). In England the movement of enclosures speeded up in the period of 1450–1640 to ensure an increased amount of full-time pasturage in favour of manorial lords ("Enclosure"). The practice of enclosing the land gaining popularity, the Parliament issued the first enclosure act in 1604 to end the informal way of enclosing the land ("Enclosing"). Parliamentary enclosures continued until the first quarter of the twentieth century, when more than a fifth of the total area of England, amounting to some 6.8 million acres, had already been enclosed ("Enclosing").

While enclosures helped to expand cultivated land, they also led to the concentration of ownership of land into the hands of a minority forcing out most of the

peasantry in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Williams 97). It is agreed that enclosures decreased the amount of waste lands and greatly contributed to the increase in agricultural efficiency with new agricultural methods being more easily implemented in hedged lands (“Enclosing”). Despite this, the parliamentary enclosures have been regarded as the destroyer of a traditional and settled rural community (Williams 96). Considering that many traditional farmers were left landless and a great number of rural labourers were left jobless and forced to migrate to towns as a consequence of the enclosures and advent of new agricultural methods, the negative perception about enclosures is understandable.¹⁶

As the English countryside was experiencing such changes, towns, particularly London, were rapidly growing. Williams indicates that by 1660 London’s population had already reached half a million, when Bristol, the second biggest town in England, was still a city of some thirty thousand people, and between 1770 and 1820, London’s population rose to a million and a quarter (146). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, London was a capital centre of trade and distribution and of all the work connected with shipping and trade (147). Being the commercial capital, London became the cradle of new professionals such as agents, factors, brokers, bankers, insurers and contractors (147). London’s dizzying and unprecedented growth was found to be monstrous and diseased by some, but Williams rightfully links this growth to the change in the whole social order:

The centralisation of political power; the replacement of feudalism by an agrarian aristocracy and then agrarian bourgeoisie, with all its effects in modernisation of the land; the immense development of a mercantile trade; these outstanding developments had acquired, over the generations, an unstoppable momentum: a concentration and demand which then fed on itself. (146)

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both the countryside and cities were going through fundamental changes that solidified class-system and enlarged the gaps between different segments of society. Williams underlines that the contrast between the

¹⁶Williams is critical of the idealisation of the open-field villages against enclosures, for he thinks that before enclosures, the social order in the countryside was far from any imagined rural democracy with prevailing inequalities among cottagers, labourers, servants and the unattached poor. For further information, please see “Enclosures, Commons and Communities” in *The Country and the City* (1973).

wealthy and the poor was the reality of both the rural and urban societies, but this contrast was more intense and problematic in the rapidly expanding cities (144).

1.7.2 Industrial Revolution and Darwin

Following the shift to agrarian capitalism, Industrial Revolution caused cities to grow even more rapidly, with London's growth rate reaching twenty percent while Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield grew by more than forty percent between 1821 and 1841 (Williams 152). The transition from agrarian capitalism to industrial capitalism brought about many drastic changes for the society and the non-human nature. The consequences of Industrial Revolution have been extensively studied by historians, who generally tended to examine its effects on economy, technology, agriculture, society and religion mostly neglecting its impact on the non-human nature (Steinberg 261). However, it should be recognized that in addition to its economic, social, cultural and agricultural consequences, Industrial Revolution caused also a psychological change in the way people perceived and related themselves to nature: As they became machine operators, their confidence in their ability to use resources such as coal and iron and to master nature was heightened ("Industrial"). According to the anthropologist John Bennet, who calls the transition to the industrialisation "the development of an anthropocentric orientation toward the natural world", Industrial Revolution caused nature to be defined in terms of human wants and needs more than ever (qtd. in Steinberg 273). Though this had been an ongoing process since at least Agricultural Revolution,¹⁷ as Steinberg indicates, Industrial Revolution facilitated and accelerated the conceptualization of nature as a bundle of commodities, which means it was literally turned into a resource to harness energy and obtain food (273).

Hence, it would not be bold to claim that with the industrialisation the Enlightenment attitude to nature as a resource made available for the use of man was strengthened. Concerning the large-scale transformation triggered by Industrial Revolution, Bate accepts the positive effects of industrialisation in several fields, particularly in health, heating systems and longevity, but he also draws our attention to the fact that the negative consequences become perceptible the moment we realise that

¹⁷According to Paul Shepard, who is among the early scholars of Animal Studies, it is with the transition to agriculture and domestication of animals that the ties between humans and nonhuman nature were cut off leading to harmful effects on both sides (Gökçen 4).

it is in this era that the word pollution gained its modern sense (*The Song* 137). As a matter of fact, while word pollution used to mean “discharge of semen other than during sex” in mid- fourteenth century, its first recorded use in the meaning of contamination of the environment was in mid-nineteenth century (“Pollution”). The change in the word pollution attests to the negative consequences of industrialisation in nature as well as human society.

At this point, it would be reasonable to mention another nineteenth century revolution, which had a shaking influence on the understanding of the non-human, namely Darwinian revolution.¹⁸ Scheese informs that the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, who combined the word *ecology* in 1866, specifically refers to Darwin as the one who contributed considerably to the understanding of interactions among complex organisms (21). Beyond its suggestions about the interconnection among living organisms, Darwinian evolution led modern biology to see the connection between the species and the ecosystem they live in (Bate, *The Song* 229). Darwin’s studies on the theory of evolution and natural selection evidently helped to see the interrelations among living beings. In addition to his ground-breaking discoveries about the interconnection among living organisms and their ecosystem, as Clark mentions, Darwin observed that both non-human animals and humans have emotion and mind, which are not secret interior states but legible in their features and behaviour (*The Cambridge* 194). To be more specific, Darwin described in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) that monkey is a sociable creature, capable of expressing pleasure, affection, dejection and anger and can make a laughing sound when tickled and can even sulk (Bate, *The Song* 186). From this perspective, Darwin seems to have made a positive contribution to the emergence of an ecological mindset not only

¹⁸Though the theory of evolution is attributed to Darwin, the scientists who preceded him had done studies that fed into Darwin’s theory, which Darwin did not mention. In his time, there was another British naturalist, Alfred Russell Wallace, who developed similar ideas about evolution and even submitted his theoretical work to Darwin. Wallace, however, could not get the same attention from the scientific community as Darwin did probably due to his social status and unusually emphatic attitude to the human communities he studied, which did not fit imperial goals. For more information on the topic, please see: Atay, Tayfun. *Din Hayattan Çıkar: Antropolojik Denemeler*. 7th ed., İletişim, 2019. In this study, I have had to stick with Darwin’s name not because I ignore Wallace’s and other scientists’ contributions but because Darwin’s name has gained more popularity in academia and thus might sound more familiar to researchers reading this dissertation.

because he demonstrated the interconnectedness in nature but also because he attributed emotion and mind to the non-human, too.

Yet it should be remembered that with his ground-breaking studies Darwin triggered a lot of discussions in natural theology. Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection was obviously in conflict with the Genesis narrative in the Bible, which is why as a pious Protestant he hesitated to publicize his findings for a while (Atay 217). In fact, Darwin was sent to a five-year world tour on HMS Beagle to provide scientific evidence for the Genesis story in the Holy Book (224). Atay claims that the real motivation, which is obviously a religious one, underlying Darwin's journey is mostly overlooked (224). Coming up with findings beyond his intentions, Darwin was careful to allude to divinity in his research, which is visible in the way he finishes *On the Origin of Species* (225). Looking at the last paragraph of the same book, Robert M. Ryan also agrees that Darwin did not give up the idea of a mysterious creative dynamism manifesting God's omnipresence in the natural world.

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved. The passive voice here- have been and are being evolved- suggests that evolutionary process was driven by some universal force that was creative of life, a life that religious scientists needed to understand in theological terms. (qtd. in "Wordsworthian" 58)

It is important to note that *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was presented to a "society in Britain, and the rest of the English-speaking world, whose conception of and response to nature had been profoundly shaped by Wordsworth" (Ryan, "Wordsworth's" 10). While Darwin was travelling around the world, Wordsworth had already secured his position as a respectable poet, and he was also venerated as the prophet of a new understanding of natural theology in England (10). Though there is no agreement on Wordsworth's religious tendencies (Dombrowski 136), he was widely accepted as a pantheist because his sense of the natural world was charged with divine life, and he dedicated himself to testifying his own experience of a divine presence

prevailing in the nature (Ryan, “Wordsworth’s” 10- 12). In the nineteenth century, most British natural theologians were deists who believed in a God as a creator that was in external relation to the universe, but Wordsworth was more in search of deism diffused in nature (qtd. in Ryan “Wordsworthian” 58). It is possible to argue that Wordsworth’s views were welcomed in nineteenth century England, where Darwin’s findings had deepened the crisis of faith, for the poet neither denied the existence of God nor extolled an external supernatural being. According to Ryan, Wordsworth’s popularity as a poet and natural theologian in the nineteenth century England was due to his success in blending pantheism and orthodox Christianity (“Wordsworthian” 59).

Wordsworth’s poetry seeking divinity everywhere in the natural world and Darwin’s studies revealing laws of nature might look incompatible at first regard, but given that Darwin was meticulous about hinting at the divine aspect in the natural phenomena, the two important names of the nineteenth century can be reconciled. In fact, in 1878 an article titled “Evolution and Pantheism” that appeared in *Contemporary Review* tried to support the idea that Darwin and Wordsworth were not to be opposed, for they both suggested pantheism rather than theism. John Tyrwhitt wrote that “Wordsworth did in fact recognize a supporting life or law of creation, which science may label as Evolution with our full consent; but we call it a manifestation of the presence and power of God” (qtd. in Ryan “Wordsworthian” 58). Thus, it is possible to conclude that apart from the socio-economic developments that fundamentally altered people’s relation to the non-human, the nineteenth century understanding of nature was shaped by Darwin on the one hand, who unintentionally but inescapably shook people’s understanding of nature offering the idea of nature as a total of interdependent beings, some of which might have emotion and mind, and Wordsworth on the other, who circumvented the idea of nature as created by an external creator but venerated nature as an entity where divine power permeates.

1.7.3 From Sense of Loss to a Holistic Approach

Offering to read the romantic response in the literature of the countryside in the light of changes in the society and landscape, Williams finds it comprehensible and significant that there appeared a feeling for unaltered nature and for wild land (128). It was a time when cities were being populated by a flux of former rural labourers, the

countryside was being confiscated by great landowners and life was being mechanized more than ever. Williams claims that the countryside writing of the eighteenth century is marked by a feeling of loss, melancholy and regret, which he thinks is very much related to the changes of conditions (97-99). Besides, as Kevin Hutchings indicates, the human-induced damage caused to the nature started to become visible and questionable during the Romantic era: For example, Percy Shelly (1792-1822) mourned for water and air pollution. Similarly, William Blake (1757-1827) in his “Vala, Night the Ninth Being the Last Judgment” complained about the air pollution in cities, and in his book *The Natural History of Selbourne* (1788-89), Gilbert White raised concerns about the effects of excessive hunting on the eradication of partridges and red deer (175). Furthermore, the sad feelings about the loss in nature were justified by the geological science of the Romantic era as geologists started to unravel the fragility of nature and the finitude of natural resources (Hutchings 175). In addition, with Thomas Malthus’s famous and controversial work *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), extinction appeared to be a matter also concerning the human species as Malthus warned that food production might not catch up with population growth (176). The sense of loss and dissolution was, thus, maintained in the nineteenth century Romantic poetry with the addition of a lonely wanderer and observer concentrating on himself (Williams 130). In Williams’s point of view, all the afore-mentioned changes, which people initially failed to cope with, increased interest in nature and its workings (127). Nature, thus, was conceived as a retreat and solace in Romantic poetry (129).¹⁹ As Williams also refers to, Wordsworth’s following verses demonstrate the poet’s quest for solace through nature.

I well remember that those very plumes,
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o’er
As once I passed, into my heart conveyed
So still an image of tranquillity,

¹⁹It is important to note that while Williams finds romantic response to the rapid changes in the society and landscape totally understandable, he remains critical of any blind celebration of the life in the countryside that is ignorant of the actual men and women living there suffering from intense work and exploitation, and he objects to Golden Age discourse praised in especially the literature of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For further information, please see “Pastoral and Counter-Pastoral” and “Golden Ages” in *The Country and the City* (1973).

So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thought which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
That passing shows of Being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream. (qtd. in Williams 129)

As his famous poem “I wandered lonely as a cloud” also shows, even the thought of daffodils gives Wordsworth a feeling of relief, let alone any direct experience with the flowers or touch of them.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. (Wordsworth)

It is obvious that there is both a philosophical and aesthetic aspect in Romantic poets’ turn to nature. Hutchings claims that much earlier than the term ecology (to which we owe the ecological principle “everything is connected to everything else”) was first coined in 1866 by the German evolutionist and zoologist Ernst Haeckel to describe “the branch of biology that deals with the relations of living organisms to their surroundings”, such holistic approach to earthly organisms was a topic of interest in the Romantic era (176). For example, Gilbert White writes: “Most insignificant insects and reptiles are of much more consequence and have much more influence in the economy of nature, than the incurious are aware of” (qtd. in Hutchings 177). Hutchings alludes also to William Blake to demonstrate the holistic conceptualisation of nature in the Romantic era. In his “The Book of Thel”, Blake makes a reference to life-death cycle and implies that when one is dead, the body turns into food for earth worms, which is an important process.

But Thel delights in these no more, because I fade away
And all shall say, “Without a use this shining woman liv'd,
Or did she only live to be at death the food of worms?”

The Cloud reclind upon his airy throne and answer'd thus:

Then if thou art the food of worms, O virgin of the skies,
How great thy use, how great thy blessing! (Blake)

In the very same poem, as Hutchings rightfully refers to, Blake writes “Every thing that lives/Lives not alone, nor for itself” clearly justifying his holistic approach to nature. Hutchings reads the story of Thel, the female protagonist in the poem and her encounters with various non-human creatures as her awakening to the interrelationship and interdependency in nature (181). In her talk with a weed that calls itself weak, Thel responds in a way to show how what is found insignificant matters for the entire ecosystem:

O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley.
Giving to those that cannot crave, the voiceless, the o'ertired.
Thy breath doth nourish the innocent lamb, he smells thy milky garments,
He crops thy flowers. while thou sittest smiling in his face,
Wiping his mild and meekin mouth from all contagious taints.
Thy wine doth purify the golden honey, thy perfume,
Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass that springs,
Revives the milked cow & tames the fire-breathing steed. (Blake)

1.7.4 The Picturesque, the Sublime and the Wilderness

In addition to Romantic poets' philosophical thoughts about holism, their approach to nature from an aesthetic point of view is worthy of consideration. The romantic aestheticization of nature makes it necessary to elaborate on two important concepts of Romanticism, which are picturesque and sublime. The word picturesque is defined as “resembling a picture suggesting a painted scene” (“Picturesque”). Bate indicates that the concept of picturesque is one of the earliest artistic movements in history which challenges the Classical view that art should imitate nature and favours instead the view that nature should imitate art (*The Song* 136). The notion of picturesque became popular in the late eighteenth century (130), that is with Romanticism. Though the dictionary definition of the word implies that whatever is considered to be picturesque in nature is inspired from not nature but arts, picturesque

gaze caused the attention to be directed to nature as a beautiful entity, an object of aesthetics itself.

Adorno highlights that for a long time the concept of aesthetic was associated with arts, and natural beauty was dropped out from the agenda of aesthetics (qtd. in Bate, *The Song* 119). Oscar Wilde's following remarks justify Adorno's detection: "What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out" (qtd. in Bate, *The Song* 120). The superiority given by the theory of aesthetics to art in achieving beauty is noticeably anthropocentric. As Bate also implies, according to Enlightenment thinkers, artistic beauty makes humans more than mere animals because from an Enlightenment point of view it is through works of art that the highest creations of the human are embodied (120). Thus, it appears that Romantics' appreciation of natural beauty came as a reaction to Enlightenment insistence on arts as the only means to reach aesthetics.

Aestheticization of non-human nature has had its complex consequences, though. In one chapter titled "The Picturesque Environment" in his *Song of the Earth*, Bate sheds lights on the intricate links among the importance attached to the natural beauty by early Romantic poets, rise of picturesque tourism and the emergence of conservationist efforts. Bate points out Thomas Gray's letters on his visit to the English Lake District in 1796 and Thomas West's *A Guide To The Lakes in Cumberland, Westmoreland and Lancashire* (1780) in tracing the origins of modern tourism (*The Song* 126- 27). Similarly, with his *Guide to the Lakes* (1810), which was his most-selling work, Wordsworth promoted his native Lakeland landscapes more than anyone else (128). In Bate's point of view, compared to individual tourists who visited a given landscape and shared its photos with their circle, poets and painters of the picturesque contributed to the popularisation of natural beauties more as they disseminated the idea or image of picturesque to a large public (127). The more the pictorial value of a landscape was promoted, the more people visited it encouraging others to follow their footsteps, which, in the end, caused that landscape to evolve into a commodity and become less natural and less pristine (Bate, *The Song* 127). The praise of the

picturesque, thus, brought about unintended effects. Although Romantic poets had intended to question human mastery over nature, they could not really liberate themselves of the Cartesian dualism of the Enlightenment as they maintained their gaze that separated them from the non-human (Hutchings 179). Eugene C. Hargrove claims that the picturesque gaze was that of the human as the one that perceives and consumes the natural beauty turning it into an aesthetic instrument (qtd. in Hutchings 179). Apparently, aestheticization of nature inevitably triggered its commodification no matter how much those who valued the picturesque were motivated by a love of nature. Bate also agrees that “While pretending to value nature above art, the picturesque took to an extreme a tendency of Enlightenment thought which has had catastrophic ecological consequences” (*The Song* 136).

Hargrove, on the other hand, highlights that the fascination for the picturesque beauty significantly contributed to wildlife protection and affirms that despite the common understanding that preservationist practices date back to the science of ecology in the Victorian era, eighteenth-century artistic theory is at the roots of such conservationist attitude to the non-human nature:

In landscape ... painting and poetry, the general desire that things of beauty be preserved was extended to include objects of beauty in nature, either actually represented in paintings and poetry or capable of being so represented. Natural history scientists ... developed a common aesthetic attitude toward nature with painters and poets as a result of the artistic training they routinely undertook in order to be able to illustrate their fieldwork. (qtd. in Hutchings 179)

For example, William Cronon links the opening of national parks with the aim of protecting wildlife in America to the Romantic desire to protect sublime and beautiful landscapes (Hutchings 180). Similarly, Bate also mentions the influence of William Wordsworth’s writings on the opening of a series of national parks in the US and UK (*The Song* 23).²⁰Garrard, too, verifies that Wordsworth’s fervent advocacy for Lake District led to the creation of a national park, long after his death though (*Ecocriticism* 42). Moreover, Bate informs that with the increase in the number of people who had

²⁰Please see part “2.1 Ecological awareness and subsequent activism” under the chapter “New Nature Writing” in this dissertation for further discussion on the possible link between preservationist feelings and the opening of national parks.

more leisure time and income to visit picturesque landscapes by the end of the nineteenth century, tourism started to visibly change the most visited landscapes, which caused the establishment of organizations such as the National Trust that aimed at the protection of the most celebrated picturesque destinations (*The Song* 132).

Praiseworthy as they may seem, as Hutchings says, such conservationist efforts need to be considered from a critical perspective. To be more specific, Hutchings warns that Romanticism's ecological legacy might facilitate the fetishisation of wilderness along with disregard for urban and suburban ecosystems (180). Likewise, Bate questions the rationale of such conservation practices and alleges that rather than nature's rights, it was human needs in the first place that triggered such efforts: "The admirer of picturesque scenery pretends to be submitting to the power of nature, but in fact, she is taking something for herself from it, using it as a source of nourishment for the spirit, just as the man who encloses land and does so in order to increase its yield of nourishment for the body" (*The Song* 132). Bate is also critical of the conservationist efforts that target only picturesque landscapes such as lakes and mountains and focus solely on species that have more anthropomorphic appeal like a cuddly giant panda or seemingly smiling dolphins (132).

Regarding the praise of the picturesque, which ironically got its inspiration from paintings, in the Romantic era, Garrard argues that Wordsworthian Romanticism, which valued picturesque landscape, might have diverted attention away from places that were ecologically under more pressure such as swamps, which had evoked feelings of fear and disgust rather than admiration in western culture and had been drained for agriculture to the extent that few examples have survived intact (*Ecocriticism* 43). Notwithstanding the preservationist efforts it led to, the idea of picturesque promoted by Romantic poets has been criticized due to its Eurocentrism as well. At this point, Bate's comment is worthy of attention: "There is indeed a case for the argument that Western environmentalism- keeping *our* countryside picturesque- exacerbates world-wide ecological degradation by shipping the production processes that cause the worst pollution out to the Third World where *we* won't notice them" (*The Song* 138).

Despite all the criticism that Romantic poets of the picturesque have been subjected to, Luc Ferry affirms that poets like Blake, who celebrated maggots, fleas,

tape-worms and slugs and Robert Burns, who brought poetic attention to creatures like mice and lice provide alternatives to idealistic Romantic naturalism that took no notice of “all that is hateful in nature” and was interested only in its “harmony, beauty and peace” (qtd. in Hutchings 182). In fact, Blake’s “The Book of Thel”, which welcomes a holistic view of the world as mentioned above, verifies Ferry’s point about Romantic alternatives. As to Robert Burns, he is considered as a revolutionary poet of the late eighteenth century for his attitudes to animals and non-human suffering (Clark, *The Cambridge* 19), and his following verses from his poem “To a Mouse” proves Ferry’s point and show that the poet is truly concerned about the mouse having to flee because of human dominion:

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim’rous beastie,
O, what a panic’s in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi’ bickerin brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an’ chase thee
Wi’ murd’ringpattle!

I’m truly sorry Man’s dominion
Has broken Nature’s social union,
An’ justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An’ fellow-mortal! (Burns)

If picturesque is one term that has determined the romantic approach to nature, sublime is another. Sublime means “lofty, grand, or exalted in thought, expression, or manner; of outstanding spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth; tending to inspire awe usually because of elevated quality (as of beauty, nobility, or grandeur) or transcendent excellence” (“Sublime”[*Merriam*]). As a literary term it was first used in the Antiquity, and in *On the Sublime* attributed to Cassius Longinus (85 BC- 42 BC), the term was used to define excellence in language and expression of great spirit in literature showing the moral, emotional and imaginative depth of the writer (“Sublime”

[*Encyclopaedia*]). In Britain, the sublime caught great attention in the eighteenth century (Holmqvist and Płuciennik 718). Although the term has appeared across different cultures since the Antiquity, one reason why it aroused special interest in the eighteenth-century Britain could be the increasing importance of landscape as a subject category for artists and critics (Riding and Llewellyn). Edmund Burke's work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) was also significant in the rise of the sublime in the eighteenth century (Riding and Llewellyn). Burke's work, which preceded *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge by forty-one years, is accepted to have provided the English Romantic movement with a systematic analysis of what constitutes the sublime and thus have given the Romantic poets a theoretical foundation as well as legitimacy to their artistic expression (Court).

In Burke's point of view the source of the sublime is "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger", in other words anything that is "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (111). In explaining the source of the sublime, Burke points out seven main categories: darkness, which constraints the sense of sight; obscurity, which confuses judgement; deprivation, which gives pain; vastness, which is beyond our comprehension; magnificence, which provokes a sense of awe; loudness, which overwhelms us and suddenness which shocks us (qtd. in Riding and Llewellyn). The sublime, in Burke's understanding, apparently originates from beyond what is not easily accessible by human mind. Besides, given that Burke was an empiricist who believed that our knowledge of the natural world is derived from our sensory experience, which is determined by our senses, perceptions or passions (Court), it is understandable why he looks for the sublime beyond reason. Burke's empiricism was in contrast with the rationalist school of thought, which asserts that knowledge comes with reasoning (Court). Concerning the effects of the sublime, Burke notes: "Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect" (130). These were the emotional forces that Romantic poets tried to recreate in their poems ("The Sublime"), and it would not be wrong to claim that they turned to nature to find the source of the sublime and feel its effect.

Considering the definitions above, it is possible to draw parallelism between the emergence of sublime and criticism of the human mastery of nature. Also, Bate confirms that following the technological domination of nature in the eighteenth century, which caused the repressions of nature's wildness, the repressed returned in the form of what eighteenth century aestheticians called "the sublime": "The aesthetic appreciation of wild landscape thus emerges as the counter-tide of technological modernity" (*The Song* 122). The writings on the mountains can serve as an example for the Romantic appreciation of the wild landscape (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 64). The following verses from Wordsworth's 1816 poem "To ———, on Her First Ascent to the Summit of Helvellyn" show that the poet points out the sublime taking its source from the grandeur and vastness of the mountains and provoking sense of delight and amazement on the one climbing and gazing them from above.

Inmate of a mountain-dwelling,
Thou hast clomb aloft, and gazed
From the watch-towers of Helvellyn;
Awed, delighted, and amazed!
Potent was the spell that bound thee

Lo! the dwindled woods and meadows;
What a vast abyss is there!
Lo! the clouds, the solemn shadows,
And the glistenings—heavenly fair!
And a record of commotion
Which a thousand ridges yield;
Ridge, and gulf, and distant ocean
Gleaming like a silver shield!
Maiden! now take flight;—inherit
Alps or Andes—they are thine!
With the morning's roseate Spirit,
Sweep their length of snowy line. (Wordsworth)

Wordsworth's "The Simplon Pass", which was published in 1845 and in which Wordsworth narrates his youth experience of an alpine tour, is another noteworthy example of the sublime.

—Brook and road

Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy Pass,
And with them did we journey several hours
At a slow step. The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And in the narrow rent, at every turn,
Winds thwarting winds bewildered and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end. (Wordsworth)

In the verses above, Wordsworth draws the reader's attention to the darkness of the pass, vastness of the woods and loudness of the waterfalls evoking the feelings of danger and pain associated with the sublime by Burke. In fact, Wordsworth and his friend Jones set out on a tour of the Alps in 1790 to enjoy the visual pleasures of the natural world, but they felt great disappointment because not only did they get lost, but they also crossed the Alps without even realizing that they did, which was a dream that they had been longing for (Miall 88). In the poem itself, during the climb as the travellers walk through the pass, they seem to be very far from mastering nature, which

was the assertive promise of the Enlightenment, as the nature imposes itself upon them with all its mysterious and loud sounds, dark passages and paradoxical beauties which might and did obscure one's judgment and reason.

The association of the sublime with the wild landscape makes it necessary to turn our attention to the concept of wilderness.²¹ The word wilderness, which dates to twelfth century, comes from *wild-deor*, which means wild animal and wild deer in Old English ("Wilderness" [Online]). The etymological root of the word designates a land beyond cultivation where "deoron" or beasts live (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 60). Still keeping its originally intended use, wilderness is now defined as "a tract or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings; an area essentially undisturbed by human activity together with its naturally developed life community" ("Wilderness" [Merriam]). Garrard alleges that wilderness is a relatively new concept in the history of human species, and he reckons that for the Palaeolithic hunters-gatherers concepts like weeds and wilderness did not exist in opposition to fields and crops, while Neolithic farmers might have positioned their farm and produce as something to be protected against the beasts of the wilderness (*Ecocriticism* 60).

Accepting that we might not reach definite information about hunters-gatherers' perception of wilderness, Garrard turns his attention to Judeo-Christian texts. According to Garrard, in Judaic scriptures there is ambivalence: After the fall from Eden, wilderness is seen as the place of exile. Just as Abraham guides his people into the wilderness to found a nation, Moses leads the people of Israel through wilderness back home finding wilderness more hospitable than the civilised but enslaving Egypt (*Ecocriticism* 61). In Bible, wilderness is associated with Satan as Jesus is sent to the

²¹Wilderness is an important theme particularly in North American nature writing probably because European settlers observed a rapid shrinkage of "wild lands" firsthand starting especially with the nineteenth century. Gökçen underlines that wilderness and its varying meanings lie at the bottom of American history and identity, and she notes that American nature scholars were already familiar with the (near) extinction of some animal species and loss of wilderness, so they built their studies on this nationally loaded subject. For more information, please see: Gökçen, Nilsen. *Encountering the Animal: Explorations in American Literature*, Boyut, 2015. Similarly, to Scheese, wilderness is a social construction that fits the ideology of colonialists because to Native Americans there were no wild lands as European settlers labelled them to be. For more discussion on the topic, please see: Scheese, Don. *Nature Writing: the pastoral impulse in America*. 1995. Routledge, 2002. For more information on the American idea of wilderness, please see: Byerly, Alison. "The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and The National Park System." in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, 53-68.

wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Yet in early monastic traditions, Christian hermits went to the deserts to escape both Roman persecution and worldly temptations (61). As Garrard underlines, the idea of wilderness in Judeo-Christian conception goes with trial, danger, freedom, redemption and purity (61).

This confusion about the concept of wilderness in early Judeo-Christian texts evolves into hostility in early modern philosophy and literature, and, for example, in Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1648), the mountains are explained as "the physical outcome of God's displeasure with mankind, scars inflicted upon a previously unwrinkled globe by the 'Great Flood' that Noah and his family survived" (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 63). The condemnation of wilderness was, according to some deep ecologists, ecofeminists and Heideggerian ecocritics, accompanied by its thingification as an object of study with the Scientific Revolution (63). Though Garrard is precautionous enough to question the pervasiveness of such a mechanical worldview and respects the gains of Scientific Revolution, he agrees there was an effort to discipline wilderness through reason, to which Romantic sensibility objected (*Ecocriticism* 63). Romanticism's objection to the vilification and thingification of wilderness can be observed the best in the sublime. Mountain ranges, which were once considered as scars of the Earth, turned into the embodiment of sublime beauty in Romantic age. Percy Bysshe Shelley's verses on Mont Blanc can exemplify this turn:

Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there,

The still and solemn power of many sights,

And many sounds, and much of life and death.

In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,

In the lone glare of day, the snows descend

Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,

Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,

Or the star-beams dart through them. Winds contend

Silently there, and heap the snow with breath

Rapid and strong, but silently! (Shelley)

It is understandable how and why wilderness gained importance in the Romantic era. Nevertheless, like the pastoral, picturesque and sublime, the concept of wilderness

has been criticised, too. One reason for the attack on the praise of wilderness is that it implies the absence of human presence. Garrard suggests that any idea of wilderness that includes total purity and absolute absence of human deletes the history of indigenous peoples who used to call the areas that are wilderness to the white European settlers home: For example, “In the case of Yosemite, this myth of an ‘uninhabited wilderness’ meant that both the Ahwahneechee Indians and the white miners who had lived and worked there were expelled” (*Ecocriticism* 70). From this perspective, Garrard finds the celebration of wilderness in North America ideological, for it erases the social and political history (71).

Besides, such a purist notion of pristine wilderness has been found problematic because it confines the natural world to where there is no human settlement, and thus ignores the nature in the urban areas (Clark, *The Cambridge* 87). Urban environmental activist Cinder Hypki notes: “The real purist notion of environment- that is just the natural world- just can’t work in today’s world. It doesn’t work for peasants in Costa Rica, and it sure doesn’t work for people living in inner-city Baltimore” (qtd. in Clark 88). Also, considering the possibility that nature and culture inevitably melt into each other as discussed earlier in this dissertation, it would be unwise to expect total purity in the wilderness. Garrard calls the praise of wilderness as a zone of solace which is completely free from human influence “poetics of authenticity”. He uses the term “poetics of authenticity” to define the claim that the relationship of the ancients to nature was more authentic, unalienated and inarticulate (*Ecocriticism* 45) and that there is, thus, a fixed standard we ought to try and meet (179). In Garrard’s point of view, such standard or authenticity does not exist, and he also alleges that the idea of wilderness cleansed of human presence not only encourages misanthropy (71) but also contributes to the demarcation between nature and culture, which is what ecocriticism tries to dismantle (179). In addition to that, when wilderness is accepted as a pure zone, there is the risk of its commodification by the consumerist culture just as it was the case with the celebration of the picturesque. As Garrard claims, the praise of wilderness to sell authenticity can be thought in parallel with the promotion of wilderness experience as a privileged leisure time activity (*Ecocriticism* 71). In fact, Garrard’s prudence about the commodification of wilderness is not groundless. Steven Poole, a British author and

journalist, for instance, harshly criticizes nature writing as a form of bourgeois escapism (“Is our love”), and in response to this criticism, Mabey admits that “Nature has been commercialised and commodified, as day-trip redemption, off-prescription Prozac” (“Richard”).

Such concerns about the commodification of wilderness seem to be justifiable because the celebration of wilderness as an area of consolation where one might flee might do harm to the wilderness whether it is conceived as an area freed from human presence or not. Romantic poets had objected to the reification of wilderness as an object of study to be mastered by scientists and, thus, tended to praise it as a free-willed zone where human mind can reach relief. In their naive attempt to pay tribute to the wilderness, they might not have imagined the consequences of their loving attitude to it, though. With regards to the literary celebration of a traditional or preindustrial site and thus being complicit with its demise or commodification, Clark gives the example of the poem *Ossian* by Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736- 1796), which according to Clark, contributed to the popularisation of Scottish Highlands together with their assimilation into growing commercial networks including tourism (*The Cambridge* 99). Based on this example and previous examples related to the picturesque and sublime, it is plausible to suggest that any idealisation of wilderness as a recreational area inevitably gives rise to its instrumentalization as a touristic destination, which was certainly not the aim of Romantic poets.

1.7.5 Beyond Aesthetics

The concepts of picturesque, sublime and wilderness, which made their way into literature in the Romantic era, obviously attracted attention to nature and representation of nature in literary texts paving the way for ecocriticism in the long run. However, Williams underlines that no matter how intense the interest shown in nature was, Romantic poetry was indeed concentrated on man. The affirmation of nature was intended as the affirmation of man and his poetry (Williams 132). The following verses by Coleridge from his poem, “Dejection: An Ode” help to validate Williams’s point:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

And would we Ought behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element! (Coleridge)

According to Williams, in Romantic poetry, man's creative imagination and his desire to recreate man appear to be more important than nature itself (132). Clark, on the other hand, draws attention to the New World romanticism and states that in North America, too, the writings about the wild were in fact based on the question of identity, and the places such as deserts and forests were conceived as sites of identity crisis, places of religious insight or rite of passage (*The Cambridge* 25). Likewise, Scheese states that Romantic influence on nature writing was the increasing tendency to celebrate the self, leading particularly natural history writings to become more autobiographical (20). Focusing on Wordsworth's poetry, Garrard states that Wordsworth is generally more interested in the relationship between the non-human nature and the human than in nature itself (*Ecocriticism* 43). Thus, it is seen that the turn to nature in the Romantic period was found to be not for nature's sake, but for self's sake. Romantic poets' supposed self-centredness and negligence of social and political context in their approach to nature has been targeted particularly by Marxist critics.

For example, Wordsworth's poetry and the way he elaborates on nature have been criticized by Roger Sales. Sales thinks that particularly with his poem "Michael, a Pastoral Poem" Wordsworth produces a pastoral kitsch which contains no socio-political analysis, and which is ignorant of the hardships experienced by the shepherd Michael and his wife (qtd. in Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 40). Sales goes as far as to compare Wordsworth's poem to "cynical 'advertising boys' using images of a cheerful farmer's wife 'at work on an antique spinning wheel' to sell us 'old-fashioned, hand-knitted

socks” (40). Sales’s claim is that in this poem Wordsworth veils a harsh world where people are traded at hiring fairs and where feudal vassalage still prevails cruelly exploiting farmers (40). Garrard, on the other hand, disagrees with Sales’s criticism of Wordsworth and finds fault with the former for not appreciating the way Wordsworth portrays Michael as a man with profound attunement to his natural environment (40). Indeed, the following verses, to which Garrard refers, attest to his point:

Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and, oftentimes,
When others heeded not, he heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on Highland hills.
The Shepherd, at such warning, of his flock
Bethought him, and he to himself would say
‘The winds are now devising work for me!’ (Wordsworth)

Garrard adds that the shepherd’s responsiveness to the winds shows not only his ecological sophistication but also his skills to ensure the survival of his flock, which goes unnoticed in Sales’s remarks (40). In fact, Roger’s criticism of Wordsworth sounds harsh considering that Wordsworth does not offer a utopia. Wordsworth is aware of the severe conditions in the natural world and, as Bate claims, he even prefers his harsh northern landscape to the soft pastoral (*Romantic* 24). His following verses imply that nature might not always respond to a human in a human-friendly way.

Yet hail to you,
Your rocks and precipices, ye that seize
The heart with firmer grasp, your snows and streams
Ungovernable, and your terrifying winds,
That howled so dismally when I have been
Companionless among your shoulders. (qtd. in Bate, *Romantic* 24)

Wordsworthian pastoral does not provide a pre-lapsarian Eden, and with all the hardships it includes, his pastoral is differentiated from the pastoral of literary tradition (Bate, *Romantic* 22). On the contrary, in Wordsworth’s poetry, people work hard day and night and they have to learn to survive in nature with its winds and mists.

And, truly, at all times, the storm, that drives
The traveller to a shelter, summoned him
Up to the mountains: he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him, and left him, on the heights
So lived he till his eightieth year was past. (Wordsworth)

It is in fact possible to allege that Wordsworth's tone is not idyllic for two reasons: First, he covers the hardships that a shepherd may encounter. Second, especially towards the final verses, the shepherd and his wife's sufferings after the departure of their son signal a tragic ending. Nevertheless, Wordsworth's admiration of the shepherd's life is undeniable:

And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air; hills, which with vigorous step
He had so often climbed; which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
The certainty of honourable gain;
Those fields, those hills—what could they less? had laid
Strong hold on his affections, were to him
A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself. (Wordsworth)

Towards the end of the poem, it is revealed that the shepherd's son, who left for the city, "gave himself to evil courses: ignominy and shame". At this point, Wordsworth seems to be privileging the countryside over the city, which he associates with corruption. Sales criticizes Wordsworth for not mentioning the real political and

economic factors that caused consecutive tragic changes in the shepherd's life. By attributing 'change' to mysterious forces or 'strangers', Wordsworth is intentionally concealing the exploitation going on within his beloved Lakeland (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 41). Indeed, Sales's criticism of Wordsworth is typical of Marxist criticism of Romantic poetry. Marxist critics are of the opinion that a concern with nature helps to mystify the reality, which they define through socio-economic terms (42). Romantic conceptualisation of nature has been found problematic from a Marxist point of view, and Romantic pastoral is claimed to have overlooked the socio-economic problems in the countryside, unconditionally associated the city with the unethical and obscured the exploitation system that was in effect in the countryside.

On the other hand, Bate objects to such criticism. From his point of view, reading Wordsworth with the expectation that the poetry should attempt to solve political and social problems means forgetting Anton Chekhov's advice that art does not provide answers but poses questions in unusual ways (*Romantic* 12). Bate asks which is better: to tell a poet what he should have written about or to read a poet to enjoy and learn from his poetry (13). In fact, Bate's defence of Wordsworth goes beyond these interrogations about what art should do faced with socio-economic problems. Putting aside Marxist allegations that Romantic poetry generally remains indifferent to politics, Bate sees a political aspect in Wordsworth's work. Bate asserts that given that ecological problems have been made a matter of politics since 1980s, reading Wordsworth from the twentieth century helps to see that Wordsworth is indeed political in an ecological sense (5). Bate also maintains that Wordsworth, as a true nature poet, invited people to change the way they look at the natural world exerting a vital influence on our environmental consciousness (9). In Bate's opinion, Romantic poetry was political in the sense that it encouraged people to view the natural world from a new perspective. Romantic poets' call to live in harmony with nature did not match the political model people had been used to (19), but it was apparently an ideological call, and thus a political attitude.

Another political dimension that Bate sees in Wordsworth's poetry is the unalienated labour and sense of democracy the poet thought existed in the countryside.

The following verses, as Bate claims, demonstrates that Wordsworth considered the labourer working out in the fields as someone who would work in tune with nature:

Delicious, seeing that the sun and the sky,
The elements, and seasons in their change,
Do find their dearest fellow-labourer there,
The heart of man; a district on all sides
The fragrance breathing of humanity,
Man free, man working for himself, with choice
Of time, and place, and object (qtd. in Bate, *Romantic* 16)

Wordsworth points at the countryside as an area where one can reach freedom, control his/her own time and choose what to work with. Considering this, Wordsworthian pastoral seems to have a political dimension where one is not alienated from his/her labour. Furthermore, as a poet who visited democratic Swiss cantons and saw first-hand the elective assemblies, Wordsworth believed that a shepherd living in the mountains is no one's slave and learns to claim his rights and, as a consequence, he sees a connection between political emancipation and unity with nature (Bate, *Romantic* 24). From this perspective, it appears that in Wordsworth's poetry, one is not estranged from his labour in the countryside, and the life in the countryside is suitable for democracy because a shepherd as a free man living in the mountains already knows his right. In fact, not only Wordsworth but Romantics in general imagined villages as small-scale republics of free men living amidst the untamed forms of nature, and Coleridge and Robert Southey even attempted to establish a 'pantisocratic' commune along the Susquehanna River (Bate, *The Song* 40). However, the depiction of the countryside as a democratic paradise has been criticized by Williams, who draws attention to the inequalities in the rural areas mainly related to the landownership and cruel working conditions (102).

Bate's praise of Wordsworth for his ecologically political attitude much ahead of his time might have contributed to the defence of Romantic poetry against Marxist criticism. However, as mentioned earlier, Romantic poetry still had to face the criticism which found it more self-centred than eco-centred. Focusing on Wordsworth, Garrard accepts that Wordsworth spent more time on reflecting his own and other people's responses to nature than describing nature, but he also reminds that the nature

Wordsworth praised was not as polluted and vulnerable as the nature today (*Ecocriticism* 73). Thus, Wordsworth's preoccupation with human response to nature in place of nature itself could be seen as a consequence of the way of thinking of his time, which was centred on self rather than nature, which was then not under such a big threat as it is now. Besides, it would be unjust to denigrate entire Romantic poetry on the grounds that it supposedly privileged self to nature. Garrard points at John Clare as a Romantic poet who had a better claim to be a true nature poet than Wordsworth (44). In fact, Williams also maintains that "Clare shared many of the insights of the modern 'green movement'... He insisted that man does not own the earth and is not entitled to do whatever he likes with it. Instead, he must treat it as a responsible steward, for his own sake and that of the other species ... which also have a right to exist" (qtd. in Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 46). The following verses from "To A Fallen Elm" show that Clare truly cared about the non-human nature and saw the interconnectedness in nature:

Old Elm that murmured in our chimney top
The sweetest anthem autumn ever made
And into mellow whispering calms would drop
When showers fell on thy many coloured shade
And when dark tempests mimic thunder made
While darkness came as it would strangle light
With the black tempest of a winter night
That rocked thee like a cradle to thy root
How did I love to hear the winds upbraid
Thy strength without while all within was mute
It seasoned comfort to our hearts desire
We felt thy kind protection like a friend
And pitched our chairs up closer to the fire
Enjoying comforts that was never penned

Old favourite tree thoust seen times changes lower
But change till now did never come to thee
For time beheld thee as his sacred dower

And nature claimed thee her domestic tree
Storms came and shook thee with aliving power
Yet stedfast to thy home thy roots hath been
Summers of thirst parched round thy homely bower
Till earth grew iron—still thy leaves was green
The children sought thee in thy summer shade
And made their play house rings of sticks and stone
The mavis sang and felt himself alone
While in thy leaves his early nest was made
And I did feel his happiness mine own
Nought heeding that our friendship was betrayed (John Clare)

Clare refers to the comforting effect of the elm tree on humans, but the relationship between the elm tree and human is not his main concern. He portrays the elm tree in its entirety, including the effect of seasonal changes on it. Thus, he spends a considerable amount of time on describing the tree. He also alludes to the mavis nesting in the branches of the elm tree and says that he shares the bird's feelings. When viewed from this aspect, Clare appears to be in an effort to feel like the human's "other". Garrard indicates that in his poem "The Lament of Swordy Well" Clare even tries to ventriloquise an inhuman voice:

Though Im no man yet any wrong
Some sort of right may seek
And I am glad if een a song
Gives me the room to speak (qtd. in Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 46)

According to Garrard, Bate sees in Clare a deep ecologist speaking for unenclosed nature (*Ecocriticism* 47). Given that Clare attempts to speak for the enclosed land in "The Lament of Swordy Well", his approach to nature is not man-centred, at all.

There was a time my bit of ground
Made freemen of the slave
The ass no pinard dare to pound
When I his supper gave
The gipseys camp was not afraid

I made his dwelling free
Till vile enclosure came and made
A parish slave of me. (Clare)

Bate observes that Clare interlinks the rights of the land, the ass and the gypsy (*The Song* 171). Similarly, Hutchings indicates that in “The Lament of Swordy Well”, there is “a holistic sense of care for the welfare of ecosystems” (188). In this sense, Clare seems to have internalised the ecological thinking long before the environmentalist movement took the stage. In fact, Clare had such an ecocentric mindset that he asked for freedom for all living things. In a passage about a wounded peregrine falcon, he writes: “They tyed a piece of tar marling to one of its legs & tetherd it in a barn w[h]ere they kept it 3 or 4 days when it knawd the string from its leg & effected its liberty” (qtd. in Bate, *The Song* 171). Clare’s concern about the peregrine falcon’s freedom is clearly against the idea that conceptualized animals as soulless machines. According to Hutchings, in addition to Clare, several Romantic poets supported the idea that humans must treat animals compassionately, and they gave room to the non-human in their poems whether or not they defended animal rights *per se*, causing even the Parliament to outlaw cruel treatment of cattle and discredit bullbaiting and cockfighting (186- 87). In this regard, some Romantic poets, primarily Clare, showed signs of biocentrism,²² invalidating the criticism that Romantic poetry was centred on the lonely wanderer’s quest for authenticity and self in nature.

All in all, Romanticism has obviously shaped our view of the non-human nature. With the romantic turn to the non-human, the latter stopped being a soulless subject of study. Some Romantic poets inclined to aestheticise the non-human with their veneration of the picturesque and sublime, and they have been blamed for maintaining the otherizing human gaze and privileging the sites or species that look appealing to the human eye. Some poets, particularly transcendentalists in North America, tended to retreat to the wilderness to search for authenticity, and they have been discredited for seeking something that never existed and ignoring indigenous peoples who had already been inhabiting an area which was wilderness to the white settlers. Some went to the

²²Biocentrism is defined as an “ethical perspective holding that all life deserves equal moral consideration or has equal moral standing” (DesJardins).

countryside to live in a supposedly democratic setting, where one can enjoy his/her liberties in harmony with the non-human nature, and they have been disregarded for eulogizing the pastoral and turning a blind eye to the socio-economic inequalities that had calcified in the countryside since at least feudalism. Some chose to wander in nature and contemplate the landscape to reach a true self, and they have been denigrated for being egoists who do not care about socio-political problems or non-human nature. Thus, Romanticism has been criticized from numerous aspects. However, especially since the environmental movement of the 1970s, there has been an effort to pay tribute to the Romantics, for it is now acknowledged that environmentalism owes much to them. Thus, in British nature writing, Romanticism has had a very important role, and as it will be seen in the next chapter, if contemporary British nature writing stands on the shoulders of a long history dating back to Antiquity and even earlier, Romanticism weighs heavily with this deeply rooted tradition.

CHAPTER 2

New Nature Writing in Britain

2.1 Twentieth Century Nature Writing in Britain

In the twentieth century British nature writing was mostly trivialized and the respect afforded to the genre in the Romantic and Victorian literature was hard to find (Hampton 1). As Macfarlane puts it, “For much of the twentieth century in the UK, writing about wildlife or the countryside was regarded with suspicion tending to contempt” (“New Words” 166). Clark states that in the 1980s there was a consensus in British literary criticism that “Nature was only a spurious topic in literature, that any account of the natural world in poetry embodied a mode of false consciousness, an evasion of real political issues” (*The Cambridge* 15). In fact, discussions around nature writing had appeared earlier even among Romantic poets themselves, who are known for their love of nature. For example, John Clare harshly criticized John Keats for metropolitan sentimentality (Mabey, “Richard”). Clare himself wrote on natural world and rural life (“John Clare”), but he blamed Keats for idealising nature: “The descriptions of scenery are very fine, but ... he often described nature as she appeared to his fancies and not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he described” (qtd. in Canton 13). As it is seen, romanticisation of nature was a point that even a Romantic poet criticized. Also, Macfarlane reminds us of Oscar Wilde's 1889 contemptuous remark about landscape appreciation: “Nobody of any real culture ever talks nowadays about the beauty of sunset. Sunsets are quite old fashioned. To admire them is a distinct sign of provincialism of temperament” (“Only Connect”).

Nature writers of the twentieth century were dismissed for being nostalgic for a Britain that never existed (Hampton 455). One of the reasons why the genre was not welcome in the twentieth century was the attack from writers like Stella Gibbons and Evelyn Waugh (Hampton 454). Alexander J. B. Hampton informs that Gibbons, with her comedic novel *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932), offered a pastiche of countryside novels by writers like Hardy, Lawrence and Brontë sisters (454). In this book, Gibbons caricatured nature writers as “steeple-climbers in flight from the high waters of modernity” (qtd. in MacFarlane, “Call”). There was also Evelyn Waugh who “skewered the plush prose of country diarists in his novel *Scoop* (1938)” with expressions such as

“feather-footed through the plashy fen passes the questing vole”” (MacFarlane “New Words” 167). Such a mocking attack on nature writers has been shared by many other critics and commentators over the past 70 years (MacFarlane, “Call”).

Williams’s *The Country and the City* (1973) is also claimed to give permission to the dismissal of pastoral writing clouding the recognition of post-pastoral literature (Stenning and Gifford 1). As mentioned in the previous chapter, in this book, Williams criticizes the idyllic and stereotypical representation of rural life as opposed to the hostile representation of the urban life and claims that such an idealized representation of the rural area caused the social and economic inequities and the exploitation of natural and human resource to be neglected (Johnson and Howley 146-47). Though *The Country and the City* apparently has a Marxist agenda in its approach to writing about the countryside and though it hailed a change pre-setting the tone of nature writing in twenty-first century, it might have caused question marks to hang over twentieth century nature writing due to its strongly valid arguments. After all, as Garrard underlines, Marxist criticism has challenged even British ecocritics, let alone nature writers themselves (*Ecocriticism* 48).

For decades after Gibbons and Waugh, nature writing seemed self-indulgently sentimental in its longing for oneness with the natural world (Macfarlane “New Words” 167). In addition to exaggerated sentimentalism, Anna Stenning and Terry Gifford also mention its lack of philosophical sophistication in explaining the dismissal of nature writing in the twentieth century: “Writing about the British countryside and rural life dwindled in the mid-to-late twentieth century, perhaps due in part to critical association with sentimentalism, or a lack of philosophical sophistication, while the international and urban travel narrative produced bumper crops” (1). Stenning and Gifford point out the problems intrinsic to the genre of nature writing as well: “Finding a structure for a series of narratives about the external environment is problematic. It runs the risk of sounding, to the sceptical British ear, inauthentic and stagy on the one hand, or indulgently personal and egocentric on the other” (1). In fact, this problem relates to the question of whether nature writing should be scientific or personal. Within the tradition of nature writing, be it in the UK or USA, there has been a divergence of views as to the objectivity of nature writers. As mentioned earlier, such clash of ideas was observed in

the Romantic period, too. Canton reminds us of the tension between Clare and Keats: Clare spent years wandering in his locale and attached importance to the law of observation in writing about nature, which provided him with exactitude and expertise in his depiction of nature, while Keats wrote in all emotions (13). Jos Smith informs us that writers like Jim Perrin prefer brute facts and are disturbed by the way aesthetics distort facts while there is also a tendency that opposes the endorsement of nature as an object as if it was something that we could know the true character of through science (*An Archipelagic* 114-15). The lack of a shared attitude among the practitioners of nature writing about whether the genre should be entrusted to a scientific eye or a personal experience might have prevented its establishment in a confident way.

In brief, nature writing has been cartooned variously as reactionary ruralism or as sentimentalism for a prelapsarian age of at-one-with-natureness, and all this hostility caused nature writing to be threatened with extinction in Britain (MacFarlane, "Call"). Macfarlane notes: "Since Gibbons, it has been increasingly hard to write about 'nature' with a straight face, and to expect a serious reception in Britain" ("Call"). As a result, the public voice of the individual who attempts to interact with nature has been gradually replaced by the objective voice of the expert, which left nature writing to scientists (Hampton 455). In other words, twentieth century British nature writing was shaped more by naturalists, geologists and biologists than by writers (455).

What has discouraged nature writers of the era from writing their personal experience in nature from a subjective perspective could be the tension between scientific and aesthetic tendencies in nature writing. Smith underlines that there is an awkward debate between fact and aesthetics that has haunted nature writers (*An Archipelagic* 115). Underlying this debate, Smith sees Raymond Williams's description of the country writing of the twentieth century: "All through our own century we have had country writing that moves, at times grossly, at times imperceptibly, from record to convention and back, until these seem inextricable" (261). According to Smith, in Williams's understanding, record is the attempt to represent the real lives of those living in rural areas including the hardships, while convention is the projection of a literary and metropolitan fancy onto rural life (*An Archipelagic* 115). Nature writing seems to have been driven into a tight corner by a purely objective eye on the one side and a

sentimental personal eye on the other. In this bipolar state accompanied by bitter criticism, the practitioners of the twentieth century nature writing might have felt discouraged.

Though the criticism targeting twentieth century British nature writing sounds bitter, it is an unignorable fact that British nature writing remained weak compared to American nature writing of the same era. In Macfarlane's view, the reason why nature writing did not flourish in Britain of the twentieth century is twofold:

Tradition's decline might be laid at the door of the kind of selfhood that has come to predominate in Britain: an acrid mixture of the acquisitive-materialist and the secular-humanist, which regards "nature" as a commodity, in no way connected with human enterprise. It might also be linked with changing employment patterns, which mean that more people work further away from where they live and move more frequently... and there is a diminished sense of interest in any place in particular, outside one's immediate, and often temporary, domestic sphere. ("Call")

Additionally, the nationalistic tone in nature writing of the English landscape of the 1930s, which Smith mentions in the introduction to his PHD thesis titled *An Archipelagic Environment: Re-Writing the British and Irish Landscape, 1997-2012* (2012), deserves attention. In his dissertation, Smith highlights the archipelagic character of British nature writing and claims that nationalistic tone could be a restrictive factor against the burgeoning of the genre in the twentieth century. Smith writes: "The myth of nationalism seems unshakeable from the landscape painting and literature of the 1930s and, of course, only intensifies with the onset of the Second World War" (*An Archipelagic* 13). To him, unifying enthusiasms of the 30s tended to collect all nature representations together under the aegis of a "search for England", which he finds oppressive (17). If the objective of nature writing is set as "to reach a unified England", the ideal of a united territory might overshadow the concerns about nature. In fact, considering that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland went through devolution in 1997, which caused the transfer of some powers from central to regional bases ("A guide"), Smith seems to be right in touching upon the inappropriateness of a nationalistic tone within British nature writing, especially when it

is dedicated to the praise of the landscape of England only. As he underlined, the meaning of Britain became less certain after Scotland and Wales voted for partial devolution (“An Archipelagic” 9). Given the gradual loss of imperial power and a weakened sense of unity in Britain as well as the global character of the ecological problems the planet has been suffering more and more intensely since the Industrialisation, Anglo-centred nationalism would apparently make no significant contribution to the development of British nature writing as a genre.²³ As Smith puts it, “Somewhere between thinking globally and acting locally, nationalism gets lost. This is something felt especially strongly in Britain at this time since it had seen the partial devolution of Scotland and Wales in 1997, an actual decentring of power that ought to be seen on a continuum with the fall of the British Empire overseas” (*An Archipelagic* 24). Thus, such a nationalistic perspective might have slowed down the development of British nature writing, especially in the first half of the twentieth century.

Kerridge noted in an interview that the popularity of nature writing in Britain has fluctuated throughout its long history, with a decline after the Second World War (“Interview” 137). According to Kerridge, nature writing was popular in the inter-war period as soldiers who survived the first war turned to the love of wild nature, which resulted in the genre to be associated with war trauma (137). After the second war, however, the genre lost its appeal because the ideological context was marked by war-related concerns such as a desperate wish to avoid another war with Germany (137). As detailed below, Nan Shepherd had abstained from getting *The Living Mountain* published in the aftermath of the war, and Shepherd’s experience both exemplifies and justifies Kerridge’s point about the influence of the war on ideological context. Nature writing in Britain was apparently suspended under the weight of the war.

²³ It should be recognized that while the merging of nationalism and a love for the landscape might not be applicable to today’s Britain due to its fragmented structure, it has been embraced by former colonies as a strategy to claim their identities. Franklin Ginn claims that in many post-colonial states, there is an effort to construct national identity on nature as something outside and antecedent to culture and the colonial project (335). To be more specific, the concept of eco-nationalism, where the imagination of a certain territory and nature becomes the bedrock of how the nation itself is construed, has proved to be an important aspect in decolonization and is particularly welcome in India as part of Hindu nationalism. For more information, please consult Owen Ellerkamp’s award-winning article “Purifying the Sacred: How Hindu Nationalism Reshapes Environmentalism in Contemporary India” (2018).

The relatively weaker outlook of twentieth century British nature writing does not mean that there was no work at all that merited appreciation. According to Macfarlane, J. A. Baker's *The Peregrine* (1967) and Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (1977) are examples of the twentieth century nature writing masterpieces. In his review of *The Peregrine*, Macfarlane claims that

No other book – save perhaps Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*, which stands as *The Peregrine*'s golden twin, offering light to its darkness, relation to its depletion – has been so influential on the recent British literature of landscape. Roger Deakin, Tim Dee, Kathleen Jamie, Richard Mabey, Helen Macdonald, James Rebanks and I are among the many to have acknowledged its force. (“Violent Spring”)

Canton also accepts the importance of *The Peregrine* as a twentieth-century classic of nature writing. To him, *The Peregrine* is a pioneering work for the twenty-first century nature writing because “it is a work that ticks all Cowley's requirements for new nature writing: powerfully voice-driven and wildly experimental in form. Sections of the work operate as a scientific guide to the species ... Elsewhere, there are moments where the emotive intensity of the text reaches a ranting pitch” (15). Similarly, Mark Newton acknowledges the power of *The Peregrine*, which has been “revered by contemporary writers such as Macfarlane, Richard Mabey and Ted Hughes as a classic of twentieth century non-fiction”, as a book that teaches readers to look at natural world with a renewed approach rejecting the idea that one needs to escape into the woods to appreciate nature.

Baker can also teach us that to experience this bliss of connecting with the natural world, we do not need to become Henry David Thoreau and build a cabin in the woods ... In fact, in any landscape, we can discover remarkable experiences if we look at things with a renewed sense of passion. We, too, may eventually see the natural world through the eyes of other species. (“The Peregrine”)

Likewise, *The Living Mountain* written by Nan Shepherd, a Scottish mountaineer and poet and a true lover of the Cairngorms, a mountain range in the eastern highlands of Scotland, deserves special attention in the way it is a pioneering

book in nature writing. In the introduction to the book, Macfarlane informs us that Shepherd wrote *The Living Mountain* in the closing years of the Second World War, but she had it published in 1977 probably because she was discouraged by the novelist, Neil Gunn, with whom she regularly corresponded and who said that it would be difficult to find a publishing house willing to publish it (xii-xiii). In the aftermath of a world war, a book written on a mountain range without referring to the war except for the image of plane crashes and blackout nights and without giving much place to human characters could not have received appraisal especially considering that Shepherd wrote about the mountain range because she just loved it not because what the mountain gave her or its inhabitants. “The talking tribe, I find, want sensation from the mountain ... Yet, often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him” (Shepherd 15). As can be inferred from this statement, Shepherd values the mountains merely for what they are.

MacFarlane says that *The Living Mountain* is a book which embodies ecological principles without being overtly environmental (“Introduction” xxiv). I will go so far as to claim that *The Living Mountain* is the embodied form of “new materialisms”, the recent trend in ecocriticism, although Shepherd wrote it nearly six decades prior to the establishment of ecocriticism in academia and almost eight decades before the rise of new materialisms that signal the material turn in environmental humanities. In the foreword she wrote in 1977 to her manuscript dating from late 1930s, Shepherd alludes to the mountain’s “strength”, “substance”, “structure” and “weathers” and says: “It is fundamental to all that man does to it or on it. If it were not there, he would not have done these things” (x1iii). This echoes “the theory of ‘agential realism’ developed by the feminist thinker and quantum physicist Karen Barad—one of the key-figures of the new materialisms—in her ground-breaking work *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007)” (Ioviono and Oppermann, “Material Ecocriticism” 77). According to the theory of agential realism, which rejects the idea that agency can only be associated with intentionality, therefore with human intelligence, matter is a generative becoming, not a static or passive substance or being (77). In that aspect, because Shepherd does not instrumentalise the Cairngorms as something aesthetic that serves to please her but

recognizes their ontological status by declaring that “a mountain has an inside” (16), it is possible to conclude that in *The Living Mountain*, the Cairngorms stand as an active agent with all the beauties and dangers they host.

Shepherd clearly had a non-anthropocentric tone at a time while the rest of nature writing, which had already been coloured by a nationalistic tone, was associated with war trauma. Her mismatch with her time becomes evident also in the book’s materialist aspect. MacFarlane notes that *The Living Mountain* is “so full of life, death, body, gusto, touch and –subtly–sexuality. To Shepherd, being on the mountain is a profoundly physical experience” (xxvii). That Shepherd frequently shares her bodily, sensory and material experiences in the Cairngorms reminds us of again new materialisms. With the material turn that objected to the dematerialization of the world by postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, the new interest in matter has “emphasized the need for recalling the concreteness of existential fields with regard to bodily dimension and to non-binary object-subject relations” (Oppermann and Iovino, “Material Turn” 76). Shepherd seems to have embraced this bodily dimension and rejected mind/body opposition much before what is called material turn in humanities: “I began to see that our devotions have more to do with our physiological peculiarities than we admit. I am a mountain lover because my body is at its best in the rarer air of the heights and communicates its elation to the mind” (Shepherd 7). Macfarlane also thinks that the attention paid to body by Shepherd has contemporary relevance:

More and more of us live more and more separately from contact with nature. We have come increasingly to forget that our minds are shaped by the bodily experiences of being in the world –its spaces, textures, sounds, smells and habits– as well as by genetic traits we inherit and ideologies we absorb. We are literally losing touch, becoming disembodied, more than in any previous historical period. Shepherd saw this process starting over sixty years ago, and her book is both a mourning and a warning. (“Introduction” xxxi)

In the introduction to *The Living Mountain*, Macfarlane indicates that *The Peregrine* and *The Living Mountain* are similar in the way they share “a compressive intensity, a generic disobedience, a flaring prose-poetry and an obsession (ocular, oracular) with the eyeball”, and he calls these two books “remarkable twentieth-century

British studies of a landscape” (xiii). Indeed, both *The Peregrine* and *The Living Mountain* utterly deserve to be called twentieth century masterpieces of British nature writing as the former urges us to look at nature with a renewed attitude through the eyes of other species and the latter invites us to recognize the ontological status of the non-human and reconnect not with the non-human nature only but with our bodily existence as well. Even though the conditions in Britain were not ripe enough to appreciate the value of these books in the twentieth century, it would not be bold to claim that with the characteristics they display, these two books are the forerunners of what is going to be called “new nature writing” by some critics in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the Nan Shepherd Prize, which was launched in the summer of 2019, with the aim of finding underrepresented voices in nature writing honouring the legacy of Nan Shepherd is already a proof that Shepherd was a forerunner. As the organization committee acknowledges, “Nan Shepherd is one of our most beloved authors and while her classic of nature writing *The Living Mountain* took three decades to first find a publisher, today the book is recognised as a masterpiece and Nan is inspiring a new generation of writers” (“A new”).

2.2 Anthropocene and New Nature Writing

With the turn of the twenty-first century, a group of writers began to challenge the view that nature writing should be strictly neutral and scientific, and they have been trying to rehabilitate British nature writing and the voice of the individual that interacts with nature (Hampton 455). Twenty-first century nature writers seem to have chosen their side in the above-mentioned opposition between facts and aesthetics in nature writing: They accept and embrace both. In fact, their positioning overlaps with Lyon’s tripartite definition of nature writing as a genre, which combines science, philosophy, and literature. According to Smith, in contemporary nature writing, what he prefers to call “archipelagic literature”, neither purely scientific nor purely personal method is welcome because “the distinctions between nature and culture are more blurred, as are the shifts in perspective between subjective, intersubjective and objective” (*An Archipelagic* 115).

Indeed, it is possible to say that twenty-first century nature writers are now confidently getting on the stage. Drawing attention to the renaissance that nature writing

has recently enjoyed in Britain, Macfarlane points at two factors: One is the disembodiment people are increasingly feeling as they are spending more and more time in air-conditioned environments, and the second is the global ecological crisis we are currently facing (“New Words” 167). Macfarlane brings utterly vital and urgent reasons to our attention in explaining why people are increasingly tending to read and write about nature. Obviously, people feel the need to reconnect with nature before it is too late.

There is apparently a bottom-up revival in British nature writing despite the discouraging remarks from the previous century. In today’s Britain, best-selling works are by nature writers such as Roger Deakin, Kathleen Jamie, Richard Mabey, Helen MacDonald and Robert Macfarlane, and this fresh attention can be regarded as a proof that “new nature writing” is now an established trope (Hubbard and Wilkinson 253). A very recent example of this dynamism in nature writing is *Diary of a Young Naturalist* (2020) by Dara McAnulty, a sixteen-year-old naturalist and environmental activist. McAnulty has been awarded the 2020 Wainwright Prize for UK nature writing, which is a major literary award created in memory of naturalist, author and traveller Alfred Wainwright, and he has become the youngest winner of a major literary prize (“Winners”). Of McAnulty’s book, Barkham writes: “There is a genuine buzz around his debut, a combination of nature book and memoir, a warm portrait of a close-knit family and a coming-of-age story” (“Natural Talent”). The increased interest in nature writing is reflected on the numbers, too. Cécile Beaufils draws attention to what she calls the return of British nature writing in the twenty-first century making a reference to the popularity of nature writing in Great Britain in numbers:

The Shepherd’s Life: A Tale of the Lake District (James Rebanks, 2015) has sold more than 160,000 copies as of 2016, while Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk* became a bestseller, generic categories notwithstanding, with 250,000 sales in 2016. Similarly, press coverage for the genre has also grown exponentially: *The Guardian* has devoted since 2005 at least one long, documented article per year to the topic, and since 2015, increased to at least six or seven articles. (“Nature Writing and Publishing”)

In addition, there are new organisations springing up like Two Ravens Press started in Isle of Lewis, Scotland in 2006 to publish books and a magazine on nature and Little Toller started in Dorset in 2008 to republish rural classics encouraging a line of new and young authors to respond to this tradition in their own way (Smith, *An Archipelagic* 30).

However, it is neither the sales figures nor the new publishing houses that have established new nature writing as an emerging genre. These developments may rather be interpreted as a sign that a new literary movement is on the way. Smith informs us that the literary movement known as “the new nature writing” began to be noticed in the popular press in 2007 (*An Archipelagic* 5). For example, Madeline Bunting indicates in her review, published in *The Guardian* in July 2007, of Mark Cocker’s *Crow Country* (2007) that a counter-cultural genre which advocates patient attentiveness to what is immediately around us and which calls for reconnection with nature in an age of virtual reality is emerging (“We”). Joe Moran underlines “that the term ‘new nature writing’ entered public consciousness in Britain in the late 2000s in a series of widely discussed books and a special edition of *Granta* magazine under that title” (49). It was the editor, Cowley, who first identified and named “new nature writing” in that 2008 special edition that covered Macfarlane’s *The Wild Places* (2007), Kathleen Jamie’s *Findings* (2005), Mark Cocker’s *Crow Country* and Richard Mabey’s *Nature Cure* (2005) (Smith 3). What Cowley meant by new nature writing as opposed to old nature writing was clarified as follows:

When we began to commission articles for this issue we were interested less in what might be called old nature writing – by which I mean the lyrical pastoral tradition of the romantic wanderer – than in writers who approached their subject in heterodox and experimental ways. We also wanted the contributions to be voice-driven, narratives told in the first person, for the writer to be present in the story, if sometimes only bashfully. The best new nature writing is also an experiment in forms: the field report, the essay, the memoir, the travelogue. (10)

In fact, this special edition of the British literary magazine with such an introduction is claimed to have marked the establishment of a movement that has grown exponentially (Hampton 455).

Smith indicates that the movement began to receive academic interest through publications in academic journals and with David Matless's paper "Nature Voices" (*An Archipelagic* 6). Matless, a professor of cultural geography reviewed Mark Cocker's *Crow Country* (2007), Roger Deakin's *Wildwood* (2006), Mabey's *Beechombings* (2007) and Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (2007) and qualified these four books as "'nature voices' in their speaking up for things animal, vegetable or mineral ... with reflexivity concerning past conventions of nature writing and attention to uncertain boundaries of culture and nature" (178-79). Matless claims that these books foreground a current British context and draws attention to their widespread press coverage, which could be signalling a new nature bandwagon in a time of anxiety over local and planetary futures (179). Considering the works included in the special edition of *Granta*, Cowley also accentuates the anxiety felt by authors and says that the authors in the edition all have the feeling that we are devouring our world and humankind has no land or ecosystem left untouched by its members (9). In other words, twenty-first century British nature writing seems to be marked by a feeling of anxiety about nature and human disconnection from nature.

Lilley points out that the reason new British nature writing is new is both because of the unmatched scale of environmental harm and the distinctively new ways British authors have chosen to write in response to this unprecedented harm (4). Indeed, the 2019 UN report certifies the unequalled harm caused by humans to nature:

Around 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history. The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened. ("UN report")

The current ecological crisis has evidently worried and upset millions of people, and one of the most striking examples of this anxiety is Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager who stood against politicians' passiveness vis-à-vis climate change. Known to be an introverted child, Thunberg decided to strike every day until the Swedish national elections and made a speech in front of thousands of people at a People's Climate

March rally following the hot Swedish summer in 2018 (Watts). She has even made her parents change their lifestyle in a way to reduce their ecological footprint and more and more people from around the world have joined her strike (Crouch). Thunberg was once a timid girl, but now she stands as a climate change activist who defends the right to life of the non-human and the human. As her case shows, reactions against human-made environmental harm have spread out to the youth and even children.

In fact, the disruption caused by human species in the planet has reached such an extent that “we are told now that we have entered the ‘Anthropocene’, a new geological epoch characterized by our impacts on the land, the oceans and the atmosphere” (Smith, *The New* 12). Anthropocene can simply be defined as “the Earth’s most recent geologic time period as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic, based on overwhelming global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans” (“Welcome”). It was in the year 2000 when the term Anthropocene was first proposed by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme’s (IGBP) newsletter to describe the new geological epoch that humanity had driven the world into (“Have”). Crutzen and Stoermer mark the latter part of the eighteenth century as the starting point of Anthropocene because the data retrieved from glacial ice cores show the beginning of a growth in the atmospheric concentrations of several “greenhouse gases” then (“Have”). Since 1945, human development has been in “The Great Acceleration” as it is called, and, as a result of our species’ way of life, the planet has begun to operate outside the traceable parameters of the Holocene, which covers a time span of the last 11, 500 years (Smith, *The New* 13).²⁴Crutzen and Stoermer list just a few of the many human impacts on the planet:

During the past 3 centuries human population increased tenfold to 6000 million, accompanied, for example, by a growth in cattle population to 1400 million... Urbanisation has even increased tenfold in the past century. In a few generations mankind is exhausting the fossil fuels that were generated over several hundred million years ... 30-50% of the land surface has been transformed by human

²⁴Though it is commonly agreed that Anthropocene dates to industrial revolution and the invention of the steam engine, some also argue that extensive agriculture and forest cleaning might have already changed the Earth significantly thousands of years ago (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 1).

action... Coastal wetlands are also affected by humans, having resulted in the loss of 50% of the world's mangroves. ("Have")

This alarming situation has inevitably had its consequences in our cultural understanding of nature. To illustrate, in August 2019, the world witnessed a funeral organized for *Okjökull*, the first glacier Iceland lost to climate change ("Iceland mourns"). The funeral was attended by around one hundred people including Iceland's Prime Minister, Katrín Jakobsdóttir and the former UN human rights commissioner Mary Robinson who all left a plaque on the mountain with a letter to the future saying "Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it" ("Iceland holds"). This anthropomorphic commemoration project, which is apparently marked by self-awareness, guilt feelings and anxiety, may be seen as a shift in our understanding of our species and non-human nature as well as a belated acceptance of the harm we caused to the planet.

To give an example of the shift in our understanding of nature in academia, Smith alludes to Bill McKibben, an American environmentalist, author, and journalist, who says that "to continue to behave as if 'Nature' were eternal and separate from us would be fatal" (qtd. in *The New* 13). Another recent example of the acceptance of the Anthropocene would be Christian HummelsundVoie's PHD thesis, *Nature Writing of the Anthropocene* (2017). In this study, Voie basically argues that American nature writing has moved from traditional narratives of retreat to narratives of confrontation in the age of Anthropocene when writers have recognized the harm caused by human species on the planet and offer a kind of warning (2). Voie's study aims at showing that writers, who write with anthropocenic²⁵ awareness, have developed new responses to ecological crisis: "The nature writing of the Anthropocene takes place in a world now widely recognized as deeply affected by industrial humanity across various scales, where conventional motifs such "retreat" or "escape" or "refuge" in mainly nonhuman environments are no longer possible" (2).

²⁵Anthropocenic is used by Christian Hummelsund Voie as an adjective form of the word Anthropocene.

In fact, the response to the ecological crisis has already found its place in academia. In his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), Buell reports that “The environmental turn in literary and cultural studies emerged as a self-conscious movement little more than a dozen years ago” (1). Cheryll Glotfelty, whose book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) is accepted to be a pioneering work in the field of ecocriticism, draws our attention to the foundation of Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992 and establishment of a new journal, ISL (interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment) in 1993 to mark the start of ecological literary study as a recognizable critical school in the USA (xvii). The British counterpart of ASLE, ASLE-UK, now UKI with the inclusion of Ireland, was founded in 1998 (“Association”). In Britain, Jonathan Bate deserves credit for pioneering the practice of ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies in 1990s (Hutchings 173). Since 1990s, ecocriticism has been growing as an increasingly heterogeneous movement around the world (Buell, *The Future* 1). The gains of the twentieth century have obviously continued into the twenty-first century. Clark notes that the situation of the physical world and its future condition have never been studied and mapped out that laboriously before (*The Cambridge* 110). New nature writing must have been influenced by this movement in literary studies and humanities.

The cries of the ordinary people who follow a teenager or who go out to commemorate a glacier as well as the growing academic interest in the state of the physical world show that there is an undeniable need for a new understanding of nature. This need has been further confirmed and shared by many people around the world, particularly since the outbreak of Covid-19 in December 2019. In fact, starting from the early days of the pandemic, several articles have been published by scientists and authors to invite people to revisit their approach to the natural world, not to mention the hundreds of social media posts that called for respect to the non-human. From the UN to World Economic Forum, several international organizations have agreed on the need to review our relationship with nature. To illustrate, the current President of the UN General Assembly, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande said: “Our experience with Covid-19 demonstrates that we, humanity, are not separate from the world around us... We will

only preserve Mother Earth through a paradigm shift from a human-centric society to an Earth-centred global ecosystem” (“Covid- 19”). Similarly, Lilley maintains that the new ecological crisis demands a new understanding of human-nature relations, and our growing awareness of anthropogenic environmental change has now led us to question our deeply established attitude to nature leading recent nature writing to become “new” (4). Also, Macfarlane looks at the bigger picture and notes: “A twenty-first century culture of nature has sprung up, born of anxiety and anger but passionate and progressive in its temperament, involving millions of people and spilling across forms, media and behaviours” (“Why”).

2.3 Environmental Movement and New Nature Writing

Although the term new nature writing is associated with twenty-first century writers who have shared concerns about nature and seek new ways to respond to the ecological crisis we are in, some critics think that new nature writing should be traced back to the environmental movement of the 1970s. Moran, for instance, dates the origins of new nature writing back to the environmental movement of the 1970s (50). In fact, Moran draws attention specifically to the oil crisis of 1973-4, which ended the long period of post-war growth and caused an increase in the popular interest in the natural world, as a historical moment out of which new nature writing emerged (55). Michael L. Ross states that the 73-4 oil embargo, imposed by members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries on western nations, caused the western public to go from assuming that oil was a cheap and limitless resource to fearing it would soon run out (“Americans”). Even after the oil embargo was lifted in 1974, oil prices remained high, and the effects of the energy crisis continued to be felt throughout the decade (“Energy Crisis”). This energy crisis, however, “gave the planet a life-saving head start” because people started to decrease their oil consumption and governments were forced to work on alternative energy sources (Ross, “Americans”). The high price of oil of the time forced importers to explore alternative energy sources, make changes in global energy policies and focus on energy efficiency. As an unexpected bonus, policies to conserve energy greatly reduced carbon emissions (“What We Gained”). The panic triggered by the oil embargo caused the public to change not only their attitude to a natural resource, which they had taken for granted, but also their

habits of consumption. Therefore, Moran evidently has a point in mentioning the 1973-74 energy crisis as the starting point of new nature writing, which also aims at a change in attitude and habits.

On the other side of the Atlantic, environmental epiphany had in fact started earlier. At this point, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) in transforming people's ideas of nature and awakening them to what humans have done to it. Scheese regards the publication of *Silent Spring* as one of the three paradigmatic moments in the rise of modern environmentalism along with the Earth's photo taken by Apollo astronauts and the popularization of wild places in America through visual arts (30-32). Likewise, William Howarth calls *Silent Spring* a landmark work for it stimulated "a sense of conscience about pesticides that poison ground water and destroy biodiversity" (74). Underlining that *Silent Spring* has been compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its social impact, Ralph H. Lutts asserts that never before has a book been so successful in alerting the public to a major environmental pollutant (210). The public debate triggered by *Silent Spring* quickly turned into a campaign against DDT and subsequently in 1968 Michigan banned it and regulated other pesticides as well (Dunlap 8). Beyond that, *Silent Spring* polarized government, science and industry, enabled people to see the world from a new perspective and caused the word "ecology" to become part of everyday vocabulary (Lear 28).

When Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, she was working as a biologist at the Fish and Wildlife Services (Lear 27). As a young girl, she was sent to Pennsylvania College for Women to study English, but after two years of study, she switched to biology and later on completed her master's degree in zoology (27). As her educational background reveals, Carson had both a scientific eye and literary skills. At the Fish and Wildlife Services, she was asked to write an introduction to a series of pamphlets for sea creatures, which made her dream of combining science and writing come true (25). Some think that the reason *Silent Spring* has proved to be so successful is Carson's literary skills as a scientist (Lutts 212). The comprehensibility of her arguments by common people may be another reason for this achievement. In Scheese's words, "The hallmark of the book is its lucid and authoritative style; Carson knew that to make an impact she had to write for the layperson and make clear the ecological relationships

affected by broadcast chemical applications” (32). In addition to this, the public’s readiness to ponder over ecological problems should be mentioned in explaining the book’s success. Lutts indicates that when *Silent Spring* was published, American public opinion had already been alarmed by anthropogenic environmental harm due to A-bomb testings and the radioactive fallout, namely the 1954 explosion when US super bomb was tested in the Pacific and the fallout was blown in an unexpected direction as a result of the wrong weather forecasts (Lutts 213). Hence, it can be said that *Silent Spring* came as a timely cry people needed to raise together. Long before the word Anthropocene became a current issue, Carson had bitterly made her warnings:

The most alarming of all man’s assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life. (*Silent*)

As Carson made it clear back in the 1960s, contamination of the environment is a global problem. What the US initially identified in terms of environmental pollution of the 50s and 60s was experienced in Europe and the UK only in the 70s, and the environmental movement undoubtedly gave rise to a change in the way people thought, read and wrote about the environment. Like Moran, Smith dates the emergence of new nature writing in Britain to the early 1970s, following the founding of Friends of the Earth UK at a time when an environmental movement began to spread via a fresh counterculture of activism and campaigning hitherto unheard of among traditional conservation bodies (*The New* 4). The first campaign organized by Friends of the Earth UK, bottle dump at Schweppes which aimed to return thousands of empty bottles to the London Headquarters of Cadbury Schweppes in 1971 and to promote re-use set the tone for a peaceful, eye-catching and effective style of campaigning (“Bottle”). Though this campaign did not force any change on Schweppes, their action triggered a tidal wave of mail and phone calls from would-be members or volunteers and positioned the newly-founded organisation as a credible voice in any environmental controversy from then on

(Lamb 39-40). Six years after this peaceful campaign, Stanley Race created the first bottle bank in the UK (“Bottle Bank”). Today, Friends of the Earth International, which was initiated by four organizations from France, Sweden, England and the USA, is the world’s largest environmental network (“About”). As the opening of the bottle bank and the gradual expansion of the community shows, Friends of the Earth triggered a positive change in people’s attitude and behaviour towards nature. In this sense, Smith has a point in tracing the origins of new nature writing back to the 70s because the practitioners of new nature writing have been seeking for a change in our approach to nature, too.

In addition to the founding of the Friends of the Earth UK, Smith highlights two more events in the last quarter of the twentieth century that caused a change in people’s cultural understanding of nature and paved the way for twenty-first century nature writing in Britain. The first is Tim Robinson’s move to the Aran Islands leaving behind him a successful career in London (Smith, *An Archipelagic* 7). Born in 1935 in Yorkshire, Timothy Drever, famously known as Tim Robinson, is a visual artist, author and mapmaker (Smith, “Anticipating” 285). Robinson was already a well-known artist of the London avant-garde when in 1972 he decided to move to the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland (285). The reason he chose to leave London was his dissatisfaction with the association of the art world with metropolitan life (Smith, *An Archipelagic* 9). Thus, he both turned his back on the city as a cultural centre and on visual arts as the medium in which he would work (Smith, “Anticipating” 285).

Robinson was against the idea that art works should necessarily be exhibited at museums or art galleries, and he was in search of new environments for art looking for a bridge between arts and the real world (Smith, *An Archipelagic* 9). When he went to the Aran Islands, he turned his attention to the topography and set out to produce maps. Smith informs that when Robinson “began to produce these maps it was out of an innocent curiosity as to whether it might be possible ‘to make amends’, correcting the misplacement of topographical features and the mistranslation and Anglicisation” (“Anticipating” 285). His interest in the Aran Islands went beyond mapping them: “He is now the author of a two-volume study of the Aran Islands, a three-volume study of Connemara, two editions of miscellaneous essays mostly exploring the same places, and

a volume of short fiction and experimental writings” (285). John Elder says his works now have their permanent place on the shelves as the scientifically informed, speculative and at the same time highly personal narratives of such earlier masters as Gilbert White and Henry David Thoreau (4). It can be inferred from Robinson’s move to the islands and his choice of making maps of and writing about the places where he lived that he valued material and physical world as much as he valued arts and literature. Smith interprets Robinson’s move as “a historically and culturally significant performance”, for a modernist artist was “stepping off the metropolitan avant-garde to live and write as an active member of the remote and rural community of a former colony” (*An Archipelagic* 10). Smith thinks this was an important moment because a modernist artist was embracing what was provincial and parochial without being drawn into nationalism, which was the prominent tone in nature writing back in the 1930s or into conservative English rural tradition that conflated nature, rural and England under the myth of F. R. Leavis’s “organic community” (*An Archipelagic* 12).²⁶ A modernist artist was in search of bridging the gap between arts and nature at a time when there was an ecological awakening. This clearly was a shift in the understanding of nature and arts, which would slowly lay the foundations of new nature writing.

The second important event Smith mentions, which may be interpreted as the extension of the 70s environmental movement into the 80s, is the establishment of Common Ground, an arts and environment organisation. As it is stated on its webpage, “Common Ground was founded in 1983 by Sue Clifford, Angela King and the writer Roger Deakin to seek imaginative ways to engage people with their local environment” (“Common”). Smith informs us that with their publication of *Second Nature*, the founders of Common Ground, namely Clifford and King, who had broken away from Friends of the Earth UK, made it clear that conservationists and environmentalists needed authors and artists in thinking about nature (*An Archipelagic* 15). As Clifford mentioned, they believed that “What is going to get us through is not

²⁶F.R Leavis argued that in spite of the growing impact of science and Industrial Revolution, there still existed up to the late nineteenth century in rural England local variations of the positive culture which had made Shakespeare and Bunyan possible. For more information on these supposedly deep-rooted and self-sufficient “organic communities” that Leavis thought to have existed, please see Bilan, R.P. *The Literary Criticism of F. R. Leavis*, Cambridge, 1979.

just science, politics and economics, but also humanity and imagination” (“Poetic”). Clifford explains the necessity of turning to artists by the wish to keep away from numbers, costs and financial values which the professional and the bureaucratic like to deal with as well as by the desire to liberate people into being poetic, being overtly passionate about their connection with nature (“Poetic”).

As its name also suggests, Common Ground was utterly in search of a common ground where all people, whether nature scientists or not, could think about and verbalize their personal experiences with and in nature without being forced to objective observation, and art was needed exactly at that point. As Macfarlane once argued, poetry might not save the world because literature “does not deal in deliverables”, but “it can stir the sediments of thought and morals” (“New Words” 167). Macfarlane acknowledges the power of literature in encouraging us to revise “our ethical relations with the natural world, shaping our place consciousness and our place conscience” (“Why”). At this point, it is helpful to remember Glotfelty’s argument. As she puts it, “Current environmental problems are largely of our own making, are, in other words, a by-product of culture” (xxi). Given that the crisis we are in has its origins in culture, we can have recourse to another cultural product, which is literature for a way out: “Literary scholars specialize in questions of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language, and it is in these areas that they are making a substantial contribution to environmental thinking” (Glotfelty xxii). Obviously, Common Ground wanted to rely on literature and art in changing the way people think about nature. As Smith notes, theirs was an effort to balance scientific preoccupations with subjective responses to the world (*An Archipelagic* 15).

In fact, the founders of Common Ground had been inspired by Richard Mabey’s *The Common Ground* (1980) (Smith, *An Archipelagic* 14). According to Smith, Mabey found it dangerous that conservation efforts focused solely on the rare and engendered species and invited the reader to think about the locally important and familiar forms of the landscape as well (14). In a way, this was a call to see the immediate nature around us. The influence of this invitation on Common Ground was that they turned their attention to the local. The members of Common Ground say: “The idea of local distinctiveness is at the heart of everything we do” (“Common”). To illustrate, one of

their earliest projects was the Parish Map projects which aimed to getting people across the country to create maps of their local environments together as communities (Smith, *An Archipelagic* 16). In another project, namely the recently launched Seasonal Schools project, Common Ground is working with several state primary schools in Dorset and Somerset to observe any effect seasonal change might have on children's daily learning experiences. To do so, they visit a nearby river or trees in the playground or nearby park familiar to children, watch and observe these places with them and return to see how they change as the seasons change ("What"). Common Ground is trying to direct the locals' attention to the local physically. Smith underlines that while promoting reconnection with the local and territorial specificity, Common Ground is not tempted by nationalism (*An Archipelagic* 17). In addition to their effort to bring science and art together in nature writing, it is also this appreciative attitude to the local that contributed to the shift in cultural understanding of nature. Common Ground helped to propagate the idea that nature is not far away in the woods or in the mountains but in and around us. That is the idea which is going to be supported by the practitioners of new nature writing like Kathleen Jamie and Katherine Swift as well.

Briefly, it can be argued that the decade of 1970s led to the emergence of a new understanding of nature as a result of the environmentalists' awakening to ecological problems and also because of the artists' and writers' search for bringing nature and art together. Williams's *The Country and the City* as well as Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside*, which were both published in 1973, can be seen as a written form of this environmentalist spirit though the former's Marxist approach to nature writing was not welcome by all.²⁷ Kerridge thinks that Williams's book, which was published before the term ecocriticism was used, stands among the forerunners of ecocriticism in literary studies and observes that it is a profoundly influential book about the literature of the borderlands between the rural and the urban from the Renaissance pastoral to the twentieth century (139). According to Smith, Williams's *The Country and the City* as well as Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside* would fundamentally change the way people thought and wrote about the landscape in Britain (*The New* 4). With his book

²⁷Please see part "2.1 Twentieth Century Nature Writing in Britain" above.

Williams challenged a particular form of wealthy, metropolitan nostalgia that idealized rural life, writes Smith (4). Mabey, on the other hand, challenged the tidy border between country and city turning a self-reflexive eye on the ambiguous terrain between the two through his book *The Unofficial Countryside* (4). Back in the 1970s, the idyllic representation of the countryside and the strictly drawn border between the rural and urban areas were, thus, brought up for discussion. In other words, the cultural atmosphere with regard to nature was changing through activism and cultural and literary criticism, which would inevitably contribute to the shaping of new nature writing.

2.4 Problems around the Term “New Nature Writing”

When a new genre is gradually taking shape, problems about its naming are expected. The term “new nature writing” has indeed been found unsatisfactory by several of its key practitioners like Kathleen Jamie, Richard Mabey and Robert Macfarlane (Moran 49). Mabey protests the use of the terms “recent nature writing” and “nature writers”, for he thinks they amount to homogenization (“In Defence”). According to Moran, the term is problematic because recent nature writings are “thematically wide-ranging and stylistically digressive, combining personal reflection with natural history, psychogeography, travel and topographical writing, folklore and prose poetry, which makes them difficult to categorise” (49).

Hubbard and Wilkinson also find the term “new nature writing” somewhat awkward because in their view most of the recent examples of nature writing seek to disrupt any neat binary between nature and culture (253). Referring to Richard Mabey’s, Robert Macfarlane’s and Kathleen Jamie’s discomfort about the term, Smith says that the anxiety felt by the writers results from the impression that the term nature writing separates the affairs of nature from the affairs of the country and the world (*The New* 15). The fact that the boundary between nature and culture has been blurred is a point shared by contemporary nature writers no matter how diverse methods and strategies they employ while they write about nature. As Lilley puts it, some writers think there is a need for a new terminology, with possibilities ranging from place writing and environmental literature to psychoecology, aimed at marking the interlinked cultural

and ecological engagement that is common in recent examples of British nature writing (3).

Smith, as previously mentioned, prefers the term *archipelagic literature* to new nature writing. Archipelagic paradigm in history and literature has indeed political imperatives underpinning it, which are “the challenge to binaries of centre and periphery; the forceful imposition of neglected perspectives on a dominant history steeped in colonialism and imperialism; the recovery of previously marginalized voices, authors, and texts; the insistence upon non-English vernacular languages; the correction of mistakes” (Coolahan 8). Similarly, Paul Stevens thinks that while talking about non Anglo-centric agendas, “devolution, the European Union, and the urgent need to come to terms with the consequences of largescale immigration, especially Asian immigration come to mind” (152). Thus, it can be argued that social and political factors are effective in the formation of archipelagic paradigm which aims to replace an anglocentric view of history.

John Kerrigan’s *Archipelagic English* (2008) seems to be challenging an anglocentric view of literature. By analysing the Anglophone literature of early modern period from a less Anglocentric perspective including works in Hiberno-English and Scots/Inglis as well as works translated from Welsh and Gaelic, Kerrigan offers to consider early modern England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales as not only geographically but also culturally and politically linked (Ivic 1). It can be claimed that the idea of cultural and political interconnectedness among England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, along with the geographical distinctiveness of each place, is what makes Smith prefer the term *archipelagic literature*. To Smith, the idea of archipelago allows us to be stripped off not only Anglocentrism, but also metropolitanism and at times anthropocentrism intensifying a feeling for the locale expanded to a whole network of locales, and thus contributes to the literary remapping that is currently underway (*An Archipelagic* 7-8). Smith sees the Atlantic archipelago both metaphorically and literally as “a rich and complex ecosystem of islands on the Atlantic edge with diverse cultures that are often as vulnerable to desecration as the range of natural habitats themselves” (8). Smith thinks that the word archipelagic does not privilege any one of the political powers and reveals the complex cultural relations over, across and between the islands

(“An Archipelagic” 9). Stenning and Gifford also agree with Smith: “By evoking local in terms of its distinctiveness, but also its interconnections, the archipelagic allows imaginative engagement with other places in a constant construction and reconstruction of culture” (2).

As a matter of fact, umbrella terms like “new nature writing”, “recent nature writing” or “archipelagic literature” may all sound problematic because each and every single work of literature merits separate attention and books may not easily be compressed into a single category. However, given that twenty-first century writers are currently in a kind of mobilization following the world-wide ecological movement, I find it important and necessary to try to frame and thus recognize recent British nature writing as an emerging genre even if it is at the expense of using a term which fails to satisfy all the contemporary representatives of nature writing. Besides, no matter how diverse the tones and approaches of recent nature writers are, they have shared concerns about human disconnection from nature (Moran 50), which makes it possible to study them under the same term however arguable it is. Moran argues that he needs to retain this problematic term because recent body of works that fall into this category is really new in the way they represent a critical engagement with the history of British nature writing as well as responding to the contemporary eco-political moment (50). After all, as Macfarlane says, “Nature writing is an unsatisfactory term for this diverse, passionate, pluriform, essential, reviving tradition - but it is the best there is, and it serves as a banner to march beneath” (“Call”).

Although Smith’s concerns related to Anglocentrism are shared, and the limitations of the term new nature writing are accepted, the term new British nature writing is used in this study to refer to the total of English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish writing about nature. New British nature writing is preferred in this dissertation simply because it is more commonly used to describe the books published in the United Kingdom in the new millennium.²⁸ Another reason for preferring new British nature writing to archipelagic literature is that the latter might be confused with the literature of other archipelagic countries while the focus of this study is on British literature

²⁸Even a simple Google search proves the popularity of the term “new nature writing”. When I entered the term “new nature writing” on Google search engine, it offered nearly 33.500 results in 0,61 second, while the term “archipelagic literature” yielded nearly 296 results in 0,51 second on 27 August 2019.

excluding postcolonial literatures. In addition, considering Lyon's tri-partite definition of nature writing, which covers natural history facts, personal responses and philosophical interpretations, nature writing is comprehensive enough to cover the books mentioned and analysed in this dissertation. Also, as detailed in this chapter, this study supports the view that there is a new vein in recent nature writing in the UK no matter how deeply it is rooted in the past and the idea of newness should, thus, be reflected in the term.

2.5 An Attempt to Topographize New Nature Writing

The term new nature writing can be accepted as "a banner to march beneath", but what falls under this banner is apparently a vast terrain. Thinking about the tradition of British nature writing, Canton asks: "How can we draw together this array of figures as they gaze upon rural Britain and take up their pens?" (12). In fact, there have been attempts to define or frame British nature writing. For example, Smiths states that the earliest usage he has found in England is "from 1922 in Alfred Richard Orage's *Readers and Writers: 1917-1921* which has a very brief chapter titled 'Nature in English Literature'" ("An archipelagic" 6). However, despite that early attempt and diverse articles and dissertations produced in the field, "the genre has tended to be critically undervalued in academic terms, and there is not yet a full-length study of British Nature Writing" ("Landlines"). At this point, Hampton's article titled "Post-secular Nature and the New Nature Writing" might be a good starting point to grasp new nature writing due to the topography it offers. According to Hampton, it is possible to talk about five regions in this literary topography (456- 57). The table below is an outline of his five-region topography:²⁹

²⁹The table was prepared by me based on Hampton's afore-mentioned article.

Table 1: Topography of New British Nature Writing

	Leading examples	Characteristics of the writing
familiar landscapes	Roger Deakin's <i>Waterlog: A Swimmer's Journey Through Britain</i> (1999) Kathleen Jamie's <i>Findings</i> (2005) and <i>Sightlines</i> (2012) Robert Macfarlane's <i>Wild Places</i> (2007) and <i>The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot</i> (2012) Philip Marsden's <i>Rising Ground: A Search for the Spirit of Place</i> (2014) William Atkins' <i>The Moor</i> (2014)	• focuses on a familiar landscape rendered afresh with the unfamiliar • articulates a version of the wild that goes beyond a simple notion of the untouched • describes both native and exotic settings, which reconditions the readers' view of the landscape, and rewrites their place within nature • concerned with the way we know places, not just the places themselves, and includes the human geography of history, folklore and etymology, interwoven with natural history
single space	Stephen Moss's <i>Wild Hares and Hummingbirds: The Natural History of an English Village</i> (2010) John Stempel-Lewis' <i>Meadowland: The Private Life of an English Field</i> (2014) and <i>The Running Hare</i> (2016) Mark Cocker's <i>Claxton: Field Notes from a Small Planet</i> (2014) Rob Cowen's <i>Common Ground</i> (2015)	• pace dictated by a single place • depicts an intimate relationship between the writer and the location, and cultivates a deep connection for the reader • demonstrates the exponential and overwhelming complexity and depth of a single place offering a deep sense of humanity's embeddedness in nature

excursion	Richard Mabey's <i>Nature Cure</i> (2005) Helen Macdonald's <i>H is for Hawk</i> (2014) Amy Liptrot's <i>The Outrun</i> (2016) Katherine Norbury's <i>The Fish Ladder: A Journey Upstream</i> (2015) Michael McCarthy's <i>Moth Snowstorm: Nature and Joy</i> (2015)	- the natural world serving as a cure for individual dealing with the experience of crisis, not as the place for the projection of one's emotions, but as the space whereby a perspective is gained, and a new meaning, in the context of nature, is discovered - shock of death overcome as one re-attunes to the cycle of life - alienation or depression overcome through a restored sense of participation - rich fecundity of nature overcoming the poverty of urban indifference
particular animal species	Mark Cocker's <i>Crow Country: A Meditation on Birds, Landscape and Nature</i> (2008) Tim Dee's <i>The Running Sky: A Bird-Watching Life</i> (2009) Miriam Darlington's <i>Otter Country</i> (2012) Patrick Barkham's <i>Badgerlands</i> (2013) Dave Goulson's <i>A Sting in the Tail</i> (2013)	- introduces readers to curious, fascinating and unknown aspects of everyday wildlife - demonstrates the exotic nature of the ordinary, making an argument, implicit or explicit, for a renewed relationship with nature - illustrates, through personal stories, whether of the authors themselves or of conservationists or others with a special relationship to the selected animal, how certain species impact human lives in complex and seemingly mysterious ways
direct critique	Nina Lyon's <i>Uprooted: On the Trail of the Green Man</i> (2016) Will Ashon's <i>Strange Labyrinth: Outlaws, Poets, Mystics, Murderers and a Coward in London's Great Forest</i> (2017)	- offers a direct critique of some of the proposed routes that are to lead us back into nature - adds less to literature

Any effort to draw the framework of a certain type of writing might lure us into the trap of generalization, but Hampton's attempt to draw such a topography can be useful to have a more concrete idea of the recent nature writing in British literature, especially because it brings together many examples under shared characteristics. Hampton's topography, however generalized or homogenous it might look, can serve as a reference point in understanding latest tendencies among contemporary British nature writers. Briefly, his topography demonstrates that recent nature writing is marked with a desire to reconsider human-nature relation, reposition human within nature, re-attune to the natural cycle, recondition human's view of landscape and redefine nature and wild.

2.6 Features of New Nature Writing

This study offers some keywords to explain what new nature writing incorporates and how. The subheadings proposed here, which will be integrated into the analysis part of this thesis, constitute an attempt to lay out the political, ethical, philosophical, scientific and literary aspects of new nature writing. This dissertation argues that new nature writing is political and ethical, for it asks for a change in deeply rooted anthropocentric mindset and encourages action; it is philosophical, for it seeks a self that is embedded in the bigger realm of the non-human rather than a self as a domineering observer of the latter; and it is both literary and scientific, for it combines the writer's subjective responses to the nonhuman with scientific explanations related to it. The keywords proposed here are aimed at supporting the main argument in this dissertation that new nature writing embodies a counter-narrative to the dominant dualist thinking in western thought system, and it, thus, engages in cultural criticism. Haraway's following statement from *A Cyborg Manifesto* summarizes what is understood by the dualist western mentality.

Certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals – in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. (59)

In addition, Martin Heidegger's work on western thought, which is closely connected with environmental thinking (Clark, *The Cambridge* 55), can be used as a reference point in understanding its anthropocentrism. Heidegger traces western thought back to Ancient Greece and claims that European civilisation's sense of things has been shaped around the idea of theoreticism, which involves the urge towards technical, mathematically formalizable and objectifying modes of knowledge and is the reason for the oblivion of premodern traditions of know-how and craftsmanship (Clark, *The Cambridge* 55). Underlying this theoreticism is Platonism, according to which "All things are held to be intelligible if analysed in terms of notions of basic designs and their copies" and Aristotelianism, according to which things are accepted to be intelligible if analysed in terms of "constitutive forms and the material they shape" (55). This kind of thinking which reduces things to technical designs and forms is found to be restrictive by Heidegger, who "argues that we must free ourselves from the 'technical interpretation of thinking' whose origins reach back to Plato and Aristotle" (55). Clark thinks that the mode of thinking Heidegger criticizes is "linked to the instrumentalist and fundamentally aggressive project of western rationality" (55). It can be stated that association of the intelligible with the formalizable and measurable contains aggression and violence as such thinking excludes everything that is not in the realm of human mind. Clark points out that western thought has harboured latent violence for two and a half millennia because within theoreticism, as Heidegger puts it, "Nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of knowing, since technical mastery over things bears itself without limit" (qtd. in *The Cambridge* 55).

As detailed in Chapter 1, the praise of human mind was not confined to Ancient Greek thought. Since the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century, human mind has been deployed as a "spectator, an enclosed interiority facing the world in a stance of inherent opposition and appropriation, a 'subject' opposing an 'object'" (Clark, *The Cambridge* 56). In other words, since modernity, human mind has been positioned as a self-contained entity capable of knowing and thus mastering all the rest. A thought system based on the superiority of the human mind equates with anthropocentrism which "in environmental discourse names the view that human beings and their interests are solely of value and always take priority over those of the non-human" (3).

According to Clark, Heidegger criticized “the hidden anthropocentrism of western thought, its unacknowledged projection of instrumentalist or technological modes of thinking upon the cosmos as a whole” (56). The writers analysed in this study engage in the criticism of the afore-mentioned features of western thought trying to free themselves from the supposed sovereignty of this restrictive and reductionist thinking through new ways of writing about nature, which are detailed below.

2.6.1 Ecological Awareness and Activism

This new epoch called the Anthropocene, however pessimistic it might look, has in fact an optimistic side, for it is accompanied by ecological awareness. The word eco-conscious, which means “marked by or showing concern for the environment” was first used in 1972 (“Eco-conscious”). It is no coincidence that this word was coined in 1970s, at a time when environmental movement was on the rise. Samuel P. Hays indicates that during the 1970s “environmental affairs took on an international scope and environmental problems increasingly appeared to be transnational and global” (220). The word ecology had already become a household word in the US of the 1970s, and schools tried to keep up with the environmental movement by offering environmental science courses and by highlighting the importance of energy conservation (Reichert 298). As the public had already awakened to ecological issues, 1973 polls conducted among the then nine members of the European community revealed that pollution was seen as the most important problem leaving behind inflation, poverty and unemployment (Schleicher 260). Kerridge suggests that in the decades following the Second World War, as opposed to the lack of interest in nature writing, there was a popular enthusiasm for natural history, encouraged by the first television wildlife programmes in Britain (“Interview” 137).

Public concern about and interest in environmental issues paved the way for governmental initiatives. In the US, federal laws were passed in 1960s to protect the environment and the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act were passed respectively in 1970 and 1972 (Hays 219). In western Europe, the first common political initiative with regard to environmental protection was taken in 1973 when the first European Action Programme was approved (Schleicher 259). Thus, 1970s witnessed ecological awakening on social and political level. Bearing in mind that new nature writing is fed

by the environmental movement of the 1970s, it is only to be expected that the practitioners of this genre are eco-conscious and do want to act. Kerridge also agrees that environmentalism provides a new opening for a new writing, which is not backward-looking but responsive to contemporary conditions (“Interview” 137-38). Macfarlane draws attention to responsive consciousness of contemporary nature writers as follows:

The best of the recent writing is ethically alert, theoretically literate and wary of the seductions and corruptions of the pastoral. It is sensitive to the dark histories of landscapes and to the structures of ownership and capital that organise – though do not wholly produce – our relations with the natural world ... Nor does this literature advocate a Luddite³⁰ environmentalism: it tends to be anti-technocracy but not anti-technology. (“Why”)

Seemingly, recent nature writing has a political agenda and aspires to transcend the pages and change the living world for the better instead of confining itself to romanticized and idealized representations of nature. This reminds us of Glotfelty’s approach to literature: “If we agree with Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology, ‘Everything is connected to everything else,’ we must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather plays a part in an immensely complex political system, in which energy, matter and *ideas* interact” (xix).

Likewise, Bate also underlined the need to bring literature and the physical world together. Bate favours a form of writing which he calls “ecopoetics”, which might enable us to live “with thoughtfulness and attentiveness, an attunement to both words and the world, and so to acknowledge that, although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world” (*The Song* 23). In Bate’s view, literature is a powerful tool to change people’s attitude to nature because it works upon consciousness (23). Bates gives the example of national parks to prove how literature might work upon people’s consciousness and trigger a change: “William Wordsworth could not have known that one effect of his writing on the consciousness of later readers would have been the establishment of a network of National Parks, first in the United

³⁰As Jessica Brain notes, the term Luddite was originally used to refer to British weavers and textile workers who opposed the introduction of mechanised looms and knitting frames in the eighteenth century, but now it is used to generalise people who do not like technology (“The Luddites”).

States and then in Britain” (23). In fact, Wordsworth is accepted to have inspired millions of hikers, climbers and artists as well as later American authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir and thus have contributed to the idea of opening national parks (“William”).³¹

This entire endeavour to bring literature closer to the physical world overlaps with material ecocriticism as well. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann inform us that after the linguistic turn that paved the way for poststructuralist thinking, there is now a material turn, which is also labelled as new materialisms, in the fields of sciences and humanities (“Introduction” 2). Material ecocriticism, which is born out of this new trend, “is the study of the way material forms- bodies, things, elements, toxic substances, chemicals, organic and inorganic matter, landscapes, and biological entities- intra-act with each other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories” (7). As is seen, physical and material world enter humanities, and the field of ecocriticism seems to be the first to be influenced by this urgent and insistent call. New nature writing, in this context, emerges as a genre where literature and natural world can be connected to each other so as to comply with recent academic interests in the field of ecocriticism. In Moran’s words, “New nature writing mirrors the concerns of academic ecocriticism” (58).

New nature writers, with their scientific eye, literary style and awareness of the anthropogenic harm caused to our planet, try to attach literature to the natural world and thus bring an activist’s spirit into the world of literature. In fact, it can be claimed that this endeavour was initiated much earlier by Rachel Carson, who wanted to bring science and literature together. Carson says: “I am the sort who wants above all to get out and enjoy the beauty and wonder of natural world, and who resorts only secondarily to the laboratory and library for explanations” (qtd. in Beudel 273). Her statement

³¹It should be noted that nationalisation of the great landscapes in North America did not arise from purely environmentalist feelings, for before the Western landscapes were nationalised, Native Indians had been exiled from their native lands and the animals they had been taking care of were slaughtered. John Muir and Roosevelt are said to have promulgated the Western myth of great landscapes as touchstones of personal or cultural identity through national parks. For more information, please see Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. It should also be acknowledged that conservationist efforts like the opening of national parks have some controversial aspects from the point of environmental justice, especially with regard to the rights of indigenous communities. For more on the issue, please go to *Environmental Justice* course on futurelearn.com.

reveals that Carson did not instrumentalise nature as an object of study but developed a deep attachment to and had a keen curiosity about its wonders and beauties. Carson resorted to the concept of wonder in scientific studies as a way of triggering mobilization and public engagement (Beudel 267). Apparently, to her, nature writing was not bound to remain on the page or in the class and her *Silent Spring*, which, as mentioned above, caused the prohibition of DDT and alerted the American public to its harm, was the obvious outcome of her thinking about nature writing.

A much more recent example which calls for public engagement and activism is *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991) by the American author, Terry Tempest Williams. Scheese calls *Refuge* a recent example of radical nature writing, in which the author protests the continued testing of nuclear weapons in the Great Basin in western North America and warns that pastoral refuges may eventually disappear as a result of dangerous government activity (35). In this memoir, Williams mourns for two losses, namely the loss of the bird refuge and the loss of her mother. She mourns for the bird refuge because it was a place where she spent her childhood and it was also a shelter for migratory birds, which she used to observe as an ornithologist and thus developed an intimate contact with. She mourns also for her mother because the latter's joy of life did not save her from cancer which gradually withered her away. Interweaving human and non-human losses in her memoir, Williams uses both a scientific and a literary language. She gives a detailed description of the birds and refuge with a scientific eye. As Mark Allister puts it, this kind of detailed writing is grounded in William's own observations as a naturalist (11). Yet Williams's objective descriptions of the birds, lake and refuge do not make *Refuge* a crude account of the life in the Bear River basin. Williams demonstrates the tension between a pastoral nature (the camaraderie in the flock, clear nights, the welcoming breast of the lake as a mother, navigational stars) and a nature that contains destruction and death (the dead swan and her mother) inviting reader interpretation (Allister 12).

Her emotionally-charged reaction to the inundation of the refuge by the Great Salt Lake and her mother's death go beyond an individual mourning narrative as she gradually recovers and reconciles with the lake, which flooded her refuge and with her mother's disease, which inevitably killed her. In the epilogue "The Clan of One-

Breasted Women”, Williams points out the link between the high rate of cancer in Utah and the atomic testing done in their region in 1950s and tells about her involvement in a civil disobedience act at the Nevada Test Site. Though she grew up in a Mormon culture where “authority is respected and obedience is revered”, Williams can finally defy: “As a Mormon woman of the fifth generation of Latter-day Saints, I must question everything even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a member of a border tribe among my own people. Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives” (286). Williams’s grief and illness narrative, hereby, turns into an open call to challenge social constructs like patriotism and patriarchy or faith and question our definition of nature and what we have done to it. Williams, along with Barry Lopez, Gary Snyder, Richard Nelson and Annie Dillard, is shown among the best-known practitioners of the genre in the US (Macfarlane “Call”). Though the tradition of nature writing in the US and in Britain has followed different paths, Williams’s *Refuge* dated 1991 can serve as a good example to give an idea of the twenty-first century British nature writing as the latter is said to combine scientific information, literary aspect and activism, which is indeed what Williams had done in her eco-memoir back in 1991.

2.6.2 A Move from Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism³²

As detailed in the previous part, new nature writers apparently do not just write about nature but also intend to take actions for it, which shows that they avoid positioning self over other and culture over nature. It can be argued that such ecological awareness and activist spirit incorporates an ethical concern about nature. Indeed, activist spirit in new nature writing brings an ethical aspect to it because there is a will to change our attitude to and understanding of nature among the practitioners of this recent form. Robert J. Brulle underlines the link between ethics and the natural environment:

Questions about preservation of the natural environment are not just technical questions; they are also about what defines the good and moral life, and about

³²While the terms biocentrism and ecocentrism can be used alternately to designate a worldview against anthropocentrism, some make a distinction between them: Biocentrism focuses on living organisms, but ecocentrism covers abiotic factors such as rivers and systems, too (Barnhill). In this dissertation, these two words are used alternately.

the essence and the meaning of our existence. Hence, these are not just academic or technical matters, to be settled in elite dialogues between experts. These are fundamental questions of defining what our human community is and how it should exist. (qtd. in Clark, *The Cambridge* 1)

An association of ethic to nature necessitates an allusion to Aldo Leopold and his concept of “land ethic”. Leopold (1887-1948), who is widely recognized as the father of wildlife conservation movement in the US, was interested in natural history and studied forestry at the School of Forestry at Yale University (Ross 431). He joined the US Forestry Service after graduation and worked for U.S. Forest Service in Arizona and New Mexico, Carson National Forest in New Mexico and US Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin and became the chair of Game Management at the University of Wisconsin (431). He and his family started their own ecological restoration experiment on a worn-out farm along the Wisconsin River planting thousands of pine trees, restoring prairies and documenting the changes in the flora and fauna (“Aldo”). In Part I of his *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), which is regarded as the Bible of the conservation movement, Leopold recounts the family’s efforts and highlights the satisfaction they derived from the process of re-creating wilderness (Scheese 31). As can be seen, Leopold was attached to land both professionally and personally. His concept of land ethic is a moral code of conduct that grows out of the recognition that the relationships between people and land are intertwined (“The Land”). To be more specific, Leopold expands the scope of ethics to soils, waters, plants and animals, all of which he calls “land” and argues that care for people cannot be separated from care for land (“The Land”). In Leopold’s words, “The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land” (434).

Generally speaking, ethic is “a system of accepted beliefs that control behaviour, especially a system based on morals” (“Ethic”). In philosophy, “the field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour” (Fieser). Based on James Fieser’s introduction to ethics in the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, it can be argued that ethical matters are generally treated in relation to humans excluding metaethics, which questions whether

morality can exist independently of humans and newly emerging environmental ethics, which questions whether animal rights, environmental pollution, environmental resources, etc. should be entitled to direct moral consideration. Thus, a conventional definition of ethic is seemingly limited to humans. Leopold also states that “All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of community of interdependent parts” (433). Leopold says that “An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct” (433). Yet Leopold opposes confining ethic to human-to-human relations only. He calls for a respect for the land community, which to him includes soils, waters, plants and animals. According to Leopold, land ethic will help change the role of *homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member of it as it implies respect for the community as such (434). In his understanding, the key to showing respect to the land community is the acknowledgement that human is a species in the world just as the others are: “That man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events ... were actually biotic interventions between people and land” (434). Leopold insists on human’s role within the biotic community as a plain member just like other members and challenges the basic paradoxes concerning human’s relation to land, which are “man the conqueror *versus* man the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword *versus* science the searchlight on his universe; land the slave and servant *versus* land the collective organism” (446). To Leopold, to be able to develop an ethical relation to land, one needs to have love, respect and admiration for it in addition to a high regard for its value, which is definitely not defined by the economic gain it would bring to people but by its existence *per se* (446-48). Leopold is aware that land ethic itself may not suffice to prevent the alteration, management and use of soils, waters, plants, and animals which humans see as “resources”, but asserts that it might at least help recognize their biotic right, which is the right to continued existence in a natural state (434).

Leopold’s land ethic requires a rejection of anthropocentrism and a move towards biocentrism. Anthropocentrism means “any stance, perception or conception that takes the human as centre or norm” (Clark, *The Cambridge* 3). Clark informs us that anthropocentrism is contrasted to biocentrism, which is an attempt to identify with

all life or the entire ecosystem without privileging one species over the others (*The Cambridge* 3). In fact, due to his concept of land ethic, “Leopold is held to have anticipated the biocentric philosophy of the ‘deep ecology’ movement that emerged with Arne Naess in the 1970s” (78). Deep ecology asserts that the thinking of the self must involve other organisms, and all that supports them, as part of one’s own identity, and this greater self must bring about an ever-widening circle of identification with other living things (23). It is apparent that with his insistence on soils, waters, plants and animals as all worthy of respect and love, Leopold laid the foundations of a twentieth century movement nearly a century ago. Clark implies that Leopold himself can be criticized for practicing fishing and hunting as recreational activities and for not questioning the concept of private property, which is to him at the core of Leopold’s topic (82). Yet it seems that Leopold’s anthropocentric activities do not change the fact put forth by J. Baird Callicott in his essay “The Land Aesthetic”. To be more specific, Callicott argues that Leopold’s book is “the first self-conscious, sustained, and systematic attempt in modern Western literature to develop an ethical theory which would include the whole of terrestrial nature within the purview of morals” (345).

Apparently, Leopold’s land ethic dovetails not only with deep ecology and new materialisms but also with new nature writing. The practitioners of new nature writing seem to be sensitive to the ontological status of non-human. For instance, in her memoir *To the River*, Olivia Laing laments for the human intervention in the River Ouse: “The river’s transformations bothered me because they seemed to highlight the wrongheaded rapaciousness of my own species, carving the world up with no thought to its consequences: behaviour, ironically enough, that seems doomed to bring an apocalypse of floods and droughts upon us all” (178). Laing does not feel sorry just because the engineering interventions brought about floods or droughts to people. She is sorry for the river itself, too: “I thought of the sewage treatment works tricking their poisoned outfalls into the Bevern; of the water companies that abstracted groundwater from its secret hoards in the Downs. And then I thought ahead, a century or two. Would the river have dried up?” (178). Similarly, in *The Morville Hours* (2009), although Swift is trying to make a garden, which is undoubtedly a product of human intervention in nature, she remains sensitive to the biotic right of other creatures in the garden and seems to accept

human's position in the biotic community. Describing her garden covered by the snow, she says: "The garden is abandoned to other creatures: fox, weasel, stoat, badger; fieldfare and blackbird; pheasant and vole. I can see their tracks in the new snow. Whose territory is it anyway? They were here before me. They ignore the divisions of beds and paths, taking their own lines, disregarding my interventions" (44).

In a similar vein, Jay Griffiths, in her comprehensive travelogue, *Wild: An Elemental Journey* (2006) makes a point of indigenous people who have a land ethic, different from the white western settlers of the planet. To illustrate, during a visit to the Bajo people who live on a small island off Sulawesi, Indonesia and who are known as the sea gypsies, she observes that the only means of living for these people is the sea, and they are not of the view that they have the right to exploit it. On the contrary, in Griffith's words

They believed there was very deep water with fish that are unfamiliar even to them, in spite of the fact that they know the waters here so intimately. They believed in a spirit of the sea, which would be angry if they acted in an immoral way and would show disapproval by withholding fish. They prepare food sacrifices for the sea because the sea likes to eat, they say, just as people do. (186)

Griffiths also gives an example from the YirkalaMirning people to prove that there are other ways of establishing relationship with non-human nature, which is not marked by the motivation to derive one-sided benefits: "In the Great Australian Bight, the Yirkala Mirning people use gong stones, musical stones from the local cliffs and caves and say that by striking the gong stones, they can call southern right whales, and that the musical stones are used in song ceremonies and dance ceremonies in which both the people and the whales take part" (187). Throughout her travelogue, Griffiths provides more examples of indigenous people's view of nature to prevent her readers from taking for granted the supposed human superiority to other species and invite them to question their relation to "land" from an ethical perspective. Sometimes indirectly through the examples, sometimes directly through her righteously angry remarks, Griffiths seems to be calling for a change in our attitude to nature. Macfarlane says, "The real subject of landscape writing is not landscape, but a restructuring of the human attitude towards

nature” (“Only Connect”) and as shown in the examples above, new nature writers apparently concern themselves with this ethically critical mindset.

2.6.3 Porosity and Enchantment

To Hampton, this entire endeavour to redefine human-nature relation and restructure human attitude to nature is linked to post-secularity. He observes what he calls “symptoms of post-secularism” in new nature writing. To understand post-secularity, it is necessary first to remember how the shift from pre-secular to secular took place. Charles Taylor argues that with modernity there was a shift from the porous self, which was thought of as open to supernatural forces and powers beyond itself, to the buffered self, which was conceived as independent and autonomous with its thoughts and feelings that belong to mind (“Buffered”). To Taylor, while our ancestors with their porous selves lived in an enchanted world with forces crossing boundaries, we are living in a disenchanted world with a much firmer sense of boundary between self and the other (“Buffered”). While the antique and medieval porous self accepted the forces it could not control as divine and sacred and interacted with them through magic or prayer, the modern self demystified cosmos and separated itself from nature (Hampton 461). As Gerrit Benschop observes, “In the Middle Ages things of nature were seen as loci of God's wonderful acts, but in modernity the world came to be seen as consisting of a huge amount of interlocking parts, designed to work in certain ways and to produce certain results, which resulted in the mechanization of the world” (145).

As Hampton puts it, this was indeed an epistemological shift: “Before, both nature and the self are held together by the transcendent forces that shape them; afterwards, nature and the self are separated from one another” (461). We can presume that this is where the Enlightenment steps onto the scene. Inspired by Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer claim that Enlightenment's program was the “disenchantment” of the world (1). Disenchantment is “a feeling of no longer believing in the value of something, especially having learned of the problems with it” (“Disenchantment” [Cambridge]). In other words, it is “the feeling of being disappointed with something, and no longer believing that it is good or worthwhile” (“Disenchantment” [Collins]). In both dictionary definitions, a loss of belief and an accompanied sense of disappointment come to the forefront. In philosophy and sociology, however, disenchantment refers to

the supposedly demystified condition of the world since the Enlightenment ideology shook the rule and power of religion and superstition (Jin Chua). It is the German sociologist Max Weber who popularized the term *Entzauberung*, which was translated into English as “disenchantment”, literally meaning “de-magic-ation” (Jin Chua). In his famous 1918 speech titled “Science as a Vocation”, Weber claimed that modern times are characterized by disenchantment explaining the notion of disenchantment through a comparison of the savage and the modern. Weber compares the modern man with the savage man and suggests that the savage was more aware of his condition than the modern man is, for the former knew more about the use and production of his tools while the latter relied on money to buy them:

The savage knows what he does in order to get his daily food and which institutions serve him in this pursuit. The increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. (136)

In Weber’s interpretation, the advent of scientific methods and the use of enlightened reason caused the world to be transparent and demystified, and in such a disenchanted order theological and supernatural accounts of the world lost their appeal while people were increasingly putting faith in the ability of science to explain everything (Jin Chua). Based on Weber’s arguments, Richard Jenkins defines disenchantment as “the historical process by which the natural world and all areas of human experience become experienced and understood as less mysterious; defined at least in principle as knowable, predictable and manipulable by humans; conquered by and incorporated into the interpretive schema of science and rational government” (12).

The notion of disenchantment has triggered a lot of epistemological discussions related to the separation of religion and science as well as of value and fact. However, here I would like to focus on the possible links between our approach to nature and our supposedly disenchanted perspective. Alison Stone mentions three consequences of a disenchanted point of view in our understanding of nature: First, we have stopped seeing nature as an intrinsically meaningful order. Second, we ceased to believe that nature had its mysteries that are inaccessible to our understanding. Third, we believe neither that nature is sacred nor that there are divine or demonic beings worthy of our admiration or fear (231). Environmental thinkers claim that disenchantment has allowed for the instrumentalization of nature giving rise to environmental destruction in the end (Stone 231-32). According to Adorno and Horkheimer, “What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings” (2). Thus, it is possible to argue that to Adorno and Horkheimer, “the process of disenchanting nature has facilitated its ‘domination’ by humanity” (Stone 232).

At first glance, this criticism of disenchantment might be perceived as a call to turn to religion to save nature. Nonetheless, it is important to realise that neither Weber nor the representatives of Frankfurt School intended to venerate religion to reach enchantment. Their criticism of disenchantment can rather be interpreted as an invitation to change our epistemological attitudes (Asprem 11). This can be perceived as a call for enchantment. Enchantment is defined as “a feeling of great pleasure and attraction, especially because something is very beautiful” (“Enchantment” [Cambridge]). According to Collins online dictionary, “in fairy stories and legends, an enchantment is a magic spell” (“Enchantment”). These definitions include joy and magic, which are not measurable or observable in rationalistic terms. As Jenkins indicates, (re)enchantment³³ involves two tendencies: One insists that there are more things in the universe than are dreamed of by the rationalist epistemologies, and the other rejects the notion that calculative, procedural, formal rationality is always the best

³³The prefix “re” might make us think that there was a time when people lived enchantedly as Weber claimed in his comparison of the savage and the modern, but referring to Adam Kuper’s *The Invention of Primitive Society: The Transformation of an Illusion* (1988), Jenkins implies that the allegation that primitive societies were unified and homogeneously enchanted is a fiction imposed by modernity (15). This is the reason why I prefer the term “enchantment” as the subheading of this part.

(12). It can be argued that Weber and his followers wanted us to welcome alternative worldviews that do not position reason above all the rest, including non-human nature. After all, if we agree with Adorno and Horkheimer on their view that “for the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion” (4), we might come to the conclusion that for an “enlightened” mind if there is anything in nature which is not measurable, calculable or reasonable, then this thing simply does not exist. New nature writers, however, seem to be challenging this strict denial because they believe in the possibility of enchantment within modern life. They try to open themselves to new ways of knowing and experiencing nature, which do not have to be measurable or calculable.

Griffiths, for instance, seems to have set out on her journey to the heart of elements around the globe to prove the possibility of enchantment in our modern world through what she herself has experienced and witnessed in indigenous cultures. During her trip to the high hills of West Papua, Griffiths remembers a time in her adolescence, when she climbed Mont Blanc: “There was ice in my hair and sun in my eyes so bright that snow shone inside me and when I spoke there were no words but translucence. So immersed, so unimportant, so careless of myself did I feel that the mountain was all that mattered and included me in its massif” (347). Her experience in Mont Blanc corresponds to enchantment. According to Smith, we feel enchanted “when we lose a part of ourselves to an experience, when we become involved, implicated, when we become a part of something bigger than ourselves, when we become meaningfully inside a landscape and its community, and not just a spectator” (*An Archipelagic* 66). The need to be part of something bigger than ourselves is evident also in Laing’s *To the River* when she explains why she needed to go back to the Ouse after a series of losses in her life: “It wasn’t morbidity that drew me to that dangerous place but rather the pleasure of abandoning myself to something vastly beyond my control” (4). As she is about to complete her journey from the source to the mouth of the Ouse, she notes:

I didn’t want to go home, it was true, but I was nonetheless as purely happy as I’ve ever been right then, in that open passageway beneath the blue vault of sky, walking the measure allotted me, with winter on each side ... I felt untethered, almost weightless, which is a consequence sometimes of swimming in the more

buoyant waters of the sea. But it wasn't just that. I had the sense I'd fallen into some other world, adjacent to our own. (*To the River* 266)

Laing seems to have felt enchanted at the end of her riparian journey. As these examples show, Laing and Griffiths, who are both among new nature writers, like their contemporaries, do not approve of separating the self from non-human nature. On the contrary, they seek after the opening of the self to nature, and thus enjoy porosity and reach enchantment.

Hampton points out that with the emergence of post-secular, there is now a rethinking of human/nature dichotomy (459). In Hampton's words, "There is an opening of the buffered self, and a desire to overcome its alienation from forces within nature, both understood and mysterious. The result is a kind of hybrid, a turn away from the secular social imaginary that is not a return to the sacred social imaginary" (462). It should be acknowledged that while Hampton says that he sees the symptoms of post-secularism in new nature writing, he is being cautious: "The post-secular is set apart from traditional religion because it does not provide, or even aspire to offer, a fully articulated vision of a re-enchanted cosmos. Equally, it is nothing like a fundamentalist or New Age program, which aims to single out a particular historical present as a rejoicing moment of religious turn" (460). Hampton claims that there is a turn away from secular social imaginary, but he does not mean that new nature writing involves a return to religion. In fact, this is a delicate point in new nature writing because nature writers have been held in contempt by some critics who blamed them for having a religious tendency. This kind of criticism has not remained unanswered, however. Mabey opposes the homogenisation of recent nature writers as a kind of cult ("Richard") and makes it clear that new nature writers write for the sake of other beings not to extol this or that belief system, religion or God. He declares that most of them prefer to think of themselves just as writers, who simply want to embrace a rather larger than usual cast of characters, the other beings and landscapes with which they share the planet – and to respect them as subjects not simply objects" ("Richard"). As Hampton puts it, new nature writers resist any disenchanted narrative that would claim to be capable of fully understanding nature and seek to re-engage with nature without submitting it to an objectifying gaze (464-65).

Contemporary nature writers' interest in porosity and enchantedness go with their rejection of mind/body dualism as well. In many instances, they pay specific attention to verbalising their bodily enmeshment in and sensuous contact with non-human nature. Bodily experiences are frequently and purposefully highlighted by the writers. Voie also highlights the emphasis on the bodily and material experiences in recent American nature writing, which he calls material nature writing and which he reads in parallel with material ecocriticism: "Material nature writing is nature writing that is preoccupied with the materiality of the body and the environment, which is invested in the physicality of experience across a variety of scales, and which is attentive to the dynamism of matter, as it perceives matter as active rather than inert" (21). Clark, too, informs that among ecocritics, especially ecofeminists, the tendency to reject the exclusive claim of science to the understanding of human life paves the way for a reaffirmation of bodily experience (*The Cambridge* 148).

It can be argued that similar to ecocritics, be it material ecocritics or ecofeminists, new nature writers have recourse to their bodily experiences as a way of challenging the superiority of mind in knowing the world. For instance, Chris Packham, a TV presenter, wildlife expert, photographer and author, often refers to his senses to describe his past experiences with the non-human in his memoir, *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar* (2016), which was voted the UK's favourite nature book in 2016. Once in his childhood, he patiently observed a bird's nest for days to be able to see the newly born chicks alive because as a child he preferred first-hand, physical contact with the non-human and never contented himself with documentaries, books or films about animals. He describes the moment he saw the chicks he had been long waiting for as follows: "I could smell them before I could see them, a dry, slightly meaty, warm scent ... Bright-eyed, blue-eyed, with smoky coats of fluff, they flailed featherless wings and hobbled on fresh custard-yellow legs, their taloned toes tightly fixed" (41). His sight and smell stand out in this detailed description. In another childhood experience, while he was keeping a grass snake in his room, he tried to imagine how it feels to be like a snake: "He wondered what the reptile sensed of him, whether he tasted or smelled good or bad, and when he h'd unwound it and coaxed it carefully into his pillowcase snake-bag he

rolled onto his stomach and wriggled through the grass, trying to sniff like a snake” (127).³⁴

As a child, Packham tries to know about the non-human through his body and senses and despite the appropriative and instrumentalist tone, which is felt at times in the way he writes about the non-human, he can make the reader try to think and feel like the “other”, especially the animals such as reptiles, bats, insects, kestrels, toads, which are not considered by many as “loveable”. His interest in such animals brings to mind Buell’s concept of “the dignification of the overlooked” and Scott Slovic’s concept of “appreciating the unappreciated”, which both mean that any aesthetic and poetic attention to such animals grant them dignity enhancing their chance of survival (qtd. in Voie 26-27). Packham’s entire memoir can be taken as a narrative of retreat where he tells how he found shelter in the non-human as a child with Asperger syndrome who suffered from peer bullying, but overall, his emphasis on his bodily experiences with the non-human guides the reader into another way of imagining, which does not necessitate the superiority of one species over the other and which attributes dignity to species humans have tended to disdain. Hampton’s evaluation of new nature writing from a post-secular perspective lets us conclude that contemporary nature writers neither arrogate to themselves the power to absolutely define nature nor do they yield to mysticism or metaphysics when confronted with the non-human that cannot be reduced to human language. They are in fact aware of the irreducibility of nature and accept it as it is instead of denying or mystifying it. Packham, with his *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar*, seems to have adopted this post-secular perspective even as a child while he was trying to see, smell and touch the non-human and while he was trying to see, smell and touch like the non-human.

2.6.4 Stylistic Hybridity and Multidisciplinarity

Given that new nature writers are inspired by the environmental movement, strive to contribute to land ethic and show us the possibilities of immersing in non-human nature without dominating it, it is possible to argue that such an ecologically loaded agenda requires a new approach to writing. To Cowley, new nature writers react to the state we are in not by walking into the wild or rhapsodizing but rather by trying to

³⁴Packham alternately uses the pronouns I, he and you in his memoir *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar*.

observe nature with a scientific eye and write about it with a literary effect (9). It can be gathered from Cowley's statement that the newness of the new nature writing in Britain comes from its stylistic hybridity as it brings together scientific eye and literary expression. As it is known, the word hybrid means "something that is a combination of two different things, so it has qualities relating to both of them" ("hybrid"), and style as a literary term means "the way in which an author writes and/or tells a story" ("style"). In new nature writing, it is possible to talk about stylistic hybridity, which involves the use of two different styles, namely scientific and literary.

Hampton also agrees that new British nature writing gives place both to individual experience with nature and accurate description of nature (457). In a way, new nature writers end a long-lasting tension in British nature writing. Canton highlights that throughout the years "British nature writing's response to the natural world has reflected just that tension between the emotive response of the Romantic period and the objective desire of the scientist (13)". In fact, amalgamation of empirical description with emotive response in nature writing has its origins in the writings of Gilbert White. White's *The Natural History of Selbourne* (1793), in Canton's words, "engenders a new gentle art to the science of natural observation" (12). Canton also gives the example of White's two-word entry in his journal when he recorded the annual migration of the swallows to where he lived: "Hirundo domestica!!!" (qtd. in Canton 13). To Canton, the three exclamation marks show the joy felt at the swallows' return and adds emotion to the journal (13). In the way they balance objectivity and subjectivity, new nature writers appear to be following the footsteps of Gilbert White.

At this point, it is good to remember Rachel Carson's contribution to nature writing as a scientist and a former literature student. Saskia Beudel asserts that Carson wanted not only to inform and educate non-scientific readership about issues concerning nature, but she also wanted to make them feel the same fascinated engagement and curiosity about the world as she did as a scientist (267). What Carson suggested was in fact the democratization of science (272). As a matter of fact, her idea of making science understandable to and likeable by all is evident even in the way she starts *Silent Spring* with *Fable for Tomorrow*, which describes an imaginary but quite likely silence in a literary tone. She connects her fable to the rest of the book as follows: "What has

already silenced the voices of spring in countless towns in America? This book is an attempt to explain” (1). Her poetic response to the decline in nature is followed by scientific data about the use of DDT. Such amalgamation was unusual at her time. Yet before the publication of *Silent Spring*, she had already proved herself as an unusual nature writer despite efforts to undermine her work especially on the side of chemical industry. In Lear’s words,

She was lauded not only for her scientific expertise and synthesis of wide-ranging material but also for her lyrical, poetic voice. *The Sea Around Us* and its best-selling successor, *The Edge of the Sea*, made Rachel Carson the foremost science writer in America...Readers around the world found comfort in her clear explanations of complex science, her description of the creation of the seas, and her obvious love of the wonders of nature. Hers was a trusted voice. (“Introduction” xiv)

Though Carson wrote much earlier than the emergence of new nature writing in Britain, it can be argued that her influence on the hybrid style of contemporary nature writers is unmistakable.

In fact, stylistic hybridity in new nature writing might also be explained by the fact that contemporary writers have other professions and interests in addition to writing. For example, Helen MacDonald, author of *H is for Hawk* (2014) is a naturalist and historian who worked as an affiliated research scholar at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge and took part as a professional falconer in raptor research and conservation projects (“Helen”). Richard Mabey, author of *The Cabaret of Plants* (2017), *Nature Cure* (2005) and *Flora Britannica* (1996) among many other books on nature, sat on the UK government’s advisory body, the Nature Conservancy Council and is a past director of the arts and conservation charity, Common Ground (“Richard Mabey”). Katherine Swift, the author of *The Morville Hours: The Story of A Garden* (2009), was a librarian before becoming a full time gardener and writer in 1988 (“Katherine”). Kathleen Jamie, the author of *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019), is interested in the natural world (widely defined), archaeology, medical humanities and art, and to write she has

benefitted from the company and expertise of visual artists, pathologists, curators and ornithologists (“Kathleen”).

As it is seen, nature writers of the contemporary era do not just write about nature but have a multidimensional relation with it. Macfarlane notes that “Every contemporary writer about nature of my acquaintance is not ‘only’ a writer but is also involved in political agitation, campaigns and volunteer work on behalf of the living world” (“Why”). Similarly, in the editorial note on the articles published in one of the volumes of British nature journal *Green Letters*, the editors Stenning and Gifford draw attention to the fact that the contemporary British and Irish writers covered in their edition venture into the realms of biology, geology, geography, archaeology, metaphysics or a combination, in divergent ways and for different ethical trends (2). From this perspective, new nature writing is a multidisciplinary space where authors experiment with different narrative styles and incorporate knowledge from various disciplines into their writing.

One of the striking examples embodying this stylistic hybridity and multidisciplinary is Swift’s *The Morville Hours* (2008). In 1988, Swift moved to Morville from Dublin, where she was working as “keeper of Early Printed Books in the library of Trinity College” (3-4). She took the Dower House on twenty-year lease to make a garden (3). In *The Morville Hours*, Swift tells the story of how she made the garden at the Dower House with frequent references to the history of Morville and the Dower House traced back to the Ice Age. Doing so, she covers the daily lives of the locals, the biological features of the flowers she plants in the garden, the etymology of the flower names, the historical path of the flowers that were brought to England from elsewhere, the use of nature-related metaphors in English language, the creatures living in the garden and the gardening methods that have changed throughout history. Thus, she enriches her memoir, which includes her childhood memories as well, with inputs from botany, etymology, history, religion and linguistics. As Andrea Wulf observes, Swift employs “an anti-structure, as her narrative yomps through all manner of subjects. Memories of her childhood and her difficult relationship with her parents are presented in snippets and through little associations woven into the story of the garden” (“Written”).

Swift's memoir, *The Morville Hours*, moves far beyond a rich amalgamation of knowledge from various fields not only because she elegantly interweaves her childhood memories with her story of garden-making fed by various disciplines but also because she builds her entire memoir upon a philosophical question, which is our modern perception of time. She challenges her readers to carefully think about the supposed linearity of time with her emphasis on its cyclicity in nature. She compares her sense of time before the garden with that in the garden:

In my previous life there had never been enough time: time was always running out. But in the garden, where I was acutely aware of the passage of time- the changing light as the hours of the days passed by, the shifting pattern of seasons as the years passed by- there was paradoxically the feeling of having all the time in the world, of hours and days stretching and expanding into a shimmering pool of *now*. (12)

Her sense of time that changes in the garden seems to be the reason why she called her memoir *The Morville Hours*. Arguably, her perception of time determines not only the title but also the structure of her narrative. As Wulf notes

Swift takes her structure from the hours of the divine office - the daily rhythm of worship followed by monks, starting with Vigils (celebrated in the night) and ending with Compline (at the close of the day before the community retires to bed). Like a medieval Book of Hours, *The Morville Hours* guides the reader through the days and seasons in Swift's garden". ("Written")

In addition to her time-related concerns, her memoir gains a philosophical and self-reflexive aspect also because of her ecological sensitivity.

Perhaps we gardeners underestimate ourselves: for what else are our twenty-first century gardens- with their passion for wildlife, their refusal to denude foreign ecosystems by stripping them of rare plants, their rejection of fossil fuel as a growing medium, their turning away from chemicals as means of controlling pests, their emphasis on water-recycling, solar power, composting- if not a critique of modern consumer society, the very society that has brought our planet to the brink of catastrophe? (Swift 285)

The attention Swift pays to scientific and historical facts as well as the questions she poses in relation to nature and time make her memoir multidisciplinary, with an undeniable effect on her narrative style which moves from being poetic to being scientific, from being subjective to being objective. For example, remembering her parents' tumultuous relationship in which she felt to have been loved "too intensely" without a chance to avoid "their competing claims for love and allegiance" and with "no shelter from the tempest of their lives together", she turns to ice crystals that "grow in different patterns" and starts to give detailed information about how they are formed (46- 47). She apparently establishes parallelism between the unique way each and every single snowflake is formed and the unique way each and every personality is shaped implying that underlying a snowflake there is a lot invisible to the eye just like in a person's personality: "Many are damaged by collisions as they fall, blown about by surface winds; others, falling into warmer air, melt away to rain or sleet" (47). As this example suggests, she skilfully combines the personal and the scientific like her contemporaries.

2.6.5 Parochialism Coloured by Universalism

In *Granta's* special edition "The New Nature Writing", Cowley highlights an interesting point about the contributors: "They have no need to travel to the other side of the world to understand more about themselves and their relation to the world they inhabit. In this sense, many of the stories in this issue are studies in the local or the parochial: they are about the discovery of exoticism in the familiar, the extraordinary in the ordinary" (11). In this quote, the word parochial merits special attention. Parochial literally means relating to a parish (an area that has its own church or priest) ("Parochial"). MacFarlane notes that the adjectival form of "parish" connotes "secreterianism, insularity and boundedness: a mind or a community turned inward upon itself, a pejorative finitude" ("Introduction", xv). Apparently, the word parochial has been used in a pejorative meaning, and this negative connotation seems to have persisted in literary criticism as well. For example, Roberto Dainetto, a professor of Romance studies at Duke University, claims that the literatures of region tend to essentialise regional culture and attribute to regions a sort of organic unity, which never existed (qtd. in Tomaney 311).

Parochialism has been criticized not only because of rural writers' supposed inclination to fetishise their regions. Heise turns our attention to US environmentalist discourse, which, in her view, has been marked by locality, and urgently calls for an idea of "eco-cosmopolitanism" or "environmental world citizenship". In Heise's opinion, although affirmation of local ties plays an important role in environmental struggles, ecologically oriented thinking now requires the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place (10). Accepting that environmentalist emphasis on restoring one's sense of place, which has been blurred by globalisation, might be useful, Heise warns that such an emphasis may also turn into a dead end (21). Thus, she favours eco-cosmopolitanism against localism: "Rather than focusing on the recuperation of sense of place, environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness" (21).

The idea of eco-cosmopolitanism as put forth by Heise apparently did not permeate British nature writing, especially in the twentieth century, which could arguably be linked to the political devolution that the UK and Northern Ireland experienced. Richard Rankin Russell draws attention to the literary devolution in "English" literature that suggests the viability of regionalism and a decline in the dominance of London-centred literature (47). Regionalism in literature was invoked partly because of the nostalgia for rapidly dwindling rural areas of England and the population shift to the cities in the early twentieth century, and the writers from Northern Ireland also contributed to its emergence with their efforts to articulate Northern Irish regionalism starting from the 1940s (49). The Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who is among the poets that support regionalism, said in his acceptance speech of Nobel Prize in 1995:

Even if we have learned to be rightly and deeply fearful of elevating the cultural forms and conservatisms of any nation into normative and exclusivist systems, even if we have terrible proof that pride in an ethnic and religious heritage can quickly degrade into the fascistic, our vigilance on that score should not displace our love and trust in the good of the indigenous *per se*. ("Crediting")

Likewise, Patrick Kavanagh, “the great poet of the Irish mundane”, whose legacy Heaney carried on, did have no doubts about the importance of parish (Macfarlane, “Introduction” xv), but he made a careful distinction between parochial and provincial:

Parochialism and provincialism are [direct] opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis - towards which his eyes are turned - has to say on any subject ...The parochial mentality on the other hand is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish. All great civilizations are based on parochialism - Greek, Israelite, English. (“The Parish”)

Kavanagh obviously sees the universal within the parochial as he refers to the great civilizations of the world. John Tomaney points out that “Poets’ fidelity toward place is not only a source of inspiration but also a means by which universal values can be placed and made historical” (313). It can be stated that poets catch the glimpse of the universal within the local. Macfarlane highlights that Kavanagh sees the universal as a sum of fine-tuned principles derived from intense concentration on the particular (“Introduction” xv). In Kavanagh’s words, “To know fully one field or one land is a lifetime’s experience. In the world of poetic experience, it is depth that counts, not width. A gap in a hedge, a smooth rock surfacing a narrow lane, a view of a woody meadow, the stream at the junction of four small fields- these are as much as a man can fully experience” (qtd. in Macfarlane “Introduction” xv). It can be inferred from Kavanagh’s insistence on depth that one needs to connect with his/her local surroundings. However, it should be noted that parochialism in literature as supported by Kavanagh, Heaney and their followers has nothing to do with eulogising a particular regional or a national identity. In fact, although Kavanagh was praised for cherishing “the ordinary, the actual, the known, the unimportant” by Heaney and although he was accepted to have “brought submerged Northern Catholicism into public literature and culture” (Russel 51-52), he refused to be mobilised into the politics of nationalism and developed his own way of parochialism (Tomaney 316). Accordingly, it can be stated that Kavanagh’s and Heaney’s parochialism was more related to the idea of depth in one’s experience within nature than to a nationalistic agenda.

It can be said that Common Ground, which was established with the idea of “local distinctiveness” (“Common”), had a role in the spread of this tendency to value the local in Britain. In their terminology, “Local implies neighbourhood or parish and distinctiveness is about particularity in the buildings and land shapes, the brooks and birds, trees and cheeses, places of worship and pieces of literature” (“Common”). Smith claims that Common Ground has been tremendously successful in revitalizing the discourse of the local, particularly the parish, reclaiming it as a site for progressive political thinking and community activism (*An Archipelagic* 20).

In fact, the local is an indispensable part of the global. The idea of combining the local and the global had been put on the agenda during the environmental movement of the 70s, with the slogan “Think Globally, Act Locally” attributed to Sierra Club, one of the most long-lasting environmental organizations in the US. Clark says that the slogan operates on two scales: Trying to understand ecological systems on the largest possible scale and taking actions locally in accordance with this understanding (*The Cambridge* 136). Parochialism in new British nature writing seems to be closer to the idea of “Think Globally, Act Locally” as put forth back in the 70s. Clark righteously states that the inherent logic of the slogan “Think Globally, Act Locally” is paradoxical: It implies that one cannot act only locally and that any action affects the world, however minute it is (136). The new British nature writers are obviously aware of this paradoxical and unbreakable link between the local and the global. Besides, their interest in locality can also be seen as a contribution to diversity in nature writing. Slovic, too, proposes to embrace local points of view to see how ecological thinking and practice operate in different corners of the world (68).

For example, Kathleen Jamie’s *Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012) are, as Eleanor Bell notes, both rooted in Scotland (131). In other words, her contact with the natural world happens locally. Starting from the peregrine falcons in her neighbourhood, she sets out to expand her human world to non-human worlds wherever and whenever she can. She cycles to the fields nearby to watch oysters in their nests and all she desires is to see “the other”. Once she sees a large bird flying over her head, she feels a great joy because of this unexpected encounter: “Like some mediaeval peasant granted a vision, I was kneeling in a field, fixated by this uncanny cross in the sky.

Then, as it moved slowly out of sight, I raced for home excited as a child, holding its image in my hand like a bowlful of blue water- mustn't spill a drop. This is what I want to learn: to notice, but not to analyse" (Jamie, *Findings* 41-42).

Jamie's passion for nature is not a romanticised one. She understands that nature "is not all primroses and others. There's our own intimate, inner natural world, the body's weird shapes and forms, and sometimes they go awry. There are other species, not dolphins arching clear from the water, but the bacteria that can pull the rug from under us" (*Sightlines* 24). Following her mother's death of pneumonia, Jamie's search for and questioning of the natural extends even to a laboratory at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee, where she examines a cancerous colon with her friend Frank Caley, who is a Clinical Consultant in Pathology at the same hospital. Of the colon, she writes: "It was a natural artefact alright, but far from elegant, and if I hadn't been told I couldn't have said whether it belonged to an aquarium, a puppet theatre or a bicycle repair shop" (*Sightlines* 26). Chitra Ramaswamy maintains that "Nature, for Jamie, is a broad church, welcoming in moths drowning in lochans, cancerous cells under microscopes, whale bones washed up on the beach, and the people who clean them in dusty museums. She has no interest in romanticising nature, or seeking out wild, untouched places" ("Interview"). Both in *Findings* and *Sightlines*, Jamie tries to be with nature in places accessible to her. She enriches her local experiences with references to history, archaeology, science and previous nature writings. It can be argued that though initially fed by her locality, Jamie achieves reaching universality. Lilley says that "Jamie's essay collections *Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012), bring the form into the realms of the urban and the everyday, depicting landscapes that comprise multiple stories and voices" (4). From this perspective, Jamie seems to be keeping the parochial spirit in British nature writing without submitting to the restrictiveness of provincialism.

2.6.6 Self Narrative and Personal Sense-making

The alienation of nature writers from disenchanted narratives and their inclination towards more flexible and hybrid ways of writing can also be considered within the framework of poststructuralist thinking that questions rationalist western thinking as well as postmodernism that has paved the way for mini narratives. In fact, there are various examples of eco-memoirs by contemporary nature writers in Britain

who embrace mini -narratives and interweave their own life stories with those of a landscape or a non-human animal. Lilley indicates that recent nature writing encompasses and extends beyond both scientific and romanticized accounts of the natural world, blending elements of autobiography, travelogue, natural history, and popular science to explore, record, and critique the interweaving of human–natural forces in the landscapes of Britain (3). Hubbard and Wilkinson also call attention to the autobiographical accounts in new nature writing whereby the author explores the relation between landscape, selfhood and ethics through a blending of autobiography and ecocriticism (254). While comparing the new nature writing in Britain and nature writing of the Anthropocene in the US, Voie notes that contemporary American nature writing does not contain personal meaning making efforts as much as British new nature writing (13). According to Voie, individual sense of being grounded in a place and individual efforts at experiencing meaningful connections in nature characterize new nature writing in Britain more (14). Moran highlights the importance of personal voice, personal reflection and personal witnessing in new nature writing, too (49-59). To be more specific, he writes: “A common thread that unites the new nature writing is its exploration of the potential for human meaning-making not in the rare or exotic but in our everyday connections with the non-human natural world” (50).

The Outrun (2016) by Amy Liptrot can be taken as a recent example of the sort of exploration mentioned above. *The Outrun* is the story of a young woman who is Amy Liptrot herself, for whom natural world serves as a cure for her addiction and as a context where she gains a new perspective. Without reducing the landscape just to a setting for her life story, Liptrot tells the reader how she recovered from alcoholism and reconciled with herself as she returned to the Outrun, their farm on Orkney, “a group of islands at the north of Scotland, sea-scoured, wind-battered” (xvii). Liptrot left Orkney, where she had spent her childhood and adolescence in close contact with the natural world for London, where she hoped not to be limited by geography and a small community: “I grew up in the sky, with an immense of space, yet limited by the confines of the island and the farm” (19). However, London dismayed her, and she ended up in alcoholism, which caused her boyfriend to break up with her and dragged

her into loneliness and despair. “Unsettled in London, I felt as if I was dangerously suspended high above crashing waves,” she writes (50).

Aware of what her addiction cost her (jobs, friends and a lover) in life, Liptrot wanted to get well and agreed to go back to Orkney after she got out of rehab upon her mother’s encouragement, who suggested she should help her dad on the farm. The island, which she derogatorily used to call “The Rock” in her adolescence, did her good, and she even committed herself to the efforts to keep the archipelago alive. What makes *The Outrun* a fitting example of new British nature writing is that in this autobiographical account, Liptrot gets out of her own story of alcoholism, questions her attitude to the island and engages herself in telling the story of the island with all its strong winds, bare soil, sheep, seals, birds, crashing waves, powerful tides and dangerous cliffs as well as its human inhabitants, their myths and sagas. Long walks and cold swims heal her and through all the bodily and material experiences she has within Orkney’s harsh and beautiful nature, Liptrot reaches “the freedom of sobriety” and even “takes up a one-year job for the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) on the Corncrake Initiative, a long-running conservation project” (Liptrot 123). She reaches transcendence in her own way through physical contact with the land and the ocean and commits to a cause other than herself. From this perspective, *The Outrun* is a good example of one’s reengagement with nature without any romanticisation or domination of the latter.

Similarly, Katherine Norbury’s *The Fish Ladder: A Journey Upstream* (2015) is the story of a young woman who had her own tragedies in life and went to the familiar rivers to heal. As Rachel Cooke observes, similar to “Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk*, and Richard Mabey’s *Nature Cure* before it, Katharine Norbury’s *The Fish Ladder* is at heart an examination of the consoling effect of the natural world on human grief and torment” (“The Fish”). Norbury lost a child she had longed for in miscarriage, and upon this loss she decided to walk to the sources of some rivers in Britain. In fact, she had been inspired by Neil M. Gunn’s *The Well at the World’s End* (1951), in which “the protagonist goes alone into the wild places of Scotland and tells anyone who asks that he is searching for the well at the world’s end” (Norbury 11). Throughout her memoir, we learn that Norbury was an adopted child, whose biological father’s identity

remains unknown and whose biological mother chose to leave her to be able to marry her fiancé who would not accept the child born out of their marriage. She is in search of her “origins”. Thus, the reason why she wants to trace rivers back to their source gets obvious. “Although my childhood had been a happy one, and my adult life fulfilling, if not particularly exceptional, or notable from the point of view of achievement, there had been a slight unorthodoxy about my beginning,” she writes (*The Fish* 7).

As Cooke also mentions, “in the course of *The Fish Ladder*, we read of the death both of her father, and of a close friend; of her mother’s serious illness; of the author’s treatment for a rare form of breast cancer” (“*The Fish*”). However, *The Fish Ladder* moves beyond an autobiographical account of a life full of tragic events as Norbury starts to pay attention to the surrounding landscape and its non-human habitants for their ontological status not for their potential use in healing her. For example, as she describes the moment she sees the mouth of Dunbeath River, which is one of the rivers whose source she aims to reach, she silently puts herself into the background and lets the reader visualize and hear the river merging with the sea: “I watched the tide as it pushed into the river, and I found it difficult to focus, to judge distance or depth, amid the water’s shifting pattern. This was the place, the beginning, or the end, where the identity of the river was lost or discovered, depending on how you looked at it” (Norbury, *The Fish* 158). In this excerpt, we see that Norbury does not provide the reader with any scientific information as to how the river and the sea merge. Instead, she wants the reader to think about the never-ending merging of the sea and the river. In another instance during her trips, she comes across an amazingly beautiful and still loch, and out of respect she avoids touching it let alone swimming in it: “I would swim to the centre, inhabit the water, make it my own, and yet ... if I once disturbed the surface, or entered the water, I would upset a balance both chemical and physical” (193).

Although Norbury resorts to nature to get over the losses in her life, she neither instrumentalises it as if it was her caregiver nor mystifies it as if it was a magical healer. Without anthropomorphising the rivers, Norbury puts effort to make nature a lead character in her life story rather than the setting. She enriches her memoir, which takes its source from the rivers, with many folk tales that are related to the rivers, wells and lochs she visits during her trips and thus adds a historical and even mythical dimension

to her autobiographical account. As a result, the reader is invited to see more than just a flow of water when s/he looks at a river and think about its ontological status along with the human stories it engendered. Like *The Outrun*, which is a narrative of healing that starts from the edge of alcoholism and extends to the edges of Orkney islands, *The Fish Ladder* starts from the author's personal crises and merges into the web of rivers and lochs as she learns to embed herself in nature with no claim to fully understand it but with a desire to be just a part of it.

In *The Fish Ladder* and *The Outrun*, authors have recourse to the natural world as part of their healing processes although their writings remain sensitive and attentive to the non-human. Such writings within new nature writing are called as "close natural history observation as psychotherapy and psychodrama", whereby authors take refuge in the natural world as a remedy (Oakley et al. 6). Books like Mabey's *Nature Cure* (2005) and MacDonald's *H is for Hawk* (2014) are considered as examples whereby the natural environment appears as a resource for human consumption and is thus "in danger of being unwittingly instrumentalised" (12). Some writers are also concerned that nature could be thingified in such healing narratives. For example, a nature writer himself, Cocker shares this concern over self-centred narratives: "The real danger is that nature writing becomes a literature of consolation that distracts us from the truth of our fallen countryside, or – just as bad – that it becomes a space for us to talk to ourselves about ourselves, with nature relegated to the background as an attractive green wash" ("Death"). However, such concern is not shared by all. For example, Moran offers a more sympathetic account of such personal narratives claiming that first-hand literary accounts of the natural world can help to establish a bridge between scientific understanding of the natural world and personal experience of it, and he thinks such narratives are indeed connected to the "countercultural movements of the late 1960s and hence to the idea that the personal is the political" (qtd. in Oakley et al. 16). Also, in response to Cocker's criticism that such self-centred narratives in new nature writing lack political aspect, Macfarlane defends new nature writing:

Some of this writing is kick-up-the-arse furious, some is elegiac, some is about disease and dispossession, some is about dignity and the deepening of knowledge. Across its range, moral engagement and hope are consistently in

evidence. Every contemporary writer about nature of my acquaintance is not “only” a writer but is also involved in political agitation, campaigns and volunteer work on behalf of the living world. (“Why”)

To sum up, since the beginning of the new millennium, there has been a revival in British nature writing, which has significantly been shaped by the Anthropocene and the writers’ response to it. It can be claimed that contemporary nature writers want to shake anthropocentrism to its foundations and promote a more ecocentric viewpoint. In doing so, they try to enrich their writing with contributions from diverse fields such as biology, ornithology, and archaeology, and they, thus, offer a combination of scientificness and literariness. Since their understanding of nature is not exclusionary but all-embracing, they write about various topics ranging from birds to gardens as well as their native lands, fragile indigenous societies and even civilizations long gone. Though their concern is mainly the non-human, they also include autobiographical accounts in their writing and pay specific attention to their own bodily sensations and sense of enchantedness in nature. Notwithstanding the disagreement on its naming, new British nature writing emerges as a solid common ground where authors can voice up for the sake of the non-human and human as a biological and vulnerable species. As a genre-bending form, new British nature writing combines the personal with the non-human, the parochial with the universal and science with literature by dismantling binary oppositions such as human/animal, culture/nature and subjective/objective.

CHAPTER 3

Women's Eco-memoirs

This dissertation focuses on eco-memoirs written by selected contemporary British women writers. One might question why it should be important to make a distinction between men and women writers, especially when their shared concern is nature. The very reason for my preference of women writers is that as a researcher I would like to contribute to academic research on women writers writing about nature and boost their visibility in the world of academia and literature. Yet this personal motivation can be justified academically, too. This chapter focuses on some factual findings, theoretical discussions, and selected women writers' thoughts to explain why women nature writers merit special attention and examines the position of women writers in autobiography and nature writing, which are the two pillars of eco-memoirs.

3.1 Gender in Ecological Orientation

In 1730 the Maharaja of Jodhpur in Rajasthan, India sent men to take trees from Bishnoi to build a palace, and a woman named Amrita Devi went to the spot, hugged a tree and said: "A chopped head is better than a felled tree" ("Chipko"). She was beheaded by the king's men along with three hundred sixty-three villagers who believed in an old spiritual tradition based on a principle not to cut green trees, to protect the environment and to be merciful towards all living beings ("Chipko"). This event was at the roots of the 1973 Chipko Movement in India, an environmental protest throughout which village protestors, particularly women, hugged trees (the word *chipko* meaning "to hug, to cling") to fight off the loggers and succeeded in their efforts (Petruzzello). Chipko Movement was marked by the mobilization of women by Gaura Devi, a woman elder who stood against gun-wielding loggers and said: "Brothers! This forest is the source of our livelihood. If you destroy it, the mountain will come tumbling down onto our village. This forest nurtures us like a mother; you will only be able to use your axes on it if you shoot me first" ("Chipko").

In both protests, women literally sacrificed or were ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the trees either because they believed it was a sin to hurt them or because their livelihood depended on them. If environment is at risk, why it should matter whether men or women are acting against environmental degradation is a question

asked by many. To answer this question, Andrea Nightingale, who looks at the issue from the perspective of feminist political ecology, states that if the causes and consequences of environmental degradation point at a gendered process, then it should matter (280). Nightingale exemplifies the Gambian case where gender becomes salient in an environmental issue (279). Richard Schroeder revealed that in Gambia River Basin, which was deeply affected by drought in the late 1980s and early 1990s, women market gardeners enriched the soil with their localized knowledge and helped to ease the economic impact of drought, but when the soil quality increased, the soil was reclaimed by male lineage heads who left women with secondary usufruct rights (487-88).

When it comes to environmental disasters, the gender gap becomes more visible. In their 2007 study “The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy”, Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper examined one hundred and forty-one countries over the period of 1981-2002 and found out that disasters kill more women than men and considerably reduce women’s life expectancy (qtd. in Ear 1). An example is from Bangladesh, where the 1991 cyclone killed almost one hundred and forty thousand people, ninety percent of whom were women and children (qtd. in Buckingham 152). In addition, Maureen Fordham indicates that in environmental catastrophes and chronically environmentally stressed situations, violence against women increases and the situation of women in such crises is generally ignored by the male-dominated disaster management systems (qtd. in Buckingham 152).

Another example is 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. According to the Oxfam International’s study, the tsunami killed two hundred and twenty thousand people in twelve countries, and male survivors outnumbered female survivors by a ratio of 3.1 (Ear 2). Oxfam’s report demonstrated that women stayed behind to take care of children and other relatives, and many could not escape the disaster because they did not know to swim or climb trees (3). Another reason for women’s lower survival ratio is that in some countries like Cambodia the women who were doing housework at home did not hear the early warning systems located far from their houses, and not having enough time to listen to radios due to their daily chores, they stayed outside the information

network (Ear 4). On the other hand, it is important to note that although women seem to be more vulnerable to environmental disasters because of the gender roles imposed on them, they appear to be more proactive in the aftermath of catastrophes. For example, in 2007 Jakarta floods, women in informal urban settlements started emergency kitchens to feed the community (7). However, despite their active engagement, they have been excluded from disaster management systems. For instance, it was only after the 2011 triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear fallout in Japan that The Japan Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction, the first example of women's formal participation in disaster management, was established despite the long history of disasters in the area (11-14).

The above examples from diverse countries can prevent us from categorically denying the gender aspect in environmental issues and proenvironmental attitudes. Léonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland's anthology *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth* (1993) provide many more examples of women's activism in environmental issues: "Wangari Maathai (Kenya) on the Green Belt Movement, Rosalie Bertell (Canada) on nuclear power and health, Wilmette Brown (UK/US) on black ghetto ecology and Anita Anand (India) on the Chipko Andolan" (Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited" 29). In fact, several studies from environmental sociology, social psychology and political science point out a gender difference in environmentalism suggesting that women are more likely to express support for environmental protection and find various environmental risks, from nuclear power to toxic substances, more serious than men (Norgaard and York 508). Mark C. J. Stoddart and David B. Tindall also verify that the general picture emerging out of many studies conducted between 1990s and early 2000s in the field of environmental sociology is that women tend to be more environmentally concerned than men (76). To illustrate, in 2003, Washington-based Institute for Women's Policy Research conducted a nation-wide survey on women's environmental activism. Some of the conclusions regarding women's attitude to environmental activism drawn from Amy Caiazza's and Allison Barrett's report titled "Engaging Women in Environmental Activism: Recommendations for Rachel's Network" (2003) are:

Most men and women support increased government spending for the environment. Women, though, are less likely than men to support environmental spending cuts. Women have more positive feelings about environmental activists than men do. Women are particularly concerned about environmental problems that create risks for their health and safety, especially at the local level. Women who support feminist, peace, and other “progressive” causes are most receptive to environmentalism. (3)

In a similar vein, in their 2005 article “Gender Equality and State Environmentalism” that investigated the possible link between the representation of women in national parliaments and states’ support for environmentalism, Kari Norgaard and Richard York hypothesized that nation-states with greater gender equality in their parliaments might support environmental protection more. Comparing the percentage of women deputies in respective parliaments and the number of multilateral environmental treaties that the parliaments have passed, Norgaard and York concluded that countries that have “a greater representation of women in Parliament are more prone to ratify environmental treaties” (512). Accordingly, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands perform much better than other countries in terms of gender equality and state environmentalism (Norgaard and York 512). Their findings can be challenged by the assumption that countries with higher economic development levels rather than higher gender equality ratios seem to be more protective of the environment.³⁵ In fact, Norgaard and York accept the influence of economic development level and modernization on states’ environmentalism (511), but they provide a thought-provoking example that concerns Norway and Singapore: Although Singapore and Norway have a high level of industrialization and material standard of living, Singapore performs rather poorly both in terms of women’s participation in the Parliament and state’s reaction to environmental treatises while Norway ranks quite highly in both parameters (518). In the case of Norway, it is important to note that the environmental and feminist

³⁵It should be remembered that according to the theory of unequal ecological exchange, which is also known as “burden-shifting”, developed by Alf Hornborg and Joan Martinez-Alier, economically wealthy and powerful centres of the world tend to operate in ways that enable them to sustain their own high consumption levels while shifting the ecological burden onto less powerful places like in the case of countries that consume timber the most but do not feel the effects of deforestation as immediately and strongly as the countries where the trees are cut down (Martin “Global”).

movements were simultaneously integrated into the country's legal system in the period of 70s and 80s (515). Besides, Gro Harlem Brundtland,³⁶ a former Norwegian Prime Minister, was an influential political leader who played a significant role in the establishment of a less sexist and more environmentalist culture in Norway (516). Thus, Norgaard and York suggest that an improvement in "gender equality may serve to further ecological reforms, as ecofeminists have theorized" (519).

On the other hand, a more recent study conducted in the US yielded a result conflicting with the above-mentioned findings. In his research entitled "Gender Gap in the Environmental Movement" (2015), Nicholas Burghard aimed to explore how gender identity shapes the environmental movement in the US. For this purpose, Burghard collected data from the pre and post-election surveys and focused on the survey questions like whether people call themselves environmentalists, whether they are already part of an environmentalist group and whether they want the government to cut or increase federal spending on environmental problems. Burghard's conclusion is that the number of men participating in environmental activism is on the rise, closing the gender gap among environmentalists though more women are likely to demand the government to increase federal spending on the environment than men. The significant increase in the number of men affiliated with environmentalist movement might well be explained by the growing worldwide awareness about the Anthropocene; however, this would not change the fact that Burghard's study based on American voters' answers challenges the assumption that women are more likely to support environmental causes.

In fact, the studies on the link between environmentalism and gender have produced inconsistent results so far (Kalof et al. 113). To explore the links between race, gender and environmentalism, Linda Kalof and her friends conducted telephone interviews in 1994 and 1996 with randomly selected US residents and concluded that societies with a stronger sense of altruism -in their case Blacks and Hispanic- are more concerned about environmental issues (122). It was found out that while there was no meaningful gender difference among the Blacks or Hispanics in terms of

³⁶Gro Harlem Brundtland is the first politician to introduce the term "sustainable development" in 1987 urging the world leaders to investigate the causes of environmental degradation and understand the interconnections between social equity, economic growth, and environmental problems (Jarvie, "Brundtland").

proenvironmental beliefs, white men were less likely than white women to endorse environmentalism (Kalof et al. 122). The main conclusion based on these findings is that what makes a person more sensitive to ecological concerns is neither race nor gender *per se* but rather the degree of social subordination they have been subjected to throughout history. Disadvantaged groups like women and minorities in the US society tend to be more altruistic and rely more on common goods for survival compared to white American males who tend to remain inattentive to the circumstances surrounding them as they have fewer survival concerns (124). The results of this empirical research might help us to infer that those who remain outside the privileged circle are more aware of and responsive to environmental risks.

At this point, it is helpful to remember that from the perspective of environmental justice, marginalised groups are more vulnerable to environmental problems, which they have not caused. In an unequal society the least powerful are overly affected by ecological destruction (Norgaard and York 507). Therefore, it is little wonder that marginalised people are more responsive to the problems they have directly been impacted by. In addition, a survey done to test young people's environmental awareness from fourteen Spanish and English-speaking countries in Europe, Latin America and the US showed that there were significant gender differences in terms of participants' environmentalism in the US but not in Latin American countries or Spain, which supported the view that gender differences in environmentalism are not universal (Zelezny et al. 446). It can be deduced from the studies mentioned above that even though women have generally tended to adopt proenvironmental values more than men at least until recent years, this is not to be universalized or generalised, and lately men have been displaying a more proenvironmental attitude, too.

However, it should be noted that the interviewees or subjects who participated in the above-mentioned studies are not necessarily engaged in environmental activism. One might wonder how activists approach the issue of gender in ecological orientation. At this juncture, it would be helpful to turn attention to the 1993 Clayoquot Sound environmental protests in British Columbia, one of the most famous environmental protests in the west, to discuss environmentalists' own perception of their gender and of its possible link to their environmentalism. Alaimo considers activism as an engaged

mode of theory and as a process of reflective thought (“Ecofeminism” 300). Therefore, a well-known example of environmental activism in the west, Clayoquot Sound can serve as a real-life experience to observe the gender aspect in environmentalism. Situated in British Columbia on the west of Canada, Clayoquot Sound is a network of offshore islands that comprise thousands of miles of alpine valleys and lush fern gardens, forests, rivers, lakes, and laidback beach towns (Moore). By 1993, sixty percent of the rainforests in Clayoquot Sound had been destroyed for logging industry, which triggered protests led by Indigenous leaders and supported by thousands of concerned citizens making international headlines as the largest act of civil disobedience in the history of Canada (“Twenty-five”). An important point about this proenvironmental civil obedience act is that the protestors started a peace camp evidently run by ecofeminist values whether all of the participants identified themselves as feminists or not. Niamh Moore refers to the welcome handbook of the peace camp to prove the feminist orientation of the camp: “We use a consensus process based on feminist principles. We believe that sexism, racism and homophobia are forms of oppression which are linked to the oppression of Nature. We strive to make Camp a safe space, free of oppression” (287). Moore argues that the camp was founded on an ecofeminist principle because it challenged all oppressions including the oppression of nature (288).³⁷

Mark J. Stoddart and D. B. Tindall conducted research to investigate the gender perspective in this environmental movement in British Columbia and carried out interviews with the protestors. Their conclusion is that a great majority of the participants called themselves feminists, and while a large proportion of their interviewees thought that women’s social roles as mothers and caregivers make them more aware of environmental threats, a female interviewee thought it was natural for women to be more in harmony with the children and environment (95). This latter finding, which is also known as “ecomaternalism”, is, in fact, what most feminists have

³⁷Clayoquot Sound Peace camp is not the only example of its kind. Feminist activism of the 1980s offered an ecological and feminist perspective against militarism, corporatism and unsustainable energy production like in the case of Greenham Common peace camp – the long-lasting women’s peace camp (1981-2000)- in England opposing the testing of nuclear missiles by Royal Air Force (Gaard, “Ecofeminism Revisited” 29).

been trying to avoid for fear of essentialism or biological determinism. Essentialism concerns put aside,³⁸ what deserves attention in interviewees' perception of their gender and environmentalism is that participants thought there was a link between socially constructed roles and environmentalism, and male participants underlined that they had been hesitant to show how caring they were of the environment because they feared being called weak (Stoddart and Tindall 94).

The reaction to this environmentalist peace camp is worthy of attention, too. Even though in reality men were disproportionately in the leading positions to organize the protest, media attention was on women as organizers or leaders of the act (Moore 78). The media obviously assumed that there was a connection between women and environmentalism, so women, rather than men, made the headlines and attracted attention. There occurred an external violent attack to the camp, wherein pro-logging men attacked women protestors in their tents (Moore 289). Male violence was particularly aimed at women who peacefully opposed industrialism, which is, in a way, the masterpiece of white male rationalistic culture. Thus, the Clayoquot Sound case could be interpreted in the following way: The participants' biological sex does not affect their relation with nature because people of all sexes actively took part in this protest, but people's perception of and response to gender roles might influence their engagement in and response to environmental activism.

The following remark by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter and Esther Wangari, the editors of *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experience* (1996), who come from diverse backgrounds from agroforestry to sustainable development, supports the point above:

We suggest that there are real, not imagined, gender differences in experiences of, responsibilities for, and interests in "nature" and environments but that these differences are not rooted in biology *per se*. Rather, they derive from the social interpretation of biology and social constructs of gender, which vary by culture, class, race, and place and are subject to individual and social change. (34)

Rocheleau and her friends think that the gendered experience of social roles has an influence on one's response to the non-human nature. In their view, the women who are

³⁸This will be discussed further below within the framework of ecofeminism.

held responsible for providing fundamental necessities of daily life such as food, water, fuel and clothing and charged with health care and childcare at home, are more likely to counter threats against health, life and subsistence resources (36). This, however, should not be considered as the endorsement of gender roles for the sake of proenvironmental values. It is important to appreciate that feminist political ecologists are far from approving gender roles. Their concern is more focused on the recognition of women's long-established knowledge and experience regarding nature. From the perspective of feminist political ecology, with the knowledge and experience they have in treating nature, women should be able to have more place in decision-making processes related to environmental policies (Nightingale 278).

The empirical studies from diverse fields along with the environmental protests in different countries referred to so far give us a clue about whether it is sound to establish a relation between being a woman and engaging in causes for the sake of non-human nature. The cases that imply a correlation between women and proenvironmental attitudes seem to be outnumbering the ones that challenge such a link. Yet it seems that the scale of environmental degradation the planet is currently facing and the resulting anthropocenic awareness help to close the presumed gender gap in environmentalism. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that what matters is not what biological sex one has but where one is positioned in the dualistic thinking that gives privilege to man against woman, white against black, culture against nature and so on. Given that western dualism has oppressed nature and woman among many other "others" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 43), it is defensible to bring together the two oppressed categories under the same study. In other words, choosing women writers writing about nature can be a meaningful and oppositional stance because it draws together two of the most unsettling others of the hegemonic anthropocentric western dualism, namely women and nature.

3.2 Discussions around Ecofeminism

It is necessary to elaborate on essentialism concerns that surround attempts to join women and nature under the same roof, and this would inevitably necessitate a discussion about ecofeminism. The word "ecofeminism" was coined in 1972 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who established the "Écologie-Féminisme" group arguing that

the destruction of the planet results from the profit motif inherent in male power and that ecological revolution would be possible with women (Ruether 77).³⁹Gaard informs that ecofeminism is one of many feminist environmentalisms that have been shaped in academia and been applied to various fields such as art, literature, geography, agriculture, and indigenous rights (“Ecofeminism” 67-68). Gaard argues that an ecofeminist approach can be adopted in many situations like the ones faced by

Ciudad Juarez women who have suffered sexual violence in the deserts where economy is built on men’s drug-trafficking and women’s exhaustive, toxic, and exploitative overwork in maquiladoras, where they are forced to contraception and fired if pregnant; the murder of Matthew Shepard, the gay environmentalist youth who was tortured, beaten and left to die in Wyoming, and the murder attacks on Julianne Williams and Lollie Winans in 1996, the lesbian couple assaulted while backpacking in eastern United States. (“New” 650)

As it is seen, ecofeminism deals with a variety of topics. Although ecofeminism is not a monolithic school of thought, most ecofeminists accept a common premise: There are important connections between the exploitation of women and exploitation of the non-human nature (Kao 617). Similarly, Rocheleau and her friends suggest that ecofeminism posits a close connection between women and nature based on a common history of oppression by patriarchal institutions and hegemonic western culture (34). In other words, ecofeminists think that there is a shared cause between feminists and ecologists because while nature is the subjugated other in anthropocentric human/nature dualism, women are the subjugated other of the androcentric man/woman dualism (Garrard, “Ecocriticism” 23).

Broadly speaking, it is possible to follow two main paths within ecofeminism: One is essentialist, and the other is anti-essentialist with many variations. Essentialist

³⁹It should be recognized that back in the nineteenth century, in reaction to Enlightenment liberal feminists there appeared a group of feminists known as “cultural feminists” who thought that women would change the world for the better with their “womanly” qualities like peacefulness, cooperation and non-violence and claimed that women’s “improved” emotions and intuitions would help to understand the interconnections among different life forms and reach a more holistic worldview. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1911) is known as a literary outcome of cultural feminism, which was in a way the first movement to discuss women’s and non-human animals’ rights simultaneously with some cultural feminists practising vegetarianism (Donovan 69-129). Gaard also argues that ecological feminism has been present in various forms since the start of feminism in the nineteenth century with the contribution of women gardeners, botanists, animal rights advocates etc. (“New” 646).

ecofeminists attribute the link between women and nature to biological causes (Rocheleau et al 35). For example, Sharon Doubiagot claims that ecological consciousness is traditional woman consciousness and in reference to Leopold's suggestion about thinking like a mountain she states: "Women have always thought like mountains ... There is nothing like the experience of one's belly growing into a mountain to teach you this" (qtd. in Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 24). The ecofeminists of this tradition believe in the notion that women are closer to nature by virtue of their child-bearing functions and they are more in tune with the rhythms of nature due to their bodily features (Ruether 79).

The idea of a "feminine essence" grounded in biological sex has been contested by many feminists because they think such a connection only contributes to patriarchy (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 24). Plumwood summarizes why such radical ecofeminism has been criticized by feminists: "The very idea of a feminine connection with nature seems to many to be regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life" (*Feminism* 20). Radical essentialist ecofeminism is found to be problematic from the perspective of not only feminism but also ecology because it evokes anti-scientism with its desire to reverse the androcentric hegemony of reason over emotion and its unqualified assault on medical science as in the case of Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 24). At this point, as an early example of radical ecofeminist texts, *Gyn/Ecology* merits attention. In this book, Daly criticizes the cross-cultural persecution of women by various male-dominated institutions like religion, culture, and medical science (e.g. Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witch burnings, American gynaecology, Nazi medicine) and links the physical health of women directly to the environment (Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited" 28). Daly's attack on medicine is, however, questionable. As Daly explains why she has chosen the title *Gyn/Ecology* for her book, she states that it is a word play targeting gynaecologists, who are mostly male doctors fixating upon what they do not have and what they themselves cannot do (12). She writes of gynaecologists as follows: "In their frantic fixation upon what they lack (biophilic energy) and in their frantic indifference to the destruction they wreak upon

the Other- women and 'Mother Nature'- the phallic- ologies coalesce" (12-13). She even claims that women constitute a separate kind: "Gyn/Ecology is by and about women a-mazing all the male-authored sciences of woman kind, and weaving world tapestries of our own kind. That is, it is about dis-covering, de-veloping the complex web of living/loving relationships of our kind. It is about women living, loving, creating our Selves, our cosmos" (13). Such essentialist mode of thinking obviously excludes women who are not mothers or do not want to be so and treats women like a unique category as if they were all in a harmonic relation with their bodies and nature.

However, within ecofeminism, it is possible to observe anti-essentialist tendencies, too. Susan Buckingham says there is a "social constructivist" pillar in ecofeminism which has its origins in Marxist and social feminist literature and which tries to show that women's positions in society expose them to particular environmental problems (147). Similarly, some ecofeminists [e.g. Kate Soper with *What Is Nature?* (1995), Karen Warren with *Ecofeminism* (1997), Val Plumwood with *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) and *Environmental Culture* (2002), Stacy Alaimo with *Undomesticated Ground* (2000), and Ariel Salleh with *Ecofeminism as Politics* (1997)] use a materialist feminist approach to explore the oppression of women and nature and claim that association of women (sex), femininity (gender) and nature is socially constructed (Gaard "Ecofeminism Revisited" 31). Women are positioned in the sphere of reproduction, child raising, food preparation and cleaning, which are all devalued roles compared to the roles attributed to men in the public sphere of male power and culture (Ruether 77). Women are given more bodily and material tasks in this gendered division of labour. According to ecofeminists who reject essentialism, women might suffer more from the destruction of natural world and become more aware of such abuse as long as they are located in the sphere of bodily and material support for society (Ruether 79). This way of thinking, which evokes political feminist ecology mentioned in the previous part, allows us to suggest that women may become more sensitive to and conscious of threats against the environment not essentially because they are women but because they are put in positions where they inevitably get closer to nature. Thus, according to anti-essentialist ecofeminists, the concept of affinity between women and nature is a social construct resulting from gender roles (Ruether 79).

Plumwood argues that within ecofeminists those who embrace biological determinism constitute only a minority (*Feminism* 201). In fact, whether on the essentialist side or not, ecofeminists have dealt with and taken actions for many diverse issues concerning sexuality, gender and environment. Buckingham alleges that ecofeminist arguments have even influenced policy-making world-wide, and as a result of the lobbying from women/environment movement, the UN acknowledged women and environment as one of the critical areas of concern in 1995 (148). Ecofeminism seems to have given rise to change agents. For example, Vandana Shiva, an Indian physicist, environmental activist and author of books like *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (1999), *Tomorrow's Biodiversity* (2000), *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (2005), *Soil, Not Oil: Climate Change, Peak Oil and Food Insecurity* (2007) established the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Natural Resource Policy (RFSTN) to develop sustainable methods of agriculture in India in 1982 ("Vandana"). Together with Maria Mies, Shiva is known for exploring questions of genetic engineering, reproductive technologies, colonialism and populations emphasizing how reproductive technologies are employed to foster hierarchies separating First World Women from disadvantaged women with no safe access to contraception (Gaard, "Ecofeminism" 70-71). Sandra Steingraber, with her book *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood* (2003) is an example that interrogated the connections between foetal and environmental health (Gaard "New" 649). Another example is Valerie Taliman. As a member of Navaho nation, Taliman uses the term "environmental racism" to describe the way that Indian reserves in the were used as a storage area of hazardous waste and left outside environmental regulations in the US (Beder 74). Gaard lists many more issues that ecofeminists around the world have covered and reacted against: Green politics (Petra Kelly), hunting sabotage (Hope Burwell), the chocolate industry (Cat Cox), ecofeminist motherhood (Ynestra King), feminist bioregionalism (Hannah Holmes) and feminism and animal rights (Carol Adam) ("Ecofeminism Revisited" 33).

In spite of many different voices within ecofeminism and the concrete consequences of some of their actions, ecofeminism has been criticized severely. Gaard's claim is that poststructuralists and other third-wave feminisms discredited

ecofeminism by ignoring its diversity of arguments, reducing it to an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature, and even calling ecofeminists as essentialist, ethnocentric and anti-intellectual goddess-worshippers (“Ecofeminism Revisited” 32-38). In Plumwood’s view, too, some critics of ecofeminism have targeted ecofeminist stereotypes without even referring to ecofeminists’ various concerns and the substantive work they have done (*Feminism* 31). Gaard argues that ecofeminism is unique for bringing human justice, interspecies justice and human-environmental justice together and offering an intersectional approach to correct eco-social and environmental problems (“Ecofeminism” 68). Like Gaard, Alaimo also celebrates the plurality within ecofeminism and objects to blanket condemnation of ecofeminisms as if ecofeminism was a homogenous movement (“Ecofeminism” 300). It is noteworthy that even when the multivocality within ecofeminism was recognized, it was criticized. Gaard informs that in 1992, *Signs*, the leading journal of academic feminism rejected a review essay of ecofeminism and complained that ecofeminism seems to be concerned about everything in the world causing feminism itself to get erased in the process (“Ecofeminism Revisited” 33).

The criticism ecofeminists received in academia eventually caused them to find different names to defend their causes. As Gaard notes, to distinguish themselves from essentialist ecofeminisms and reach a wider audience, ecofeminists came up with diverse names like “ecological feminism”, “feminist environmentalism”, “social ecofeminism” and “critical feminist eco-socialism” (“Ecofeminism Revisited” 27). Also, material feminism (Alaimo and Hekman's *Material Feminisms*) and feminist ecocriticism (e.g. Alaimo’s *Undomesticated Ground Nature as Feminist Space or Stein’s Shifting the Ground: American Writers’ Revisions of Nature*) are among the terms that have been created by ecofeminist writers to avoid essentialism charges (Gaard, “New” 660).

Regardless of the different paths and names they have chosen, all the ecological feminist approaches briefly mentioned above share a common ground, where different forms of exploitations are interpreted in relation to each other, and thus an intersectional approach is applied to the topics related to nature, gender, race, class and sexuality (Gaard, “New” 660). It can be argued that there is a parallelism between ecofeminism

and eco-memoirs: Just as ecofeminism treats a wide range of topics which can be brought together on a common ground, eco-memoirs also offer a variety of experiences with nature which share a common ground. The common ground of ecofeminists is the struggle against all forms of exploitation while the common ground of eco-memoirs is the reaction against the loss of lives on our planet. Also, given that ecofeminism is more than a theory due to its origins in activism and has even helped to change the course of events in particular environmental crises, it can offer a fitting perspective to analyse the eco-memoirs selected for this study, which aim to raise awareness about the Anthropocene and trigger action to slow it down. Therefore, the choice of women writers in this dissertation can be regarded as an anti-essentialist ecofeminist attitude.

3.3 Eco-memoir as a Hybrid Form

As its name suggests, eco-memoir is a type of memoir. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define memoir as follows: “A mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” (*Reading* 215). Obviously, a memoir is an autobiographical account. In contemporary parlance, the words autobiography and memoir can even replace each other (198), and today it is impossible to make a sharp distinction between memoir and autobiography (Goode 18). Despite their interchangeable use, some theoreticians differentiate between the two forms:

Lee Quinby notes, “[W]hereas autobiography promotes an ‘I’ that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an ‘I’ that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. The ‘I’ or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and ... dialogical”. (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading* 198)

The sociologist Diane Bjorklund conducted a study on autobiography and memoir and concluded that although it is difficult to distinguish them, memoirists focus on the external world more, but they still discuss their own thoughts and feelings (qtd. in Goode 19). Bjorklund’s detection is identical to Smith and Watson’s definition because they all highlight the lives and actions of others in memoirs. According to Gore

Vidal, a memoir is shaped by what one remembers in bits and pieces about his or her life, but an autobiography requires research, dates and facts to be doublechecked. (qtd. in Goode 19). Based on the word's origin in French, which means memory and reminiscence, it is plausible to state that a memoir is composed by what its author can remember ("Memoir"). Nancy K. Miller regards a memoir as a more postmodern form where memoirists tend to blur the boundaries between the private and public (qtd. in Smith and Watson 198). Ian Jack thinks that an autobiographer is more centred on public self, whereas a memoirist could choose more intimate and personal experiences. Also, a memoir theorist, Helen M. Buss draws attention to the elasticity of the memoir, which lets the writer move between personal life and public activities (qtd. in Freedman 48). Some also make a distinction between a memoir and an autobiography based on the timeline they cover. For example, Rita Reali claims that an autobiography might encompass an author's entire life enriched by historical details generally presented in a linear timeline, whereas a memoir can be about specific moments in life and might begin at any point in the writer's life ("Memoir"). In fact, memoirs are separated from classical autobiographies, for they can be built on a turning point or memorable moments in one's life ("Memoir").

It is understood from the above definitions that the others' lives might matter as much as the writer's in memoirs which look more loosely structured compared to autobiography. In this respect, memoirs get closer to "relational autobiography". The term "relational autobiography" was proposed by Susan Stanford Friedman in 1985 to characterize the relational model of selfhood in women's autobiographical writing, in which, according to Friedman, there is a sense of a shared self with other women (Smith and Watson *Reading* 220). According to Smith and Watson, the concept of relationality in an autobiographical text means that "one's story is bound up with that of another" (64). Relational autobiography, which Allister defines as writing about one's self in relation to someone else, has focused on human attachments while it is also possible to find life writing examples where the relationality aspect includes the writer's connection to the natural world (3). In this kind of relational autobiography, in Allister's words, "Ecology intertwines with culture, the author's life is metaphorically written on the land together with its inhabitants, human or non-human, and these writers create a new and

important kind of life-writing by turning terrain into text, geography into consciousness” (3). Following Allister’s argument, it is possible to define eco-memoir as a form of life writing in which the relationality principle encompasses the non-human and the writer’s connection and response to the non-human natural world comes to the forefront.

Smith and Watson propose the term “ecobiography” to describe “narratives that interweave the story of a protagonist with the story of the fortunes, conditions, geography and ecology of a region and reflect on their connection” (*Reading* 194). There is also the term “eco-autobiography”. Though the term eco-memoir is preferred in this study due to the alleged differences mentioned above, the theories about eco-autobiography can apply also to eco-memoir. Melanie Pryor posits eco-autobiography, which is a largely unexplored form of autobiographical texts, between life writing and nature writing (392). Peter F. Perreton also points at the convergence of autobiography and landscape writing and states that eco-autobiographers draw their strength from physical contact with the earth and look outward to the natural world rather than “looking inward to drown in the reflecting pool of the self” (4).

According to Janet Varner Gunn, an eco-autobiographer is preoccupied with the question “Where do I belong?” rather than the question “Who am I?” (qtd. in Perreton 4). In Gunn’s view, while in a classical autobiography the self attempts to know itself from inside in isolation from the world, in an eco-autobiography the self tries to know itself from outside with anchorage in the temporality and spatiality of the lived world (qtd. in Perreton 4). On the other hand, as mentioned before, Cocker is concerned that too much preoccupation with the self might reduce nature writing to “a space for us to talk to ourselves about ourselves, with nature relegated to the background as an attractive greenwash” (qtd. in Pryor 392). Michael J. McDowell, however, underlines the existence of dialogic voices in landscape writing and asserts that the environment plays a role as important as the roles of the human characters in such writings (387). In an eco-autobiography, “The relationality is spread out to numerous human and nonhuman others that are rarely the subjects of ‘classic’ autobiography” (Allister 171). Diane P. Freedman states that eco-memoirs go beyond the personal voices of their writers and the issues they tackle because they cross genres and disciplines and reach

readers inside and outside the academy, inside and outside literature (48). As a hybrid and transgressive form, eco-memoir opens a new window into nature and life writing both for writers and readers. That being the case, whether the writer of an eco-memoir is a woman or not appears as an indispensable question. At this point, it would be reasonable to have a brief look at women writers' place both in life writing and nature writing as they are the two pillars that constitute eco-memoirs.

3.3.1 A Brief Look at the History of Autobiography

From its first examples till its current state, autobiography, as a genre, has developed so much that today it is possible to talk about more than fifty sub-genres with various orientations like the claim for an ethnic identity, the healing of a diseased body as well as captivity narratives, conversion narratives, grief narratives, trauma narratives, survivor narratives, travel narratives and so on (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 183- 209). In the long and rich history of autobiography, St Augustine's *Confessions* (397) is acknowledged to be the first book-length autobiographical narrative in the west (85). Jill Ker Conway asserts that *Confessions* follows the classical pattern in Christianity, whereby the hero moves the odyssey from the external world to the inner consciousness of the narrator and tells his story of conversion and salvation (7). Smith and Watson read *Confessions* as St. Augustine's troubled journey toward conversion and his confessions of sins and shame (85). According to Conway, St. Augustine's *Confessions* is among the shaping male narratives of western culture (7). In fact, in the next thousand years after St. Augustine's *Confessions*, autobiographical writing maintained its religious content as a form of devotion to spirituality (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 86).

It took a long time for the genre to involve secular tendencies. In the early modern period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the autobiographers adopted a more secular tone by putting emphasis on public self rather than one's inner struggles for Christian salvation (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 87). Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography* (1558-1563) stands as an early example of secular and humanist autobiography, whereby the writer tells the story of success as an artist (88). Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781) appears as another shaping life narrative in the western culture. Conway reads Rousseau's *Confessions* as the secular hero's creating himself by keeping the Augustinian inner story of the hero's emotional life but moving

towards world fame and success rather than God (8). Smith and Watson think that Rousseau's *Confessions* is an early example of Romantic autobiography, whereby there is self-justification and a solitary quest for innocence in a corrupted society (96). In Conway's view, Rousseau's autobiography, in which the epic journey is an emotional one, offers an embryonic form of the modern concepts of id and ego that are at odds with each other (8-9).

In the Romantic period, the autobiographer turns to a solitary quest for an ideal or transcendent self that desires to merge with the sublime as in the example of Thoreau's *Walden* (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 100). In the scene set ready for the rise and solidification of the individual, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* appears in 1818 as the life story of a self-made economic man who moved from poverty to richness with hard work and discipline (Conway 9). Franklin's autobiography is regarded as the foundational text of American republicanism and a prototypical narrative of America's self-created man as "male, white, propertied, and socially and politically enfranchised" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 98). Moving from nineteenth to twentieth century, modernism along with its major themes like decadence, lost belief and alienation from nature led to the emergence of a new type of autobiography marked by a modern quest for meaning as in the examples of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), T.S Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" (1930) and "Four Quartets" (1942) (Conway 10).

Apparently, the life narratives that are accepted among the most influential life narratives in the west are all male narratives. Smith and Watson refer to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Cellini's *Life*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, George Fox's "Journal", Franklin's *Autobiography*, Goethe's *Truth and Poetry*, John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, and Thoreau's *Walden* as the landmarks of self-exploration, confession and self-discovery (*Reading* 121). These supposed landmarks are all by male writers. At this juncture, what happens to women's life writing is a rightful question. Conway asks: "Given that western language and narrative forms have been developed to record ... the male life, how can a woman write an autobiography when to do so requires ... using a genre which celebrates the atomistic western male hero?" (3).

3.3.2 A Brief Look at Women's Autobiographies

In fact, European women have inherited a tradition of silence from Classical Antiquity, whereby the powerful Amazon woman image was labelled monstrous, and from early Christianity, which literally told women to keep silent in the church (Conway 11). In such a silenced tradition, it has been difficult for women to imagine themselves as consistent individuals whose lives could be narrated coherently (Aksoy 39).⁴⁰ In the masculine tradition of autobiography both the writer and reader of male autobiographies assume that the life being written/read is an exemplary one that belongs to a representative self, but the female autobiographer has lacked such strong sense of self because of her marginalisation in the male-dominated culture (Brodzki and Schenck 1-3). However, such silencing and marginalisation did not prevent women from writing their lives. On the contrary, according to many early feminist literary critics such as Elaine Showalter and Ellen Moers, women's literary tradition has existed for centuries, especially considering their presence in "marginal" genres such as memoirs, journals, diaries and many other modes of private autobiographical writing (Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 6). American writer Estelle C. Jelinek, who is known for her studies on women's autobiographies and who edited the first anthology of essays about women's autobiography, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980), suggested that women created their own tradition within autobiography in Modern Language Association Convention in 1976 in New York (ix). Similarly, Germaine Brée, another prominent critic of women's autobiography, claimed in her 1976 essay "George Sand: The Fictions of Autobiography" that women's personal narratives should be read as a separate genre (qtd. in Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 7).

As the name of her book *The Tradition of Woman's Autobiography From Antiquity to Present* (1986) suggests, Jelinek analyses many women's autobiographical works from Antiquity to twentieth century, mostly in the west though. Jelinek highlights *Memoirs* by Agrippina II (15 -59), of which just a fragment has barely survived to date, as the first solid example of a woman's autobiographical text (13). She also underlines that the earliest extant diaries, which are again autobiographical forms, from the Roman Empire were also written by women (13). Jelinek draws attention to the lack of

⁴⁰Translations from this source are mine unless otherwise stated.

autobiographical works by women during the early Christian period and assumes that the reason for this absence is probably that women did not hold important positions in the church and their records were not deemed worthy of preservation (14). Considering Conway's claim that women were pushed into silence with Christianity, it is little wonder why there hardly remains any record of women's autobiographical works from early Christianity. Jelinek's point is that if women had followed the same path as St. Augustine and confessed to similar crimes, they would have been stoned to death (14).

The editors of *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women* (1979), Mary G. Mason and Carol Hurd Green proposed that women's autobiographical tradition is rooted in four texts, namely the autobiographical texts of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish and Anne Bradstreet (qtd. in Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 8). In fact, western European women's autobiography was first established through narratives of religious life and faith (Conway 11). The earliest example from late Middle Ages was *Revelations of Divine Life* (1373; 1393) by Julian of Norwich (1343-1416), which, in Jelinek's view, is more an intellectual treatise than a personal narrative (14). According to Conway, *Revelations* offers a record of Julian's visions during her prayer and meditation and might serve as a guide about how to feel God's omnipresence rather than a personal account, in which the author is concerned about her own agency (12). In this dictated book, Julian asks: "Because I am a woman, ought I therefore to believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God?" (qtd. in Jelinek 15). Conway states that Julian of Norwich was highly literate and had a great knowledge of the Scripture (14), but it seems that her knowledge was overshadowed by her style because Jelinek underlines that her work was criticized for its nonsequential organization of chapters (15). Succeeding Julian of Norwich, women continued to write about their mystic experiences and their relationship with God as in *Life of St. Teresa by Herself* by St. Teresa of Avila, a High Renaissance Spanish mystic (Conway 12-13).

Different from Julian's and other mystics' works that had a religious content, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1436-38) by Margery Burnham Kempe (1373-1438?), the first prose autobiography in English and the first subjective account written with self-consciousness, includes many secular experiences from Kempe's life such as her marriage, her post-natal depression and her observations during her pilgrimage in

Europe (Jelinek 15-16). Like Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe also had a disjointed and nonchronological narrative interrupted by her visions (Jelinek 16). While *The Book of Margery Kempe* comes to the forefront for breaking new ground with her emphasis on the personal and the concrete, both books are accepted to have made great contributions to English literature during and after Norman conquest: “The devotional prose of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries contained a body of writing addressed particularly to women ... Julian and Margery go one step farther; they are the most prominent female writers of Middle English devotional prose, women who break a long tradition of feminine silence in England” (qtd. in Jelinek 18). Mason indicates that because of the way Kempe wrote about her wife-mother, pilgrim-mystic roles, she reveals a common pattern in women’s perception of themselves and their demanding identities, both worldly and otherworldly (322).

Starting with Renaissance, asecular and humanist tone dominated autobiographical writing with an emphasis on unique and complex individual, but this did not affect women until the seventeenth century (Jelinek 19). According to Conway, the first secular form of women’s life narratives was characterized by bourgeois preoccupation with romantic love, marriage and family (13). Jelinek emphasizes that with the secularist tendency in autobiography writing, men tended to write progressive and orderly chronicles about their achievements and experiences mostly in the army, during their travels or political lives without mentioning their families, whereas women turned to self-analysis and domestic life (24). In Conway’s words, “The secularization of European culture produced no female Rousseau, claiming to be the model of a new social and political type for a life to be understood in terms of this world” (13). In the seventeenth century women were confined to home with domestic responsibilities and lacked the chance to participate in vocational activities, and this led to the inclusion of domestic and emotional life in autobiography, at least in the English tradition (Jelinek 24).

Cavendish’s autobiographical essay “A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life” (1656) stands out as the first important secular autobiography by a woman (Mason 322). Cavendish, the first woman author in English literary history known to have written and published profusely, was denigrated by her contemporaries as a mad,

ridiculous woman, and her works were dismissed as incomprehensible scribbles (Trubowitz 229). However, according to Margaret Reeves, she was much ahead of her time, and she knew that her contemporaries had little understanding of her literary achievements (184). In her autobiography, Cavendish writes: "I verily believe some censuring Readers will scornfully say, why hath this Ladie writ her own Life? since none cares to know whose daughter she was, or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had, or how she lived, or what humour or disposition she was of?" (qtd. in Reeves 185). In the first part of her autobiography, Cavendish describes her family and tells their stories, and in the second part she writes about her own personality and seeks to justify her activities as a writer to counter rumours that began to circulate about her after she began her writing career (Reeves 185). Given Cavendish's inclination to write her life story in relation to her family members and her claim to be herself, Mason and Green seem to be right in positioning Cavendish's autobiography among the founding texts of women's autobiography.

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), who was long considered mainly of historical interest and could receive critical acceptance only in the twentieth century as a writer and poet, was, in fact, among the first poets who wrote English verse in the American colonies ("Anne" [*Encyclopaedia*]). According to Mason, Bradstreet's upbringing in Puritan tradition and early years in the New England colonies enabled her to focus on herself as a personal figure and also on a spiritual community by harmonizing the divine, secular, personal, private and public consciousness (322). Bradstreet wrote the conflicts she experienced between the pleasures of sensory and familial experience and the promises of heaven ("Anne" [*Poetry*]). Bradstreet merits attention for her ability to combine secular and divine as well as private and public, but it is also important that she makes a claim to her authorship as a woman poet: "I am obnoxious to each carping tongue/ Who says my hand a needle better fits" (qtd. in Mason 323). As it is seen, Bradstreet did not readily submit to the gender roles and religious responsibilities and questioned them in her writings; therefore, she seems to be deserving the place accorded to her among the pioneers of women's autobiographical tradition.

Jelinek claims that women writers formed a female tradition by emphasizing the personal over historical, family over career and disjunctive over progressive narratives

in the eighteenth century (33). Jelinek thinks that the changes in the socio-economic situation caused by Industrial Revolution affected women, some of whom found themselves divorced or widowed and had little means to survive in the city and some of whom were single and had no job or education to support themselves (33). In Jelinek's view, those who could write their autobiographies in the eighteenth century did so either to seek acceptance by the society or to prove their respectability and moral integrity, which shows that their autobiographies were marked by a concern about self-affirmation (40). Conway, on the other hand, argues that the bourgeois preoccupation with romantic love, family and property changed the plot of women's life narratives towards the quest for the ideal hero (14). In the nineteenth century, with more and more literary women appearing on the stage, the number of women's autobiographies also increased, but Jelinek argues that even if they were accomplished women writers, they maintained an apologetic and self-depreciating tone about their private lives and careers (44). The nineteenth century witnessed also the emergence of autobiographies by women professionals other than writers, who, in Conway's view, remained silent about their ambitions and recounted their success stories as if it was a chance (15).

Even a very brief look at the evolution of autobiography until twentieth century shows that men and women have followed different paths in this genre. Jelinek puts forward certain features that differentiate women's autobiographies from men's:

Men's life stories are more centred on their success stories as they tend to highlight their public image while women focus more on their personal and domestic lives and write themselves in relation to others. Men seek to aggrandize themselves to mold into heroic roles whereas women are more self-depreciating. Men prefer to follow a more linear timeline and create more neatly structured narratives, but women's narratives are more discontinuous and fragmentary. (qtd. in Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 11)

Domna J. Stanton even proposed the term "autogynography" to draw attention to women's being suppressed in literary history and to feature women's autobiography as a separate genre (qtd. in Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 11). Nonetheless, the differences outlined by Jelinek and supported by many feminist autobiography critics have recently been contested by some critics, including postmodern feminist critics who

claimed that women are not one single category and there are many differences among women autobiographers as well (Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 10). Still, given that women have long been denigrated in literary history, it could be a justifiable act to shed light on women autobiographers. Also, it is important to remember that women's autobiographies caught less attention than men's autobiographies, especially until the second-wave of feminism. Referring to the works of leading autobiography critics such as George Misch, James Olney, Wayne Schumaker and Dean Abner, Jelinek claimed that women's autobiographies are not analysed as much as men's (1-8). Olney confessed to this lack of interest: "As several recent bibliographical publications attest, Women's Studies courses have a sizeable autobiographical literature to draw on, but theoretical and critical writing is for the most part yet to come" (qtd.in Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 16).

However, in recent years, the relative lack of interest in women's autobiographies has been compensated for. Not only have many women writers with diverse backgrounds affirmed their positions with their autobiographies but also many critics have elaborated on their works, which is obviously a gain of second-wave feminism and feminist literary criticism. As it can be seen in several anthologies and essay collections on women's autobiographies,⁴¹ women autobiographers have written their autobiographies from various angles such as race, class, sexuality and body. Jelinek highlights that especially since Kate Millet's *Flying* (1974) more women than ever before have written autobiographies from every possible perspective: widowed women, adopted women, celebrities, survivors of concentration camps in Europe, Native American women etc. (185). Some women writers have even used their life narratives as a mobilisation tool and turned autobiography writing into activism. For example, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Elaine Brown, the women activists of the Black Power movement, respectively wrote *An Autobiography* (1974), *Assata* (1987), and *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (1992) using their life narratives as an extension of their activism (Perkins 1). Smith also underlines that with the influence of

⁴¹To read more on women's autobiographies, please see *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* edited by Bella Brodzki, and Schenck Celeste, Cornell University Press, 1998 and *Women, Autobiography, Theory, A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

modernist and postmodernist theories, twentieth-century women have used autobiography as a ground for cultural critique, especially by targeting the issues about gender, race, class and ethnicity and finding points of resistance through writing (“Self” 21).

In this multivocal and pluralist genre, which continuously evolves with the influence of contemporary theories, women writers writing about the non-human seem to be gaining a new terrain as it was seen in the early examples of Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) in the US and Nan Shephard’s *The Living Mountain* (1977) in the UK. This dissertation attempts to explore this terrain with a focus on how the selected writers try to write about the non-human in relation to themselves and how they write about themselves in relation to the non-human and discuss if they move beyond self and engage in a cultural criticism for the sake of an environmentally just world where the hierarchical dualist thinking is dismantled. Given the long history of women’s confinement to silence in literary tradition and the comparative lack of critical and academic interest in women’s life writing until at least 1970s, it might be sensible to pay timely tribute to women writers writing about the non-human in their memoirs.

3.3.3 Women in Nature Writing

When eco-memoir is considered as a sub-genre of autobiography, a very brief look at the history of the genre unravels the marginalisation of women writers in autobiography studies until the 1970s despite their significant contribution to the field. On the other hand, if writing about the non-human nature is regarded as a scientific attempt as much as a literary one, the question of women naturalists might come to mind. In fact, there have been women naturalists since ancient times. For example, Leoma Williams, the editor of *BBC Wildlife Magazine*, informs that Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut (1479– 1458 BC) is known to have done research into plants by having five ships sent out to the land of Punt to gather valuable plants and animals (“Inspiring”). Moreover, there is evidence of a female shaman who lived as early as 12000 BC as it was revealed in the archaeological excavations at Natufian cave site in Israel (Grosman et al. 17665). Considering that shamans were the herbalists and botanists of their times, it is obvious that women naturalists have existed for a long period of time. However, in her study on female shamans in the Amazons, Françoise B. Freedman claims that

female shamans have not only been ignored in ethnographic studies but also overshadowed by male shamans in the region even to the extent of being denied access to certain herbs and plants, whose healing power is accepted by indigenous peoples (137).

Joe Medeiros and Jennifer Skillen, the editors of the special collection of the *Journal of Sierra College Natural History Museum*, offer a survey of female naturalists titled “Women in Nature: A Gallery of Influential and Pioneering Female Naturalists”. This study extends from Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) to Terry Tempest Williams (1955-) in the west and argues that though women have been interested in science, mathematics and natural history since the beginning of human history, they have usually been forced to surrender to the gender roles of their time leaving those occupations to men. Medeiros and Skillen indicate that despite this forced withdrawal, there have been prominent female naturalists throughout history (“Women”). In the same vein, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), known as the founder of scientific natural history in Germany and the author of *Physica*, a series of nine books on the medicinal properties of plants, animals and stones, should be honoured among the early women naturalists that left a mark on our understanding of the non-human nature (L. Williams, “Inspiring”). Bingen is also recognized as a medieval woman healer, musician and composer who recorded her life (Conway 12).

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), a German naturalist known as a ground breaker in botany and zoology, published *Der Raupenwunderbare Verwandlung und sonderbare Blumennahrung* (*The Caterpillars’ Marvellous Transformation and Strange Floral Food*) in 1679 and *Metamorphosis insectorum Surinamensium* (*Insects of Suriname*) in 1705 in vernacular languages, which was contrary to the Latin trend at her time, and she became famous in European society and was praised by her contemporaries (Medeiros and Skillen). Medeiros’s and Skillen’s collection shows more and more female naturalists since the nineteenth century in Europe. This upwards trend in the number of female naturalists since the nineteenth century can be linked to the “increase in the number of universities by the late 1890s and early 1900s” (Bronstein and Bolnick 659). In their study on the early female authors of the journal *The American Naturalist*, Judith L. Bronstein and Daniel I. Bolnick have found out that the

earliest women naturalists who got published by the journal were mostly self-trained individuals with no affiliation with a university but who could receive the support of their rich husbands, fathers or brothers to be recognized (662). Bronstein and Bolnick imply that the early women naturalists' professional career was tied to powerful and wealthy men (662). Bronstein's and Bolnick's study also reveals that the number of female authors of the magazine has increased since the 1970s (656), which could be a gain of the feminist movement. It appears that women naturalists have always been there, but they have been recognized in the field late as it was also the case with female autobiographers.

If we consider eco-memoir as a hybrid form, which it indeed is, now it would be wise to focus on women writers who write about the non-human in a hybrid way, namely both scientifically and subjectively. Barkham argues that British nature writing is overwhelmingly white and male. Barkham's point is shared by Jamie. In her review of *The Wild Places* (2007) by Macfarlane, Jamie satirically writes:

When a bright, healthy and highly educated young man jumps on the sleeper train and heads this way [Scotland], with the declared intention of seeking 'wild places', my first reaction is to groan. It brings out in me a horrible mix of class, gender and ethnic tension. What's that coming over the hill? A white, middle-class Englishman! A Lone Enraptured Male! From Cambridge! Here to boldly go, 'discovering', then quelling our harsh and lovely and sometimes difficult land with his civilised lyrical words. When he compounds this by declaring that 'to reach a wild place was, for me, to step outside human history,' I'm not just groaning but banging my head on the table. ("A Lone")

Morton, too, has a satirical attitude to the male wanderer image dominating the field: "Men (mostly men) ... think that they're escaping civilization and its discontents" (*The Ecological* 83). Morton focuses on the fantasy of "I can make it on my own", which American boys are taught and argues that male wanderers act out the myth of self-made man who needs no love or warmth or has no vulnerability or ambiguity (83-4). The white male author image prevailing over nature writing has been mentioned by Hubbard and Wilkinson, too. In their article on Carol Donaldson's *On the Marshes*, Hubbard and Wilkinson argue that the narrative of a woman walking in nature alone is a challenge

against the conventional masculinist trope of male wanderer who boldly ventures into the wilderness (255). With her walk to the Kent marshes, Donaldson reveals the gendering of a landscape, which has been made home predominantly by marginalised men, and she also resists against the western myth of mobility that implies that men gain power by rejecting rootedness and familial values while women are blamed if they are mobile (257-58). Donaldson's following remarks about her own experience verify Hubbard and Wilkinson:

Women who have read the book have commented that I was brave for doing the journey alone whereas a man would not have thought twice about it ... I think the judgement was sometimes curiosity at a woman in her 40s walking across the marshes alone instead of looking after children. I think I was doing something that did not quite fit the expected image and this provoked curiosity from women as well as men. (qtd. in Hubbard and Wilkinson 258)

Donaldson and Jamie are not the only women writers who express their concerns about the genre being gendered. For example, to my question "Have you ever felt any particular advantage or disadvantage about being a woman writer writing on the non-human?", Griffiths, the author of *Wild* gave the following answer in her e-mail dated 9 May 2020:

I would say that the experience of being a woman inevitably means the experience of being considered 'lesser': less important, less significant, less valuable. For myself, this informs my politics in the deepest sense: I view the living world with a sense that it too is treated as the underdog in relation to the brutally strong world of money and profit, and the natural world is considered less important than the artificial world. I am always sympathetic to the underdog, to whatever and whoever is considered less important. I would hope that had I been a man, I would also have had that political stance, but I know that this empathy is sharpened by my experience as a woman.

Griffiths seems to identify with the natural world as she thinks both women and the non-human are the others of the male-dominated world, which gets her stance closer to socialist ecofeminism. She questions herself if she would think differently were she a man, but she is also insistent that she owes her sense of empathy to her experience as a

woman. On the other hand, Miriam Darlington, the author of *Otter Country* (2012) and *Owl Sense* (2018) sounds more certain about the differences between a male and female nature writer. In her e-mail dated 5 May 2020, Darlington says:

As a woman I am able to be still and porous in the natural world, using my sensory and spiritual connection and curiosity to help me observe and to record evocatively, in a sympathetic yet subtle way... (Generally) I think male writers have been inclined to struggle with and to subjugate in favour of 'knowledge' and being purveyors of factual information. This male stance is very different; they have been more acquisitive, competitive, territorial in their relation to writing about nature (the 'canon' has been traditionally very male-dominated and not seen as female territory).

Regarding my question "Do you think women writers might contribute to nature writing (landscape writing, green literature) in their own ways like the case in autobiography writing?", both authors seem to agree that women tend to write less ego-centrally and more relationally. Avoiding categorical generalisations, Griffiths accepts that the way a girl is brought up might make a difference when it comes to designating the centre of attention in a writing as someone or something other than the authorial self.

It is perhaps broadly true that women writing about the natural world may more easily be willing to step back, to write less about themselves and be more translucent to the green world they discuss. Some male writers do this, of course! And indeed, some female writers put themselves right in the centre of the frame and get in the way. So, it is a broad generalisation, for sure, but I think there is truth in it. Perhaps because there is a habit and training involved in being brought up female that (both for better and for worse) can encourage us to step back and let other people and other life forms take centre stage.

Darlington's following remarks about the field of nature writing being gendered are worthy of attention. Darlington puts emphasis on the male dominance in writing, science and natural history:

Women's writing is less assuming and gets overlooked and is undervalued. Especially in this area! I think we have a socio-cultural naturally embedded

attitude and hierarchy where we have not traditionally listened to women's voices on this. Of course, this is not just limited to nature writing but is particularly acute in this area because science and natural history have been owned by men. In this area I have observed/experienced suspicion and hostility, or just to be ignored and undervalued, repeatedly. Apart from overcoming fears of being out in the wild alone, which we female nature writers work hard to challenge, women's writing is stereotyped, simply not valued as much as men's and we are still breaking into the canon. In the United States this is different, but in the UK we are still quite feudal!

The authors' opinions and feelings are supported by the American scholar, Vera L. Norwood, too. Moreover, Norwood does not think that the situation is considerably different in the US. Norwood criticizes the dominance of white male author image in American nature writing and draws attention to four pioneering women nature writers in her article "Heroines of Nature: Four Women Respond to the American Landscape". According to Norwood, the experience of wilderness in the New World was gendered in such a way that while for men wilderness was a place where they could prove their virility and satisfy their adventure-seeking impulses, for women it was constructed as a dangerous place to avoid (341-343). Covering the books of Isabella Bird, Mary Austin and Rachel Carson that extend over a period from 1878 to 1951, Norwood claims that these four leading women defied the gender roles imposed on them and contributed to nature writing in their own ways, and they had a shared understanding which distinguished them from their male counterparts: "Their cultural drama is not one of successful challenge, nature overcome, but of full recognition, nature comprehended," writes Norwood (344). Concluding her article, Norwood underlines that different from their male counterparts, women writers could forfeit their voice so that nature speaks: "We know a great deal about the heroism of the first voice, but very little about the equally heroic acts of the second" (344).

All in all, it is a justifiable preference to choose women nature writers as a separate subject of study unless one does not give in to strict and hasty generalisations which would end up in essentialism. Women's ecological orientation, which might be attributed to their being "the other" in their societies is one reason why our attention can

and should be directed to them. The tangible gains of ecofeminisms are another reason why an attempt to discuss women and nature under the same roof would matter. After all, ecofeminism has moved beyond theory and integrated into activism yielding positive results in diverse environmental rebellions across the world. Notwithstanding the essentialist tendency within the movement, ecofeminisms offer us a variety of lenses to look at the non-human nature, which all share a common understanding: Dualist western thinking causes harm to what is not white and male human. Finally, women writers have been marginalised not only in the field of autobiography but also in natural history. Since eco-memoirs are writings that combine subjective life writings and scientific nature writings, women writers seem to be facing double exclusion in this field. Feminism has obviously helped improve women's conditions in literature and science since late nineteenth century, but twenty-first century has still not witnessed the dismantling of the male-dominated order. The feelings of contemporary nature writers quoted above also hint at an ongoing subjugation, which should not be ignored. From this perspective, paying timely homage to women nature writers appears as a legitimate need.

CHAPTER 4

Women's Eco-memoirs as Counter-Narratives

4.1 *Findings, Sightlines and Surfacing: An Eclectic Trilogy*

This part of the dissertation focuses on the eco-memoirs by selected contemporary British women nature writers and analyses the points discussed so far in their books. As it was seen in the previous chapters, my argument is that contemporary eco-memoirs have the potential to offer a counter-narrative to the deeply rooted dualist thinking system in the west, and within this anthropocentric tradition women nature writers can be studied separately for their long neglected presence in the history of nature writing and life writing, which constitute the two pillars of eco-memoirs and also for their allegedly different relation to the non-human world, which can be explained by the fact that women have been the other of male-oriented western dualism just as the non-human nature has been. The features which are apparently common in recent eco-memoirs help us to deduce that regardless of the subject matter they choose to focus on and irrespective of their background in nature writing in particular and writing in general, contemporary nature writers have a shared anxiety: They want to change our way of looking at the non-human world starting with our well-established dualistic thought system.

As previously detailed, from the earliest examples to the contemporary works, nature writing in the west has been enriched with contributions from writers with diverse backgrounds. Regarding its current state in Britain, it can be argued that fed by the long history of nature writing in the west, contemporary nature writers in Britain are similar to each other in their ecological awareness and interest in environmental activism; their search for a porous self and experience of enchantment in nature; their coming from diverse backgrounds and their tendency to blend literariness and scientificness in their writings; their concern for their local natural habitats without ignoring the universality of environmental problems and their inclination to use nature writing for autobiographical purposes. In what follows, I would like to start with the analysis of Kathleen Jamie's essay collections, namely *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019) in the light of these common traits and discuss how they create a counter-narrative to the dominant anthropocentrism in the west.

Kathleen Jamie was born in 1962 in the west of Scotland (“Kathleen” [Poetry]). Raised by a non-bookish family, Jamie started writing poetry when she was a teenager (“Kathleen”, [Scottish]). As a young poet studying philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, she attracted the attention of the poet Douglass Dunn (“Kathleen”, [Scottish]). Of her poetry, Douglas Dunn said: “She is a very self-aware poet. My framework for poetry is that it has to happen between the ears - intelligence - it has to happen under the left nipple - bit of heart and feeling ... And I like her work because of the way it engages with natural things. That is her main thing” (qtd. in Scott).

Jamie has been in the British literary scene since 1980s, and her interest has generally been in cultural, national and gender identity (Falconer 2). Rachel Falconer informs that Jamie was more concerned about Scots language and culture in her earlier poems, but it can hardly be said that she has employed a nationalist’s tone, for she knows how to open her writing to the world although she is strongly influenced by Scottish landscape (2). In fact, Jamie has spent most of her life travelling and avoided the constrictions of home (Mackay 87). Her *The Golden Peak* (1992),⁴² in which she writes about her travel to Pakistan as well as *The Autonomous Region* (1993), a collaborative work of Jamie and the photographer Sean Mayne Smith on their experience in China and Tibet show that she does expand her horizon to worlds other than Scotland (Falconer 3).

According to Louisa Gairn, since the devolution in 1997, Jamie’s attention has shifted more to the natural world and ecology rather than questions of nation and national culture (236). Gairn cites from the writer herself to show her evolution: “Hills and birds seem to be entering the poems; my local landscape, the energy of the land. To my mind, these poems are more interesting than “political” or “gender” poems” (236). On the other hand, Falconer highlights that even though she appears to have turned to nature more in her recent writings, her writings have always been in conversation with the natural world, but she has come to the forefront as a nature writer because the first decade of twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of new nature writing in Britain (4). Falconer’s following statements about Jamie merits to be quoted in full, for it extensively describes her writing.

⁴²This book was reissued as *Among Muslims* (2002).

Reading Jamie is a lesson in learning how to wait patiently for the marvellous to swim into view. It is a lesson that goes against the grain of much twenty-first-century Western culture, where to be faster, louder and shinier than the competition is a sign of success. Jamie's writing explores weighty issues – questions of nationhood, subjectivity, the relation between art and medicine, the health of the planet, what it means to be human – with all our freakish inner landscapes – and the primacy of the human connection to other species. But it does so with disarming quietness, with 'tremendous patience'. (1)

Though Jamie herself is against labels, she is mostly known as a Scottish poet and a woman poet. In fact, she catches attention as an award-winner poet, too. Her first poetry collection, *Black Spiders*, won the Eric Gregory Award in 1982, and her ten subsequent collections have been critically acclaimed receiving awards such as the Forward and Griffin Prizes (A. Bell). She is the author of numerous collections of poetry, including *The Bonniest Company* (2016), *Waterlight: Selected Poems* (2007), and *The Tree House* (2004) ("Kathleen" [Poetry]). At the present time, Jamie is a professor of poetry in English at the University of Stirling, and Scottish editor of *Irish Pages* (A. Bell). Addressing a wide-ranging readership in the British Isles as well as North America, she also writes for *The Guardian*, *The London Review of Books* and *Orion Magazine* in the USA (Falconer 2). About herself as a writer, Jamie says:

I have what Robert Louis Stevenson called 'a strong Scots accent of the mind' and my constellation of interests seem to include the natural world (widely defined), archaeology, medical humanities, and art. To produce work, I have walked and sailed many miles, and benefited from the company and expertise of visual artists, pathologists, curators, ornithologists, and from encounters with other species, too, especially birds and whales. ("About")

Despite her fame as a poet, Jamie has remained less popular as a prose writer, and the editor of *Granta*, Ian Jack thinks that her "poetic touch to prose" is what makes her less famous (qtd. in Scott). This dissertation, however, focuses on her essay collections, *Findings* (2005), *Sightlines* (2012) and *Surfacing* (2019), which reveal the evolution of Jamie's writing over a period of fourteen years. Given that her essays cover a wide range of topics from dead animals' body parts to pathological human cells, I will

try to examine her essay collections based on the common traits observed in new nature writing reflecting the writer's eclectic style in the analysis.

4.1.1 *Findings* (2005)

Jamie's first collection of essays, *Findings* was published in 2005 and at that time her publisher was not sure how to categorise it: It was not travel writing, for the writer did not travel somewhere out of her homeland, nor was it an autobiography because it was not formed like a coherent memoir (Crown). In fact, *Findings* can be categorized under nature writing as an example of eco-memoir as Jamie combines her response to the natural world with what she experiences in life. *Findings* is composed of eleven essays, which are respectively titled: "Darkness and Light", "Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes", "Findings", "The Braan Salmon", "Crex-Crex", "Fever", "Markings", "Surgeons' Hall", "Skylines", "Sabbath" and "Cetacean Disco". As the title of each essay might suggest, *Findings* is not structured around a plot in traditional sense but is rather fragmentary in form. Likewise, the subjects Jamie chooses to write about are also disparate. She writes about salmons, peregrines, cetaceans as well as a Neolithic cairn. Though she turns attention mainly to birds like peregrines, ospreys and cranes in *Findings*, she is also interested in dead human body parts, which she observes in the Surgeons Hall and equally considers as part of nature. Similarly, she shows interest in dead animals' body parts she finds during her hikes, and she likes to keep them at home as a reminiscence of her direct touch with the natural world. In terms of time, *Findings* offers no structured timeline, either. The sense of fragmentedness manifests itself in setting, too. Her essays move from the Orkney Islands to Surgeons' Hall Museum in Edinburgh, from her bedroom in their house to a hospital room in Fife, from the River Braan to the Charlotte Square in Edinburgh although they are all derived from Scotland.

In a comparative analysis of *Findings* and Jamie's poems collected under *The Tree House*, Peter Mackay claims that receptiveness is an important element in *Findings* (84). Mackay suggests that Jamie's writing about the natural world is marked by her attentiveness to the non-human nature and her respect towards it (84-92). From Mackay's analysis, it is understood that Jamie does not aim to consume non-human nature as an object of gaze or an object of entertainment. Neither does she want to

instrumentalise it as a refuge or shelter. It appears that Jamie simply wants to be within the natural world for its mere existence. Mackay quotes from the author herself to show how she describes herself as an author writing about the natural world: “You take notes almost like a naturalist who observes something, whether it is a flower or a street scene. It is not out of curiosity, but you almost respect what you are observing. You want to have what you observe accurately in its beauty and detail, and so it is almost like a mark of respect for it” (86). Similar to Mackay, Gairn also draws attention to Jamie’s attentiveness to the natural world and claims that with *Findings* the writer finetunes her ability to pay heed to the natural world (241).

Eleanor Bell offers a comparative analysis of Kathleen Jamie and Nan Shepherd in her article titled “Into the Centre of Things: Poetic Travel Narratives in the Work of Kathleen Jamie and Nan Shepherd”. Focusing on Jamie’s *Findings* and *Sightlines*, Bell suggests that different from the sense of timelessness in Shepherd’s *The Living Mountain*, Jamie’s essay collections, which are both rooted in Scotland, show the signs of the twenty-first century with all the traces from Jamie’s life as a woman who needs to find a balance between writing, motherhood and aspects of a busy life (129). From Bell’s point of view, in both essay collections “Jamie writes from a personal space which sees the value of recording the everyday within a grander order. It is perhaps these very human qualities of her essays on travel and nature, though – seeing the domestic within the wild, and vice versa – which are central to their appeal” (129).

As an essay collection that brings together the writer’s everyday encounters with the natural world in her vicinity and her personal and familial experiences in life, *Findings* has been praised both by readers and critics. Upon the publication of *Findings*, John Berger called Jamie a “sorceress of the essay form” while her readers were amazed by her straightforward approach to her environment, in which nature is observed within everyday life (Crown). The writer’s attentiveness and respect to the natural world have particularly drawn attention. Jamie herself thinks the success of *Findings* mainly lies with her close relation to the land as she is neither a landowner nor a tourist but an indigene in Scotland (qtd. in Crown). In what follows I would like to go into more detail about *Findings* based on the following subheadings.

4.1.1.1 A Move from Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism and More

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, ecologically minded critics and writers have been trying to challenge anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism. Clark's definition of biocentrism lets us conclude that a biocentric point of view encourages us to identify with all life or the entire ecosystem without privileging one species over the others (*The Cambridge* 3). Biocentric thinking is mostly associated with deep ecology, which asserts that the thinking of the 'self' must involve other organisms (23). In the opening essay of *Findings*, "Dark and Light", Jamie apparently practices this biocentric way of thinking, and she does even more than that by paying attention to the non-living, too. In late December, while everyone in the household is focusing on Christmas preparations and people are busy with kids' parties, where she also takes her children, Jamie manages to create a space for herself to appreciate the inclusion of non-human in her busy life. She pays attention to the weak December sunlight entering through her kitchen window and notes: "It was a weakling light, stealing to the world like a thief through a window someone forgot to close" (1). However anthropomorphic this description may sound, it is noteworthy that at a time when everybody else in her circle is involved in Christmas preparations and while they all seem to take the long winter nights for granted, especially towards winter solstice, she remains attentive to the changing pattern of light in the sky.

Towards Christmas, Jamie receives an invitation to go to a meal at Maes Howe in Orkney Islands to celebrate the winter solstice and decides to go there, for she wants to see darkness inside a cairn. During her visit to Maes Howe, a World Heritage Site of five thousand years old, she goes to see the Neolithic chambered cairn alone before going there with others. She observes the empty hills surrounding the tomb and writes: "I like the sun's particular gestures, and I like the signs of midwinter life; the wintering geese in empty fields, a lone woman walking along a farm track in boots, and coat, a scarf over her head" (9). The way she includes the sun, the geese and the woman in her description shows that she has an all-encompassing eye. Maes Howe is the main target of her visit to the islands, but the description she makes does not privilege this cultural heritage to the nature it is embedded in. To her, the sunlight, the geese and the woman all complete Maes Howe, which can be read as a sign that she offers a holistic look at

nature and culture. In this holistic approach, she hardly elevates non-human nature, which separates her from a romantic author in search of the sublime.

On the day when the group heads for Maes Howe, which was built in the exact position to face the setting sun on December 21st, Jamie continues to observe her surroundings with a watchful eye, and her descriptions cover the non-human, again: “Sheep were grazing the field, and a heron was standing with its aristocratic back to us. There was a breeze, and the shivery call of a curlew descending. On all sides, there are low hills, holding the plain between them” (*Findings* 12). Though some of her descriptions are anthropomorphic, it is evident that she does not apply anthropomorphism to prioritise human against non-human. In other words, Jamie’s anthropomorphism is not damaging. On the contrary, the way she introduces the non-human elements in between her explanations about Maes Howe and its history urges the reader to think of the Neolithic remains in continuity with the surrounding nature.

When Jamie enters the cairn, she is amazed by how the stone was turned into a tomb: “A moment ago, you were in the middle of a field, with the wind and curlews calling. That world has been taken away, and the world you have entered into is not like a cave, but a place of artifice” (*Findings* 13). The sharp contrast between the sounds of the wind and curlews outside and the “soundlessness” of the stone astonishes her. She appreciates both the stone for its permanence and the Neolithic people who carved it for their skill: “What you notice when you stand and look around is cool, dry, applied skill. Across five thousand years you can still feel their self-assurance” (13). Her simultaneous appreciation of the stone and Neolithic people without ignoring the sound of the wind and birds is another proof of her holistic approach. Her attention to the stone and wind evokes the importance attached to matter by material ecocriticism, alternately known as new materialisms.

The leading theoreticians of new materialisms, Iovino and Oppermann say that in material ecocriticism the world’s material phenomena are taken as knots in a vast network of agencies, and thus it is possible to find the stories of matter everywhere like in the air we breathe or the food we eat (“Introduction” 1). By agency, they mean the ability to produce a force that influences both the human and nonhuman (2). From their perspective, matters, which are endowed with an agentic capability, matter. With the

attention she pays to the sunlight, wind and stone, Jamie seems to be appreciating the material world. Likewise, she notices the change caused by the algae and humidity inside the cairn. She learns from her guide that the cracks they see inside the tomb might have occurred from humidity, so the scientists working on the tomb try to control the humidity level with monitors installed inside: “The building wasn’t designed to be breathed in and lit. It was designed to be dead in, and dark. Breath and light mean algae, and algae is damaging” (*Findings* 17).

Material ecocritics basically argue that we, as humans are not in control of many worlds, like the worlds of toxins, fungi, climate patterns that affect our world and we cannot, thus, claim to have agency as a faculty to be attributed to humans only (Ioviono and Oppermann, “Introduction” 3). In parallel with this, Jane Bennett, another prominent thinker of new materialisms introduces the theory of “distributive agency” to imply that a human subject that is exclusively thought to have a will or intentions cannot be the only cause of an effect (31). Accordingly, it can be argued that although a human seems to be the subject of an action, there might be multiple non-human agents that make this action possible. Bennett uses the term “the agency of assemblages” to suggest that a variety of factors, human or non-human, animate or inanimate, have an agentic capacity that might change the course of events (34). Clark indicates that with this term Bennett describes the way combination of agents work together to produce unexpected results (“Material” 114-15), which the human agent might not have intended. Jamie refers to such an unintended effect in the Maes Howe as she highlights the impact of algae and humidity on the tomb. Here, she is, in fact, pointing at the agency of the non-human. On the other hand, if the tomb had never been opened for search and tourism, there would be no human breath in it and no algae would have occurred. Human aspiration to dig the earth and uncover the past brings about possible damage to the tomb, which is hard to control. By referring to the scientists’ meticulous efforts to keep the humidity level inside the cairn under control, Jamie explains how a natural phenomenon gets in the way of a human effort, but she admits that the fault originally lies with the human after all: “They [Victorian archaeologists who found the tomb] had awakened Maes Howe out of a long sleep, by entering through its roof, as you might crack a boiled egg.

Though they had repaired their damage, it was not to the Neolithic standard, and a watchful eye was being kept on it” (*Findings* 17).

Another example where Jamie implies the agency of the non-human is about the salmons in “The Braan Salmon” and their potential ability to follow the smell to get back to the river of their birth. She informs the reader that the salmons feeding off the south coast of Greenland get back to the Braan, their river of birth. Yet she cannot help asking: “What, do we imagine, is the smell of the Braan? The smell that must distil on our faces, out of the spray, as we stand in that little balcony? Rather, how does the smell of the Braan differ from the smell of the Earn, say, or the Tilt?” (*Findings* 81). It is evident that she is asking a question she cannot answer. With this question, she seems to be suggesting that the salmon has a capability which we, as humans, have trouble even trying to imagine. She cannot find an adjective to describe the smell of the river as felt by the salmon simply because she has none. She has to use a lot of words followed by a question mark trying to describe the smell: “The water of the falls of the Braan must surely smell of schist and granite gravel, peat, and fish, alder, microbes and leaf rot, earth, silage, moss and oxygen?” (81). Her lack of words about the salmon’s ability to smell the river could imply that a human’s agency might not match a non-human animal’s.

According to Iovino and Oppermann, the material world has been contrasted to the human that is accepted to be endowed with reason and agentic capability, and it has been seen as inert and unable to convey a message (“Introduction” 2). Different from this tendency, Jamie recognizes the agentic capability of the non-human animals and attributes agency to the inanimate world, too. In other words, she does not condemn inanimate things to passiveness. Jamie implies that although all those Neolithic people have long gone, the matter they left behind still stands proving their existence in the world. Jamie tries to remember a moment they were working in the cairn: “I can’t remember if we spoke in low voices, as you would in a sacred place. I think we must have because you could see the stern weight of stone and earth overhead” (*Findings* 19). It is obvious that the respect she pays to the cairn is not only related to the stories of the dead people buried in the cairn. She is respectful also to the stone and earth that made it

possible to witness the past. In that specific moment, she does not consider nature and culture as separate.

Her embracing approach to the inanimate, non-human and human world as a whole applies to her perception of time, too. Jamie sounds suspicious of the linear perception of time. Upon her visit to the Neolithic village Skara Brae, she notes: “There you can marvel at the domestic normality, that late Stone Age people had beds and cupboards and neighbours and beads. You can feel both their presence, their day-to-day life, and their utter absence. It is a good place to go. It re-calibrates your sense of time” (*Findings* 11). That she draws attention to the similarity between Stone Age people’s habits and our habits could be read as a sign that she likes to imagine time as a circular concept rather than linear. In the Neolithic village, she can feel both the absence and presence of Skara Brae’s former inhabitants as if past melted into present and vice-versa. Just as she keeps away from dualism in her understanding of nature/culture, she sounds suspicious of a sharp present/past distinction as well.

As it can be seen, in “Dark and Light”, Jamie shows an obvious tendency to look at the world from a holistic point of view, in which culture and nature, past and present, animate and inanimate all get intermingled. In fact, even her very reason to set out for Maes Howe, where she expected to experience darkness by keeping her critical attitude to Christian condemnation of dark against light, gets invalid when she realizes that she cannot experience darkness in a technological age when the inside of a Neolithic cairn has to be enlightened for scientific or touristic reasons: “My ventures into light and dark had been ill-starred. I’d had no dramatic dark, neither at sea nor in the tomb, and no resurrecting beam of sunlight. But lasers are light, aren’t they? ... I’d crept into Maes Howe, at solstice, hoping for Neolithic technology; what I’d had found was the technology of the 21st century” (*Findings* 24). Accepting the fact that there is neither pure dark nor pure light, Jamie writes: “Here were skilled people passing light over these same stones, still making measurements by light and time. That thought pleased me” (24).

Jamie applies her all-encompassing perspective to her writing experience. Writing about the landscape does not tear her away from her everyday realities. For example, she cuts her trip short to catch up with Christmas celebrations at home saying

“I had my midwinter rituals to observe. We put up the Christmas tree on the 21st, the children decorate it, and I couldn’t miss that. There was the dinner with friends to look forward to as well” (*Findings* 25). She is not like the self-oriented lonely wanderer and observer of the Romantic age. She has a human community surrounding her, and she seems to be happy with them. Also, in her essay about the Braan salmon, she alludes to her friend Robin, who knows a lot about salmon and fish in general. She specifically mentions Robin’s baby and tells how Robin and his wife celebrated the birth of their daughter after an IVF treatment. In doing so, however, she does not overlook the irony between the stuffed salmon, which Robin had caught and keeps at home and the pram, which carries the new-born: “Under the stuffed salmon in its glass case in Robin’s hallway appeared a pram” (81). Cowley notes:

When I used to think of nature writing, or indeed the nature writer, I would picture a certain kind of man, and it would always be a man; bearded, badly dressed, ascetic, misanthropic. He would often be alone on some blasted moor, with a notebook in one hand binoculars in the other, seeking meaning and purpose through a larger communion with nature: a loner and outcast. (7)

Encircled by her friends, Jamie does not fit into this stereotype. Her essay titled “Skylines”, in which she writes her observations about Edinburgh as she looks through a telescope placed up on a hill that looks over the city, is another good example of how Jamie’s sensitivity about the non-human nature does not require her to distance herself from a city. In “Skylines”, Jamie’s understanding of the wholeness of the city with its human and non-human aspects gets clear as she describes Edinburgh as “an organism which is both living and stone, coral perhaps, more brittle than you would imagine when you are tramping its streets” (*Findings* 150). In fact, when she comes back to Edinburgh years later, she regrets that when she lived in Edinburgh as a student and an office worker, she did not pay attention to the sky of the city. Her feeling of regret for missing out the Edinburgh sky shows that she is not the lonely wanderer in the woods, which has been the common image of a nature writer as caricatured by some critics like Waugh, who called nature writers “feather-footed” (qtd. in MacFarlane, “New Words” 167).

As Jamie watches the city through a telescope with a sense of discomfort as if she were violating the privacy of the city, she pays heed to the non-human, too. She can discern the birdsongs from among the noises coming from the city: “Although the trains pass nearby, blaring their hones before they enter a tunnel, there is birdsong down there and trees, and entire Victorian families lie buried in its walled grounds” (*Findings* 159-60). Trains, tunnels, birds, trees and cemeteries, namely the living and the non-living as well as the dead are the components of her wide perspective. Thus, it can be stated that the way she writes about nature, be it human or non-human, dead or alive, living or non-living is utterly all-embracing.

In *Findings*, we can encounter more examples of how Jamie can combine her daily routine with writing. Her daily chores leak into her lines as she says she will take the kids to pantomime or when she decides to buy a souvenir for her daughter back from her trip to the Orkney Islands. This is even more evident in her second essay “Peregrines, Ospreys and Cranes”. In explaining how she got to be interested in birds Jamie writes: “Between the laundry and fetching kids from school, that’s how birds enter my life. I listen. During a lull in the traffic, oyster catchers. In the school playground, sparrows -what few sparrows are left- chirp from the eaves” (*Findings* 39). Gairn interprets this as the writer’s ability to pay attention to nature amid her everyday responsibilities (242). According to Falconer, this shows that by dealing with nature through incidental and everyday encounters, Jamie takes the tradition of nature writing away from solitary and extreme experience of the wild (4).

It is obvious that in Jamie’s world writing about nature does not necessitate her to set out on a lonely journey into the woods or to the sea. Lilley points out that Jamie manages to establish close contact with nature in suburban surroundings, which can be read as her skill of interweaving the wild and domestic (10). Even when inside the house, Jamie manages to catch a glimpse of the wild: “I was fetching the children’s school clothes out of the tumble dryer, when I chanced to look out of the window and saw the male osprey himself, taking the same route as he had before” (45). As she notes, she likes watching the non-human in the middle of her routine: “I like being able to glance up from my own everyday business, to see the osprey or the peregrine going about hers” (46).

Jamie notices the birds chanting while she is waiting for her kids in the school playground. She hears wild birds in the middle of the traffic or sees an osprey from her house window. With her attention to the non-human in the middle of her hectic routine, she is indeed urging the reader to listen to or look at her/his immediate surroundings to experience non-human nature. Jamie's choice between writing about nature as a hermit and writing about nature as a person who does not give up her everyday life gets clearer as she alludes to J. A Baker in "Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes". J. A Baker is the author of *The Peregrine* (1967), which, as mentioned earlier, MacFarlane considers among the twentieth century masterpieces of British nature writing ("Violent"). Consulting *The Peregrine* as a classic of English natural history (35), Jamie thinks about its author and wonders how he could spend ten years following peregrines in the fields and ditches all day. She is appreciative of the author's arduous efforts and its outcome, but still she draws attention to the paradox that she thought the author was in: "Here is a person who would annihilate himself and renounce his fellows, who would enter into the world of birds and woods and sky, but then in an act of consummate communication to his human kind, step back into language and write a book still spoken of forty years on" (*Findings* 45). This shows that Jamie is aware that writing about nature cannot be an act of leaving culture behind because after all even if an author gives up culture, s/he is obliged to the language, which is a cultural product *per se*.

Also, in her third essay "Findings", Jamie narrates her trip to CeannIar and Monach Islands to the northwest of Scotland. She informs the reader that CeannIar was once a human settlement, but it is home to seals and birds now (*Findings* 53). Yet the island cannot escape the influence of contemporary culture because they come across the remains of a plane crash on the island and loads of plastic waste driven by the winds and waves (59). Among the garbage washed ashore, plastic toys catch her attention: "Here was a baby's yellow bathtime duck, and here the severed head of a doll. The doll still had tufts of hair, and if you tilted her, she blinked her eyes in surprise" (60). That she foregrounds the human influence on an island not settled by humans for a long time shows how the boundaries between the non-human and human, namely nature and culture can get erased in the contemporary world. Science writer Jonathan Weiner claims that we are hybridizing the planet with our influence in it, and he refers to flies as

an example saying that their immune system has adapted to pesticides (qtd. in Philips 81). Also, natural historian Marston Bates draws attention to the long history of hybridization of the planet and argues that “The man with the axe is not a wholly different figure from the man with the insecticide sprayer” (qtd. in Philips 81). In a planet where human influence is undeniably omnipresent, a bathtime duck on a remote island is hardly surprising. In addition, in “Findings”, we learn that Jamie likes to collect things from her trips and bring her findings home. Her friend Martin, who was with her on CeannIar during the trip, gives her a gannet’s skull he found on the island as a gift. Jamie puts the skull next to the other bones she has collected: “I made an ossuary of the plastic Tupperware box where I kept my tobacco” (*Findings* 69). Keeping dead animals’ bones in a plastic box meant for tobacco might show how a purist notion of nature and culture fails in our modern world.

Thus, Jamie seems to be defying the exclusionary definitions of nature, culture and wilderness. In fact, in her essay titled “Markings”, in which she writes about her solitary excursion to a glen⁴³ in her region, she shares her ideas about why it would be unwise to make categorical distinctions between wilderness, nature and culture. During her time in the hills, she goes to see the shielings⁴⁴ which have been abandoned and thinks about the lives of the people who once lived on the hills. Of the hills, she writes: “Sometimes you hear this land described as ‘natural’ or ‘wild’- ‘wilderness’, even- and though there are tracts of Scotland north and west of here, where people live, ‘wilderness’ seems an affront to those many generations who took their living on that land” (*Findings* 126).

“Surgeons’ Hall” is another essay where Jamie offers a fascinating perspective to treat nature/culture separation. Surgeons’ Hall is Scotland’s oldest museum which was developed as a teaching museum for students of medicine and hosts collections including bone and tissue specimens (“Surgeons”). That Jamie tells the reader about her visit to this museum is worth attention because in a collection of essays which can be categorised under nature writing, Jamie gives place to a museum of anatomy. Laura Severin implies that “Surgeons’ Hall” does not fit well with essays like “Peregrines,

⁴³ Oxford online dictionary describes “glen” as “a deep narrow valley especially in Ireland and Scotland”.

⁴⁴In Collins online dictionary, a “shieling” is described as “a rough, sometimes temporary, hut or shelter used by people tending cattle on high or remote ground”.

Ospreys, and Cranes” because of its focus on perishable aspects of nature and mortality rather than natural beauty (103). However, neither this so-called discord nor the author’s choice of a museum as her subject matter makes “Surgeons’ Hall” irrelevant to nature writing. On the contrary, as it can be seen in her frequently cited paragraph Jamie invites the reader to look for nature inside us, not necessarily outside:

We consider the natural world as ‘out there’, an ‘environment’, but these objects in their jars show us the forms concealed inside, the intimate unknown, and perhaps that is their new function. Part art gallery, part church of secular contemplatives. ‘In the midst of this city, you think you are removed from nature’, they say- ‘but look within’. (*Findings* 141)

Jamie’s call is for a real, physical inner journey, not a metaphoric one. Clark argues that because a novel has conventionally focused on individuals’ inner lives and their psychological, cultural and social problems, a novel in traditional sense has limitations in offering an ecological vision, which requires characters to be imagined as biological beings embedded in nature (“The Challenge” 103). It appears that Jamie’s non-fiction essay “Surgeons’ Hall” overcomes such a challenge through an invitation for a physically inner journey and offers an unusual perspective to consider humans as part of nature with the nature inside them.

With her call to reconsider the separation of human/non-human and culture/nature, Jamie respectively justifies Cinder Hypki, Haraway and Garrard Hypki, an urban environmental activist, criticised the confinement of the natural world to where there is no human settlement, thus ignoring the nature in urban areas and objected to the purist notion of environment (qtd. in Clark, *The Cambridge* 88); Haraway proposed the term *natureculture* based on her criticism of fact/fiction dualism as she thinks what we know to be purely scientific about the natural world is indeed a narration (*Primate Visions* 4); Garrard introduced the notion of ‘poetics of authenticity’ to criticize the idea of selling wilderness for touristic purposes while wilderness is home to indigenous communities and warn against the possibility of promoting misanthropy by praising wilderness as a zone without human settlement (*Ecocriticism* 70).

4.1.1.2 Stylistic Hybridity and Multidisciplinarity

Trying to explain why twenty-first century nature writing can be used with the adjective “new”, Cowley claims that new nature writers observe nature with a scientific eye and write about it with a literary effect (9). Hampton also agrees that new British nature writing gives place both to individual experience with nature and accurate description of nature (457), which was, to Canton, a tension between the emotional response of the Romantic period and the objective desire of the scientist (13). It can be claimed that Jamie resolves this tension in her own poetic way. In her second essay “Peregrines, Ospreys and Cranes”, in which the reader learns that she amateurishly engages in bird-watching activity and keeps records for RSPB, she offers some scientific information about the birds she observes in her neighbourhood. For instance, she informs the reader about how peregrine falcons hunt and peregrines mate. She watches the birds and explains their habits. It is noteworthy that she does not have an authoritarian tone as she intends to give information about the birds. To illustrate, she admits that she does not have any knowledge about peregrines and needs to consult books to collect some data because she feels “strangely exposed without books to fall back on” (*Findings* 34). She does not claim that what she writes about the bird she has been watching is absolute information even if it is based on observation or reading. In the following quote, it is possible to observe her humility as a writer: “As April passed, I looked up books and field guides because I knew nothing about peregrines” (34). It appears that asking questions and thinking about the non-human matter more to her than giving “objective” information: “Do they [peregrines] mate and then build a nest, or vice versa? Some birds of prey mate many, many times. Ospreys, apparently, do it hundreds of times before the eggs are laid. I don’t know if peregrines construct a nest at all, or if they just deposit eggs on the rock ledge, like sea birds do” (34).

The questions she asks about the birds are scientific. Nevertheless, she does not claim to be the single authority in this field because she confesses that she does not know much about peregrines. It is possible to observe this in her forth essay “The Braan Salmon”, too. She cycles to the Braan, a Highland river to watch the salmons jumping against the weight of water, hanging in the air and falling into the water. She tries to understand the salmons’ dance in the air: “I was watching for technique. Of the first six

to leap and hang suspended in the air, five seemed to be directing themselves at a particularly thick coil of water. Further they seemed to be trying to get into the back of it, or maybe they were thrust there by the sheer force” (*Findings* 75). The curious point is that she is not giving information but speculating about the salmon’s leap. She does not really try to inform the reader of how the salmon manage to jump against the water and what happens to them when they fail. She only shares what she thinks with hesitant expressions like “seemed to” or “maybe”.

Moreover, she learns from her friend that the River Braan is not a natural salmon river and the salmon are purposefully put in the river by the hatcheries upstream (*Findings* 78). When the salmon realize that they cannot really jump against the waterfall, they recede to somewhere quiet in the river to spawn, so their hatchlings do not get mixed with the hatchlings from the hatcheries, where scientists try to observe the behaviours of the artificial hatchlings (79). Because Jamie is particularly concerned about what happens to salmon if they fail in their leap, this information is indeed critical. If her purpose was to give purely scientific information about the Braan salmon, she would be expected to share this knowledge earlier, but she reveals this information only towards the end of her essay. She seems to be preferring to involve the reader in the process of wondering about the salmon rather than achieving a conclusion about them.

In this regard, Jamie seems to be less concerned about scientific conclusions than the situation the salmon are forced into. She feels for the salmon: “I knew a secret, something the salmon didn’t know, that whether be it instinct or technique it didn’t matter, their effort was hopeless” (*Findings* 79-80). While she is watching the salmon, a photographer who is there to take the photos of the fish as they are jumping asks her if she was replenishing her soul by watching them (73). When she learns the truth about salmon, she asks herself: “Could I ‘replenish’ my soul by watching the salmon try to leap the falls, knowing all the while that it was useless? What could we do, that passing ad-hoc community of salmon watchers, burdened with this new knowledge, but shake our heads at their dumb efforts and walk away?” (80). As it can be seen from her self-questioning, she is truly sad about the salmon’s helpless efforts. It can even be said that

she feels guilty for knowing something about the salmon's lives that the latter did not know.

Thus, Jamie's inclination towards emotive response to the non-human is more evident than her desire to seek pure scientificness. In another instance, she notices a very big bird as she is cycling home back from an excursion to the river. The sight of such a big bird, which she has never seen before, excites her and she writes: "I raced for home excited as a child, holding its image in my head like a bowlful of blue water-mustn't spill a drop. This is what I want to learn: to notice, but not to analyse" (*Findings* 41-42). Plumwood is critical of the interpretation of objectivity as oppositional to body and emotions as if emotions or body would prevent one's access to knowledge (*Environmental* 42). According to Plumwood, Platonic rationalism and Cartesian dualism polarise reason and emotions by excluding material reality, practical activity, emotions and subjectivity (42). Jamie's desire to be able to notice the non-human, her avoidance of saying the last word about it and her excitement at the sight of an unusually big bird without trying to reduce it to an analytical category show that she is shaking the barricades between objective knowledge and subjective response. Evelyn Fox Keller asserts that any "insistence on a concept of impartiality or disengagement imposes a rigid barrier between subject and object which excludes relationships of care and sympathy" (qtd. in Plumwood, *Environmental* 42). Jamie seems to be inviting her readers to think about the possibility of knowing about the non-human without being emotionally disengaged from it. She does not abstain from loving what she is observing and writing about. In this sense, she is opening science to literature, just as she is opening literature to science, which could be interpreted as a sign of stylistic hybridity and multidisciplinary.

Another example of Jamie's emotional engagement in the natural world can be seen in her essay "Crex-Crex", which is about the corncrakes in Coll, a very small Hebridean island which is situated off the west coast of Scottish island, Mull. She informs the reader that corncrakes have been in danger of extinction in Britain due to the mechanization of agriculture. To be more specific, with modern agricultural techniques, corncrakes lost the long grasses to hide and breed in, but the reason they remained in Coll is that the fields in the island are too small for mechanization and there

has been a shift to earlier farming techniques (Jamie, *Findings* 90). Yet “Crex-Crex” is not a dull essay in which the author gives information only about the mating, breeding and nesting habits of the corncrakes or about their history in the island. Jamie is sad about the decline in the number of the birds but remains hopeful because of RSBP’s efforts to conserve the bird. Jamie’s regret for the loss of the bird can be observed as she looks at Constable’s 1821 painting, *Haywain* in her room. She also alludes to John Clare who mentioned the common presence of corncrakes in his poem. These nineteenth century works of poetry and painting suggest that the corncrake was part of the ecosystem back in the nineteenth century as Jamie also implies: “What we could hear if we could step into this painting- would be the call of the corncrake” (*Findings* 86). Jamie draws attention to the relatively low popularity of corncrakes in today’s world: “Corncrakes don’t feature on Christmas cards, or sing after the rain. Their migration has none of the romance of swallows, though they cover the distance ... They offer us no metaphors about fidelity, or maternal dedication; they are just medium-sized brown birds” (97-8). However, their ordinariness in people’s eyes does not deter Jamie from developing feelings for them: “I feel robbed- denied one of the sounds of summer, which all our forebears would have known, that irksome *crex-crex*” (98).

When on the island, Jamie wants to see a corncrake with her own eyes rather than being satisfied with hearing its *crex-crex* voice. Nevertheless, when she finally sees one, she does not, in her own words, “punch the air” (*Findings* 97). Thus, it can be said that she does not eulogize the experience of seeing a corncrake. Still, she encourages the reader to think about the birds from a different perspective. The reader learns from her essay that corncrakes are an endangered species that needs protection. However, Jamie implies that there should be a different motivation other than mere biodiversity concerns to want to protect the birds. In this context, she mentions a holidaymaker who was watching the corncrakes while she was on the island. She asks him why he is watching corncrakes in particular, and in response the birdwatcher says: “They’re like...little gods of the field, aren’t they?” (98). Jamie feels happy with this answer, and it is for that moment that she says “I could have punched the air” (98). Based on this, it would not be wrong to deduce that Jamie wants corncrakes to be protected not only because of

their particular place in the larger ecosystem on which we depend but also because of what they are, which again gets her writing closer to a more biocentric viewpoint:

Why conserve them, other than it being our moral duty to another life form on this earth? If there is no ‘clam’rincraik’, no ‘noisy one of the rushes’, it betokens something out of kilter with the larger ecosystem on which ultimately, in mysterious as-yet-undiscovered ways, we all depend. That’s what the ecologists and scientists will tell you. But there are things which cannot be said- by scientists, anyway. (*Findings* 98)

With this statement of hers, Jamie seems to suggest that science itself would not suffice to protect the planet. It can be inferred that Jamie points at the need to love or wonder at the non-human in addition to the need to study it from a scientific perspective. In this regard, Jamie’s attitude to the corncrakes, which calls for a fusion of subjectivity and objectivity, reminds us of Carson who attached great importance to explaining natural phenomena to the general public in a way to make them amazed by the wonders of the natural world: “I do believe--that the more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us the less taste we shall have for the destruction of our race” (qtd. in Beudel 267).

Jamie’s emotional and ethical engagement when she addresses natural and scientific matters is evident in “Surgeons’ Hall”, too. “Surgeons’ Hall” is, in fact, an essay that reminds us of the mere fact that a human is above all a biological being with a vulnerable body open to decay. In the museum, Jamie sees the body parts of the people who died of leprosy, tuberculosis, rickets, cancer and so on. Lucy Collins draws attention to Jamie’s interest in the fragmentedness and fragility of human body in the museum and claims that her experience with dead body parts shows the instability of human subjectivity which is in fluctuation between the position of a subject and an object (113). From this perspective, Jamie challenges not only the alleged supremacy of human beings to earth others but also subject/object separation prevailing in science. Jamie implies that the person whose dead body is being scrutinized is as human as the person who dissects the dead body. To be more specific, Jamie does not observe the body parts kept in jars merely as scientific objects. She wonders about the stories of the people whose body parts are kept on the shelves. For example, when she sees the limbs

of conjoined twins, she feels sad: “The conjoined twins make me weep and I turn away” (*Findings* 142). Also, she finds beauty in what she observes. She even likens a slice of kidney kept in a jar to a brooch that one could wear. In this regard, she does not have an emotionally disengaged gaze. Moreover, she questions the relation between the people whose bodies were kept for research purposes and the collectors who collected those body parts. Referring to Dr. Barclay, who donated the body parts to the museum in the nineteenth century, Jamie writes:

I wonder what he felt toward the objects that made up his collection. He donated them on condition that they be devoted to the purposes of ‘professional utility’, but was there a familial affection, too? To acquire bodies, anatomists had to deal, turn blind eyes, fail to ask questions. Barclay bought some of his specimens, some were gifted and some dissected by his own hand. Where, I wonder, does one acquire the corpse of a toddler? (*Findings* 136)

It can be argued that Jamie’s statements above are a questioning of the subject/object divide in science and also of exclusion of emotions from epistemology. At this point, it can be observed that the way Jamie wants to learn about and experience the natural world overlaps with Plumwood’s criticism of “sado-dispassionate science”. In Plumwood’s view, sado-dispassionate science involves a subject/object hyper-separation in which the knower is required to be emotionally detached from what (s)he is studying (*Environmental* 52). As an alternative to current instrumentalist science and epistemology, which she traces back to Cartesian dualism, Plumwood suggests that there should be a caring rationality including ethical and emotional engagement and social responsibility (55): “What we need for a viable future is an integrated democratic science that is dialogical, non-reductionist and self-reflective- a science that can bring itself and its ends under critical and democratic scrutiny” (53). Plumwood argues that certain kinds of imaginative literature where the author can write nature as “an agent, re-subjectivizing and re-intentionalising the non-human as an ethical and intentional subject of narrative” can help to break the subject/object division (54). It can be claimed that Jamie as a poet and prose writer is taking steps towards Plumwood’s dream for an ethically and emotionally engaged epistemology.

4.1.1.3 Anthropocene and Ecological Awareness

In his PHD thesis, *Nature Writing of the Anthropocene* (2017), Voie basically argues that American nature writing has shifted from traditional narratives of retreat to narratives of confrontation and from rhapsody to jeremiad in the age of Anthropocene, when writers recognize the harm caused by human species on the planet and offer a kind of warning (2). Considering the urgency of the ecological crisis we all experience, the same may apply to contemporary British nature writing as it was detailed under “New Nature Writing” in this dissertation. As mentioned earlier, Lilley says that the new ecological crisis demands a new understanding of human-nature relations, and our growing awareness of anthropogenic environmental change has now brought us to question our deep-rooted attitude to nature leading recent nature writing to become “new” (4). Thus, it is inevitable that contemporary nature writers write with an acute awareness of the anthropogenic harm caused to the planet. It is possible to trace such awareness in *Findings*.

For example, in her essay titled “Findings”, Jamie draws attention to the plastic garbage accumulated on the CeannIar, from the shampoo bottles to milk cartons and toilet-cleaner bottles. Jamie refers to an article in an issue of *Hebridean Naturalist* she found in the yacht by which she sailed to Monach Island and she informs the reader that “One beach in New Zealand already has plastic sand- 100.000 grains to every square metre” (*Findings* 61). As a writer, she is anxious about plastic waste. In “Darkness and Light”, too, while she is thinking about the Maes Howe and what remains from the Neolithic people who built the tomb, she turns her attention to the plastic pollution of the contemporary era: “What, if the world lasts, would people five thousand years hence find worth saving of our age? They could scarce avoid all our plastic and junk” (22). Similarly, she is attentive to the air pollution as well. As she mentions an oil refinery in the sea, she notes: “Oil is brought there from the North Sea fields by tanker or pipeline, and by day and night excess gas is burned off into the atmosphere, in an orange flame” (26). She continues to inform the reader that there are experiments in Scotland to generate clean energy out of tide power. She is apparently appreciative of the use of renewable energy sources: “Wind turbines are fine, but sometimes the wind drops. There’s the sun, but, as we know, sometimes it’s obscured by clouds. Tides and the

moon, however, you can rely on” (26). Her concerns about pollution and energy reveal her ecological awareness.

In “Skylines”, it can be stated that Jamie draws attention to Anthropocene, indirectly though. While watching the city from above, she sees the gardens placed on top of modern buildings. She has a satirical tone as she comments on the way how city dwellers ended up with garden roofs:

In the olden days, when every city was a garden city, before every scrap of land was built on and cities became slums, what was raised up high were cockerels ... On the Victorians’ slender spires are crosses which look delicate, but which must actually be thumping great weights of metal ... In the late twentieth century, when roofs became flats, we dispensed with God and raised aereals and antennae, the apparatus of communications with one another ... A twenty-first-century affair [the city’s newest building] of smoked glass, presence and inclusion, cinemas and escalators and bars, the Omni building promises leisure for all. What it raises on its roof is a garden. You cannot see it from the street, of course- you have to climb the hill. (*Findings* 160-61)

It can be stated that here Jamie highlights the irony in the fact that gardens were removed from cities only to be placed on top of “omni buildings” aimed at modern day consumers, who are now forced to climb up to see an ill-placed garden.

4.1.1.4 Self-narrative and Personal Sense-making

As mentioned earlier, contemporary British nature writing covers elements of autobiography in addition to writers’ concern about the planet. Hubbard and Wilkinson call attention to the autobiographical accounts in new nature writing whereby the author explores the relation between landscape, selfhood and ethics through a blending of autobiography and ecocriticism (254). In addition, Moran highlights the importance of personal voice, personal reflection and personal witness in new nature writing (49-59). In parallel with this, Jamie does not mute her personal voice when she writes about the non-human, and beyond that, she does not erase her personal life from her writings about the natural world. Most of the essays in *Findings* are about the non-human that Jamie observes in her surroundings amid her chores. From this perspective, Jamie seems to be establishing relationality more with the non-human than human in this

essay collection. However, given that she frequently alludes to her family and friends in her essays, it cannot be said that her writings are solely about the non-human world. In her essay titled “Fever”, for example, Jamie writes about her husband’s illness called “cold agglutinin disease” which caused him to be hospitalized for six days. She obviously feels sad about her husband’s health condition, but she tries to remain calm and keep things under control at home with her kids. In this short essay we learn that Jamie faces the possibility of losing a beloved one.

One thing about the way she writes her husband’s disease particularly draws attention. She mentions a bird that she and her children saw outside the hospital. The kids notice a starling lying on its back and think it is dead, but they soon realize that it is living. Jamie does not want to let her kids watch the bird and takes them away from the window through which they saw the bird. Her avoidance of the bird’s sight can result from what the bird possibly evokes. It can be argued that the bird brings her mind a possibility that she does not want to think of, which is her husband’s death. As her husband recovers and they leave the hospital, the kids want to show the same bird to their father. This time, however, it is really dead. Of the dead bird, Jamie writes: “Its chest cavity was burst open. Carrion crows or something had eaten away at the flesh of its breast, its ribs, its lungs” (*Findings* 112). In fact, it can be claimed that with this description of the bird, Jamie indirectly alludes to the process her husband and patients with similar auto-immune anaemia go through at the hospital. In the oncology unit where her husband is kept, she observes people’s bodies being manipulated with treatments just as the starling’s body was manipulated by crows. She pays attention to the medical instruments attached to patients’ bodies: “Some of the ambulatory patients were wandering around hooked up to a vertical web of tubing which trundled along beside them on wheels, as if their own circulatory systems were external to them” (108). She refers to a little girl who came to visit her grandfather but “had to be taken away from the sacs of blood and tubes and hairless people and X-rays and needles” (112).

It can be thought that Jamie does not feel sad with the way the starling’s body was torn apart probably because she takes this as a natural process, in which crow feed on a dead starling’s body. On the other hand, from the way she alludes to the little girl who was taken out of the room, it can be inferred that she somehow feels uncomfortable

at the sight of so many devices and equipment all over people's bodies probably because she does not like to visualize human body in continuity with technical devices. In addition, while she does not have a hard time describing the dead body of the bird, she somehow keeps away from describing death as a natural phenomenon for people. For example, she implies how happy she feels because her mother got over pneumonia at the age of four during the Second World War despite lack of antibiotics: "And if they had had to bring her home in a box, none of this would have happened. Her life would not have been lived" (*Findings* 112). She wants to think about death neither for herself nor for the people around her: "It is unimaginable: you cannot think yourself out of the world ... When we imagine being dead, it is an oxymoron, isn't it?" (113). As she finishes the essay on her husband's disease, she refers back to the spiders which she noticed inside their house on the very first days when her husband fell ill. As they get back from the hospital, she sees that the spiders are not in their webs. She feels anxious and looks up in the encyclopaedia to learn if they hibernate. She does not inform the reader why the spiders are not there or whether they hibernate or not, but she hints at the continuity of life through spiders: "The young hatch and then disperse by climbing onto a vantage point, spinning a silk thread and waiting for the wind to catch it and whisk them away" (113).

With "Fever", Jamie appears as a vulnerable person who fears the death of a beloved one, and all those feelings of awe, respect and amazement she has for the natural world seem to be overshadowed by the fear of death, which is itself a natural phenomenon. While her husband is so ill, she avoids praying because she thinks that people "pray... to displace for a moment the crush of hope" (*Findings* 109). In her view, if she prays, it will be her acceptance that she has lost her hope. She self-reflexively writes: "I had not prayed? But I had noticed, more than noticed, the cobwebs, and the shoaling light, and the way the doctor listened, and the flecked tweed of her skirt, and the speckled bird and the sickle-cell man's slim feet. Isn't that a kind of prayer? The care and maintenance of the web of our noticing, paying heed?" (109). In the lines above, it is possible to observe her desperateness. It seems that she hopes for help from the web of lives around her and begs for her husband's life to be spared. Thus, "Fever", whereby she shares her feelings, brings *Findings* closer to eco-memoir.

Another essay where Jamie exposes herself to the reader is “Sabbath”. In “Sabbath”, we learn that Jamie has gone through a hard period in life, in which she has to face a few family crises with her grandmother “slipping into dependency”, mother trying to adapt to life after a major stroke and daughter missing her first day at school because of a wound in her head (Jamie, *Findings* 164). It is understood that she goes to the Isle of Lewis to stay alone for a while and have a rest after all these happenings. She walks, cycles and watches birds while on the island. In that sense, her solitary stay in the island evokes the romantic escapist’s turn to nature. It seems that all she needs is peace of mind and to listen to herself as she constantly listens to the non-human around: “I walked up the silent road, wondering if I couldn’t reconcile myself again to the idea of the Sabbath, to the day of dreary silence and mutton broth I’d known as a child, if we couldn’t close the shops and still the traffic and institute a modern, churchless day of contemplation and rest; and if it would help at all” (*Findings* 170-71). The reason why she desperately seeks silence could be that she has been exhausted by familial responsibilities and fears the coming death of her beloved ones. She remembers a conversation with a friend who said: “When we suddenly discover that we are the grown-ups, with children and parents, and even grand-parents to tend to, not to mention our pupils, patients, or clients, or employers- that we spend so much time dealing with it all, there is scarcely time to feel” (170). It can be argued that she wants to be alone in nature because she has forgotten how to feel herself among her duties.

“Sabbath” is a fragmented essay, where Jamie writes about her thoughts and feelings in a rather disorganized way. In one paragraph she writes about the care homes where they must place her grandmother, whereas in another paragraph she writes about a sea-stack. Similarly, in one paragraph, she discusses how language fails us while in another she writes about old age and its visible effects on people. She even alludes to September 11 and one-minute silence recollecting a friend’s words who was protesting that there is not a minute’s silence for many children dying of water pollution in Angola and Sudan. The fragmentedness in her writing seems to tone with her life’s reality at the time: “Our mother is herself suddenly disabled and our father charged with her care, and we children already approaching middle age with infants and bread-winning responsibilities of our own, Nana’s situation is a constant anxiety” (Jamie, *Findings*

168). As a grandchild, child and mother, she has several responsibilities to fulfil, which she knows she cannot perform without external support. Overwhelmed, she tries to find solace in nature.

During her stay on the island, Jamie decides to follow the roads till the end. Her trips to the end of the roads on the island could be interpreted as a self-challenge to face death. One day, as she cycles, she stops for a moment and decides: “I rode under a grey sky that threatened rain, relishing the movement of my body, its own small continuing strength. It wouldn’t last forever- that was the truth of it- but today I could cycle along a road, to see where it led” (*Findings* 180). It can be inferred that she accepts mortality but has a hard time facing it. She describes what she sees at the end of the road as follows: “When the road neared its end, it descended in a great hill to the huge beach at Tolsta. Black-backed gulls and kittiwakes formed two distinct parties at the shoreline, all facing into the wind” (180). As it can be seen, where the road ends, the non-human nature starts, which apparently helps her cling to life.

4.1.1.5 Gendered Experience of Nature

As mentioned earlier, Jamie herself is critical of the dominance of white male writers in nature writing. In *Findings*, Jamie’s awareness of the gender aspect in one’s experience of nature is most obvious when she writes her excursions in nature. In her essay “Markings”, she remembers a moment when she feels awkward about being alone up in the hills because she “is not used to being in the hills alone” (*Findings* 117). She is not used to the presence of a woman hiking alone in the hills, either. She points out that “the presence in this valley, of another woman ... would have surprised” her (122). As she hikes in the hills and visits the shielings, she tries to imagine the lives of the people who once lived there and remembers a line in a poem about the harvest time in the glen: “The girls went laughing up the glen” (122). She draws attention to the forgotten presence of women in the hills. She informs the reader that once upon a time people made a living in the hills, and it was considered women’s work to make milk, butter and cheese. She feels regretful not only because transhumance⁴⁵ is long gone but also because women’s presence and labour have been nullified: “What a loss that seems

⁴⁵Transhumance is “the practice of moving animals to different fields in different seasons, for example to higher fields in summer and lower fields in winter” (“Transhumance”).

now: a time when women were guaranteed a place in the wider landscape, our own place in the hills” (122).

Jamie’s awareness of the gendered experience of nature is evident in “Peregrines, Ospreys, Cranes”, too. Her bird-watching activities are constantly interrupted by her daily chores. For example, when she was watching the peregrines out of her window, she “had to leave to fetch the kids from school” (*Findings* 44). She saw the male osprey by chance as she “was fetching the children’s school clothes out of the tumble dryer” (45). One April morning, while she is watching from her room the swallows that come back, she notices the peregrines up on the cliff. She wants to concentrate on them, but she is disconnected from the birds by her children demanding breakfast: “Dammit. I had glanced away for a moment, and when I looked back the peregrine had quit fidgeting and flown. But the door burst open again. ‘Mum- can we have our breakfast? In the living room? So we can watch the cartoons on telly?’ ‘Yes’, I said. ‘I am coming’” (39). Gender roles apparently keep her away from watching the peregrines as she likes. Although she does not openly protest this, her frustration is obvious the moment she misses the sight of the bird.

4.1.1.6 Enchantment

The term enchantment is used to refer to the way of experiencing and knowing about nature in alternative ways that include a sense of joy and pleasure rather than the otherizing gaze of an observer who objectifies non-human nature as if it was a calculable and manageable entity. It can be stated that in *Findings*, Jamie attempts to change our epistemic attitude to nature by referring to certain moments of enchantment in her life. For example, in “The Braan Salmon”, she asks questions about the salmon’s leap: “How long did they spend sitting in the back-water, feeling the way ahead, feeling the speed and weight of water. Were any these failed Ho-ing jumps reconnaissance trips? ‘Instinct’, we’re told” (*Findings* 76). As can be seen, she does not provide a clear answer to the questions she asks as if she was encouraging the reader to do research at their will. It can be argued that she rather invites her reader to feel the amazement and anxiety she herself felt at the salmon’s jump: “Technique or ‘Ho!’? I dare say it was both. The technique hidden below the water, but in front of our eyes it looked like a piece of pure ‘Ho!’” (76). “Ho!” is an exclamation that shows her feelings at the time of

the salmon's leap. It seems that she cannot put her feeling into a word, which can be taken as a proof that human reason or language might fall short describing a non-human act. However, the sense of enchantment felt by the audience watching the salmon is communicated to the reader: "'Ho! There! One made it!' said the old man. 'Did you see it? I'm pretty sure it did...'" (76). The people who observe the salmon jump feel enchanted when they think the fish made it and they want to share the joy with the people around.

Similarly, in "Cetacean Disco", which is also the closing essay of *Findings*, Jamie writes about her whale-watching trip in Tobermory. She tries to describe whale-watching as an experience: "Whale-watching, cetacean-watching proceeds like a kind of theology- by glimpses, sightings, a dorsal fin, a rolling back. A pursuit for the regretful; all-might-have-beens and what-did-we-miss?" (*Findings* 186). She implies that even if one remains concentrated, there is always a feeling of missing something about the cetacean, which again can be read as a reminder of human incapacity to grasp it all. Yet this acceptance does not prevent her from feeling enchanted at the sight of dolphins. While she was sipping her tea in the boat, "the dolphins arrived, as you might say, out of the blue. We were moving in wide zigzags, and then suddenly they were all about us, port and starboard, bow and stern, aligned with the boat and travelling at pace with us" (188). The crew who took them to the trip feel even more excited when they realize that the dolphins that accompany their boat are uncommon. Of the crew, one called James says: "I don't know what they are! They aren't common, aren't bottlenose" (Jamie, *Findings* 188). They cannot find from the cetacean book what breed is swimming with them, but they are still enchanted: "This is amazing!" (188).

Jamie writes about the passengers' and crew's joy resulting from sighting the dolphins, the breed of which they cannot exactly determine: "We clapped and shouted, sheered when they leapt clear. Then: Whale! Lunging! Behind the dolphins! God almighty! Cetacean disco!" (*Findings* 189). Her simple words, unfinished sentences and frequent exclamation marks can all be read as her efforts to express how enchanted she felt together with the fellow passengers. "When we cut the engines, a great silence fell, like the silence of the beginning of the world. Then there were bird calls, and the gently plashy sound of dolphins," writes Jamie (189). In that moment, it

seems that once the engine, which ironically made it possible to access the whales and dolphins, is removed from the scene, humans, birds, sea mammals and water all get intermingled in a silence, which is hard to imagine for the reader unless s/he has had the same experience or a similar one.

4.1.2 *Sightlines* (2012)

Like *Findings*, *Sightlines* is an essay collection composed of fourteen essays, which are respectively titled: “Aurora”, “Pathologies”, “The Woman in the Field”, “The Gannetry”, “Light”, “The Hvalsalen”, “Moon”, “Three Ways of Looking at St. Kilda”, “La Cueva”, “Magpie Moth”, “On Rona”, “The Storm Petrel”, “Voyager, Chief” and “Wind”. Just like in *Findings*, in *Sightlines* there is no structured plot or linear time. Following the same style she used in *Findings*, with *Sightlines* Jamie offers her readers insights into a variety of topics regarding the natural world, including its human and non-human dimensions. Like most of Jamie’s publications, *Sightlines* has received critical acclaim winning her the John Burroughs Medal in 2014 (Falconer 2). Falconer notes that creating a “complex echo chamber between her prose and poetry”, *Findings* and *Sightlines* have helped the poet reach a wider range of readers (4). In fact, although there are many similarities between *Findings* and *Sightlines* in terms of format and concerns (Crown), *Sightlines* differs from *Findings* in the way that it covers Jamie’s travels which are more “geographically further afield” (Falconer 5). In *Findings*, her look is closer and more personal as she notices the “cobwebs in the gutter, winter sunlight cutting across a kitchen table”, but in “*Sightlines* she lifts her gaze to the horizon” seeing more of everything like “wider seas, higher cliffs and bigger weather” (Crown). Jamie herself says that this difference results from the changes in her life: “When I was writing *Findings*, I was right in the thick of the childhood years. I didn’t have the time or the resources to go far. These days, there’s scope for longer trips” (qtd. in Crown). In this part of the dissertation, I would like to go into more detail about *Sightlines* following the same pattern above, that is tracing common features in diverse essays.

4.1.2.1 Parochialism versus Universalism

As mentioned earlier, both *Findings* and *Sightlines* are grounded on Scotland, Jamie's homeland, where she says she is an indigene. From this perspective, it is expected that Jamie's writings in question offer a parochial framework. In the opening essay of *Sightlines*, "Aurora"⁴⁶, however, Jamie leaves Scotland behind and writes her trip to the Arctic north. Unlike her fellow traveller Polly, who says she decided to set out for the North Pole as a way of inner rearrangement following an illness, Jamie has no instrumentalist reason to go to the Arctic north: "What brings me? I don't rightly know. But for thirty years, I've been sitting on clifftops, looking at horizons. From Orkney, Shetland, St Kilda..." (*Sightlines* 16). To her companion's question if she wanted to see what was beyond Scotland, Jamie's answer is: "No. Actually, I never did. Not until very recently. Suddenly I wanted to change map. Something had played itself out. Something was changing" (16). It can be said that Jamie simply wants to expand her horizon, and having brought up her children, she must have had the time and resources to travel further north.

It is important to note that as Jamie enlarges her map towards the North Pole, she does not have a victorious or enchanted tone. On the contrary, faced with the majesty of the icebergs, severity of the cold and force of the wind, Jamie gives in. She realizes the helplessness of humankind in a harsh climate and in an unfamiliar landscape. For example, of the wind she notes: "The wind is no joke; it would flay you alive, a katabatic wind, they say, which flows downhill, and we're heading into it" (*Sightlines* 6). Also, regarding the cold, she writes: "The cold is no joke. Stealthy, penetrating, already prospecting our bones" (13). She finds the icebergs meaningless, lifeless, indifferent, and nihilistic. Nevertheless, she is so aware of her own anthropocentric attitude to the icebergs that she draws attention to the comfortable behaviour of the non-human settlers of the fjords in contrast to human vulnerability in the North Pole: "We look for birds and animals all the time, amongst the lifeless ice. I like the way the birds use the icebergs, how they perch on them, quite at ease, hitching a slow ride downstream" (10). Like the iceberg, the sea among the fjords triggers negative

⁴⁶The word "aurora" refers to the lightshow in the sky and if one is near the North Pole, it is called an "aurora borealis" or "northern lights" and near the South Pole, it is called an "aurora australis" or "southern lights" ("What's an aurora?").

thoughts in her mind. While looking at the sea, she remembers unfavourable memories: “It’s [the sea] become a sluggish eerie green, and suddenly it reminds me of a horrible rubber sheet my mother used to produce, to complete our humiliation, if my sister or brother or I had a phase of bed-wetting” (*Sightlines* 11). The comfortable tone Jamie had while she was writing about the Scottish landscape and remote Scottish islands in *Findings* is replaced by a sense of discomfort in “Aurora” as she thinks “‘view’ is too benign a word for the vast, unnerving scale of this land, its clarity of light. I want to come to terms with where I am: a whole new world, a world with ice” (2). She even makes a confession: “I’m not necessarily comfortable with having a place, a vast new landscape, mediated by guides, but it’s how it is. I wouldn’t last five minutes alone here, in the cold and ice” (*Sightlines* 17). Considering her experience with the cold and wind in the Arctic North and her resulting essay “Aurora”, it is possible to claim that Jamie is happier in her locality, but her tendency towards her homeland does not make her provincial who, in Macfarlane’s words, “has no mind of his own” and “does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis - towards which his eyes are turned - has to say on any subject” (“Introduction”, xv). Though restless, she remains curious of the land new to her. She and several other passengers on the boat frequently go inside to avoid the cold and wind, but the wish “to behold the icebergs, a fear we might miss something drives us out on the deck, into the noise and scouring wind, until desire for a few moments’ warmth drives us inside again” (8). Also, she marvels at the northern lights with the other passengers: “The land is featureless now, and the water black, but the heavens are vivacious. We are standing with heads tilted back, marvelling” (11). In addition, she tries to imagine the nineteenth century sailors and how they coped with the Arctic dark. In this regard, she does not confine her writing to her locality, and makes an effort to expand her horizon both spatially and temporarily.

4.1.2.2 Bodily Experience

In her article “Material Memoirs: Science, Autobiography, and the Substantial Self”, Alaimo refers to Audrey Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* (1980) and elaborates on the corporeal aspect of memoirs. She offers the term “material memoir” for self-narratives, whereby the writer’s bodily experiences are featured (86). To Alaimo, the self is understood as a material and corporeal entity constituted by material agencies

that are biological, political and economic in material memoirs (“Material” 87). In memoirs whereby the author is preoccupied with a disease or bodily disability, it is inevitable that bodily experience is highlighted. However, the rise of the body after a long history of disdain and negligence in the western thought and belief system is not only related to people’s experiences with fatal diseases. As Alaimo indicates, the long history of feminism dedicated to body politics and the feminist argument that the personal is political has helped body to be an important subject matter paving the way for what she calls material memoirs (“Material” 95). In addition to this, open to the effects of environmental degradation, citizens of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century cannot imagine themselves separate from the risky environments they inhabit (95), which means they are expected to be aware of their bodily existence at least for health-related reasons.

In this regard, in today’s world, body emerges as an urgent issue not only from a personal and social perspective but also from a medical and ecological perspective. In parallel with this, writers of contemporary eco-memoirs show an interest in embodied experiences. Accordingly, in “Aurora”, Jamie’s bodily experiences come to the forefront. For example, towards the end of the night when they watch the aurora borealis, she draws attention to her own and other passengers’ bodily limits faced with the cold weather: “Now we are shrill with cold ... Enough silence this morning, enough aurora, now, thank you. Enough natural wonder, enthralling, mysterious and wild- we too are going to retire indoors” (*Sightlines* 15). Plumwood criticizes the western thought system that has attached superiority to human reason since Antiquity by concealing our dependence on nature and overestimating our autonomy as a species (*Environmental* 35). Jamie’s experience with the cold supports Plumwood’s criticism and invalidates human arrogance vis-à-vis non-human nature.

Given that Jamie needs to highlight her bodily experiences during the trip, it can be suggested that she accepts that she exists in the world first as a body. In this respect, she justifies Ponty and the importance he attaches to body as a site of knowledge. Ponty claims that we are in the world through our body and it is with our body that we perceive the world (*Phenomenology* 184). Our bodies might limit our acts as in the case of Arctic cold, but they might open us alternative ways of knowing through our sensory

perceptions, which have been overshadowed by our intellectual capabilities. Jamie sees the northern lights, but the mere sight of the lights does not satisfy her. She wants to taste the lights just as she wants to smell icebergs, which, she thinks, smell like cucumbers (*Sightlines* 10). The sense of smell is highlighted in “The Gannetry” as well. While she describes the seabird colony on the islands, she notes: “Sometimes we caught the wistful smell of the flowers, but mostly it was ammonia and bird shit, carried up on the breeze. Bird shit and pink thrift, the smell of summer” (75). The way she alludes to the smell of the bird colony in her description helps the reader to imagine what kind of a bodily sensation it could be to be on that island watching the birds. Jamie also refers to the noise they make, which, she says, is a call for breeding: “It was exciting, like a fun fair; the closer we got to the cliff edge the more we could hear the racket, the more the breeze brought us the smell” (73). As it is seen, Jamie needs to include sensory details about how the birds smell and sound in addition to how they look.

In her essay “Moon”, in which she writes her experience of watching the eclipse, she relies heavily on vision as a sensory skill. She patiently watches the Moon as it changes colour under the earth’s shadow. In this essay, Jamie does not try to inform the reader about the eclipse as a natural phenomenon. Rather than that, “Moon” is Jamie’s personal response to the sight of moon during eclipse. She experiences seeing the moon under the earth’s shadow as an alternative way of knowing. She describes the eclipse she sees as follows:

It was as though the moon was ripening, quickly, as plums do. By its shadow, the earth had been revealed as massive and mineral, but the lifeless moon, on entering into that shadow was changing colour. It looked as though it was becoming less barren, more like a living thing. Further, because the reddish coloration of the moon’s lower side deepened as it curved away out of sight, it showed that the moon was a sphere ... The moon was a sphere. It sounds obvious, but I had just never seen it before. (*Sightlines* 125)

Jamie states the obvious by saying that the Moon is a sphere. However, what is significant in the above excerpt is that vision helps her obtain knowledge, which eventually makes her happy. In addition, seeing the Moon during the eclipse changes her perception of time as “a succession of nights and days, months and years”. “As the

shadow crept onward, upward, smothering the moon's light as it went, I half understood what I was watching was time ... In watching the shadow cover the moon, I was watching time pass," writes Jamie (*Sightlines* 123). With this enlightenment resulting from her eyesight, she invites the reader to consider time as the "collusion of sun and earth and moon" rather than an abstract concept which humans divide into days, months, years and so on. Thus, it can be stated that Jamie wants to sense the non-human world physically moving beyond mere contemplation.

The importance Jamie attaches to bodily experience can be observed in her third essay "The Woman in the Field", too. In this essay, we learn that when she graduated from high school, Jamie attended an archaeological excavation in North Mains. In fact, as it was seen in her opening essay "Darkness and Light" in *Findings*, in which she writes her trip to the Neolithic cairn in Maes Howe, Jamie has a deep interest in archaeological remains. In "The Woman in the Field", she writes: "I was a teenager when I first became aware of the past, manifest as relics in the land. A teenage antiquarian thrilled by standing stones, tumuli, ley lines, and all that ... Questing after a well or earthworks was what got me out of my parents' overheated living room and off into local byways and hills" (*Sightlines* 45). It is apparent that as a teenager she liked to touch stones and dig the earth to reach the past. When her mother suggested that she should get enrolled at a secretarial college to do office work, she felt bad and before starting the secretarial college, she volunteered to join an excavation team working on a Neolithic monument in 1977. She describes her responsibility in the excavation as follows: "Mostly, we were just clearing, but the work had its own satisfactions. It was hand work, nitty-gritty. I liked the bite on the point of the trowel as it scraped back a layer of soil, the feel of earth" (55). Apparently, she liked to touch the earth and feel the trowel in her hands. She enjoyed kneeling over "a portion of earth, a metre square or so" and scraping with "the trowel's edge" (53). In other words, she liked to use her body to reach knowledge.

4.1.2.3 Dismantled Dichotomies

In the analysis of *Findings*, it was revealed that Jamie tries to adopt an all-encompassing perspective in writing about nature questioning particularly culture/nature separation. She maintains this holistic approach in *Sightlines*, too. In her

second essay “Pathologies” in *Sightlines*, which was published in 2008 in Granta’s special edition titled “The New Nature Writing” and frequently cited in academic articles and reviews, she offers an unusual framework to think about culture/nature and human/non-human dichotomies. In “Pathologies”, we first learn that Jamie’s mother dies of pneumonia, which she had recovered from when she was a child during the Second World War. While in *Findings*, her attitude to death was marked more by fear as she had to face a severe illness her husband suffered from, in *Sightlines*, she appears to be more accepting of death probably because this time “death is a release rather than a disaster” for her mother (21). As her mother comes to the end of her life, doctors announce that there would be no medical intervention anymore. In other words, “nature would be allowed to take its course” (21). After the funeral, Jamie takes a walk in the hills near her house and watches the beautiful sky and river: “Nature was back in her accustomed place: outdoors, in the trees’ colours, in the tidal flux of the river; in the fieldfares arriving to the fields.” (22). It is obvious that the contrast between the nature that is let to kill her mother and the nature that pleases the eye out in the fields confuses Jamie. Moreover, one month after her mother’s death, she attends a conference about humanity’s relationship with other species where speakers insistently mention the need to “reconnect with nature”. During and after this conference, where she assumed all speakers had vaccination as children, which in her view is “a formal disconnection from some of these wondrous other species” and where the non-vegetarian participants ate “very nice” deer meat, Jamie seems even more preoccupied with the question of what nature is (22).

Trying to think about nature from alternative perspectives, she asks Professor Carey, who is a clinical consultant in pathology, to show her the inner nature of a human body. In other words, she wants to set out on a physically inner journey. In “Surgeons’ Hall” in *Findings*, she had a similar experience with the dead human body parts kept as specimen, but this time she wants to see the inner nature of living people. Thus, Jamie goes to the pathology lab where Professor Carey works. Carey helps her see a colon, a liver, a stomach and watch a post-mortem. In the lab, she examines a cancerous liver cell, with a poet’s eye though. The way she describes the liver as seen through the microscope is worth attention:

I was admitted to another world, where everything was pink. I was looking down from a great height upon a countryside, a landscape. There was an estuary, with a north bank and a south. In the estuary were wing-shaped river islands or sandbanks, as if it was low tide. It was astonishing, a map of the familiar; it was our local river, as seen by a hawk. (*Sightlines* 30)

That she establishes similarity between a human cell and a landscape can be read as her effort to show how equally natural both are. After they examine the cancerous liver, her friend invites her to see infections, too. This time, she examines acid-producing glands of someone's stomach, which she likens to a sum of valleys, river deltas, marshes, peninsulas, and atolls although what she is looking at is bacteria that cause ulcers (Jamie, *Sightlines* 34). It is significant that the pathologist who accompanies her also agrees that what they are looking at evokes a pastoral image with bacteria that resemble animals grazing in the fields (34). Having seen a colon, a liver and a stomach that closely, Jamie is surprised by the fact that the nature within our bodies has been neglected for such a long time. Of the stomach, she notes: "It was an image you might find in a Sunday night wildlife documentary. Pastoral, but wild, too. So close to home, but people had landed on the moon before these things were discovered" (35). Jamie's experience with human cells seen through a microscope in a pathology lab is another reminder that nature is neither something always meant to be appealing to human eye nor is it supposed to be sought far from the city like the Romantic poets tried to do: We are embedded in nature just as it is embedded in us with its bacteria and viruses. Collins suggests that with "Pathologies", Jamie points out the necessity to conceive body as a form of ecosystem (112), and with her visit to the lab, she seems to be succeeding in this and challenges the human/non-human separation with a concrete example from a lab.

"The Woman in the Field" is another essay whereby Jamie questions the culture/nature divide, this time by looking outside. Like in her visit to the Maes Howe mentioned in *Findings*, Jamie observes during her voluntary work as part of the excavation team in the North Mains that human is embedded in the non-human nature. She highlights that it is thanks to the unchanging landscape that we can get clues about the lives of the Neolithic people. She tries to imagine how a Neolithic man experienced

the landscape: “When he’d climbed out, he’d have seen the same ridge of hills as we did, the same long river valley, with woods and clearings” (*Sightlines* 56). From Jamie’s angle, it is the hills, rivers, valleys and woods that create a shared platform between us and the people long gone. In other words, it is the landscape that connects past and present ensuring continuity in time. Thus, it is plausible to suggest that Jamie believes that human stories are written in and kept by the land.

In “The Gannetry”, Jamie challenges the culture/nature separation through a gannet station. She informs the reader that there are gannet stations all around the Scottish coast, one of which is the Bass Rock. The Bass Rock, which is now uninhabited but was once a settlement for a Christian hermit around 600 AD, is an island in the east of Scotland and home to a large colony of gannets (“Bass Rock”). Regarding the island, Jamie writes:

Actually, the Bass Rock is far from remote: it’s near as dammit in the city, you can see it from the windows of the John Lewis store in Edinburgh, a shining beacon of bird shit in the Firth of Forth. You can imagine gannetries like you imagine lighthouses. Romantic outposts, if you please, facing down the wild sea—but without all that rugged manliness. They’re wild and far-flung, but domestic, ignoble, noisy, seasonal. (*Sightlines* 87)

In the above description of the Bass, the closeness of a bird colony to the city is highlighted, and gannetries are compared to lighthouses. In this context, it is possible to state that Jamie questions the culture/nature separation through the Bass Rock, which could be both wild and domestic.

Another Scottish island, which was once settled by humans but now is abandoned, is St Kilda. Jamie’s essay “Three Ways of Looking at St Kilda” offers again an unusual perspective to question culture/nature divide. St Kilda, a UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to nearly one million seabirds, including the UK’s largest colony of Atlantic puffins (“St Kilda”). The island hosted people for more than four thousand years until the remaining thirty-six islanders voted to be evacuated in 1930 because their way of life was no longer sustainable (“St Kilda”). After two attempts failed by weather conditions, Jamie could finally go to see the island with a group of archaeologists and

stayed there helping them with their work. Jamie's reaction to the island as a poet and an amateur archaeologist can be read as the questioning of culture/nature divide.

While on the island, Jamie is particularly attracted by cleits. A cleit is "a stone storage hut or bothy, uniquely found on the isles and stacs of St Kilda", which was used to store a wide array of products including cured fish, eggs, hay, manure, grains, etc. ("Cleit"). Jamie indicates that cleits, where islanders used to keep their resources, served as stores (*Sightlines* 150). The archaeology team Jamie joined was trying to locate them accurately using satellite technology. The reason why the archaeologists had to have recourse to satellite is that cleits cannot easily be positioned. In fact, because they have been abandoned for about ninety years, they have become literally embedded in the landscape making it difficult to discern them. Also, as they are made of stone and turf, which are both natural, they look like part of the landscape rather than a building erected upon it. Unlike the archaeology team that surveys the cleits from a scientific point of view, Jamie's reaction is emotive. Though she does not undermine the measurements done by the archaeologists and appreciates the work done, she complains about "too much accuracy". Jamie seems to prefer to consider cleits as the remnants of a recent past rather than a human-made structure to be scrutinized with tools and devices. "I thought the cleits curious, half nature and half culture, with their stone walls and turf roofs shivered in the breeze. We could measure them all we liked, but they were still mysterious," writes Jamie (155). From Jamie's standpoint, a cleit is an embodied example of the intermingling of culture and nature. This sense of union seems to give her a sense of enchantment, and she apparently does not want to unravel this mysterious harmony.

In fact, Jamie's essay on St Kilda openly invites the reader to see the mutually enriching link between the so-called binary oppositions. In this essay, Jamie is not philosophizing about why and how, for example, human and non-human should not be separated. She provides concrete examples to explain why it is meaningless to maintain dichotomies. She shows examples for St Kildan way of life when dichotomies were out of question. For instance, she informs that St Kildan people shared the same house with their animals. In other words, humans and non-human animals were co-habitants inside the same house. Due to weather conditions, St Kildans' houses were windowless and

heated by a central hearth that benefited both animals and people. This way of living dictated by natural conditions was disturbed when a Victorian businessman came to the island in 1860 and offered to build “better houses” with a chimney for the smoke, glass windows and a separate place for the beast (*Sightlines* 150-51). Houses ending up “damp and needy”, a four-thousand-year-old union between human/non-human and culture/nature was interrupted by a modern imposition.

Another essay whereby Jamie highlights human/non-human union is “La Cueva”. In this essay, Jamie writes her visit to a Palaeolithic cave without specifying where the cave is. The cave was discovered by two farmers who were looking for bat guano. The farmers chased after bats which then led them to the cave in the mountain (Jamie, *Sightlines* 166). While in the cave, Jamie and her companions look at the cave paintings which are mostly animal figures and Jamie attempts to imagine the bond between Palaeolithic animals and Palaeolithic people back then:

There was a time- until very recently in the scheme of things- when there were no wild animals because every animal was wild; and humans were few. Animals, an animal presence over us and around us ... Their skins clothing our skins, their fats in our lamps, their bladders to carry water, meat when we could get it. (168)

The way Jamie imagines about Palaeolithic people’s relation to animals around them allows us to conclude that Palaeolithic people depended on the animals around them for their basic needs, but they did not separate themselves from the animals.

It is important in this essay that Jamie does not act like an anthropologist who aims to inform the reader about the Old Stone Age paintings. In fact, human and animal representations from the Palaeolithic age are considered from diverse aspects by scholars: as evidence of magical rites to guarantee success in hunting or to guarantee fertility, an attempt to produce a seasonal notation system based on accurate representations of animals’ coats and a basic need to creatively record and reproduce aspects of the surrounding world (“Palaeolithic”). These reasons, however, do not concern Jamie. Instead of questioning why people painted animals in caves, Jamie tries to think about what these paintings mean for human/non-human relation, which automatically renders her writing less anthropocentric than an archaeologist’s or an

anthropologist's would be. While in the cave, she imagines about a possible union between humans and non-human animals and invites the reader to do so without employing an authorial tone. In fact, while human/non-human bond was being examined in relation with the agricultural revolution earlier in this dissertation, it was stated that animistic hunters-gatherers trusted in continuity between human and non-human communities, so their myths included all kinds of animals as humans that change shape (Barker 59). This knowledge surely exists in Jamie's luggage, but her purpose is not to give information. She just wants to dream about and feel the continuity between humans and non-human animals in the Palaeolithic age. Of the time she spends in the cave, Jamie writes: "We are deep in metaphor, the membranes between body and stone, and cave and animal are dissolved" (*Sightlines* 169). Thus, it can be stated that Jamie sees the cave as a "uterus" where binary operations fail. As she finishes "La Cueva", she notes:

Our Palaeolithic kinship with animals, with nature is over, broken, or so we say. Strange though, that it should have been animals -bats- who led the way to the cave this time round. And that it should have happened just as we were discovering a new relationship, closer than ever: discovering that we'd all travelled together, separating and overlapping, out of a deep, shared evolutionary origin. (171)

Though she appears to be regretful that the supposed animal-human bond is broken, she sounds hopeful that with the help of modern science (evolutionary biology), people will learn to appreciate the commonality in all species.

Another separation that Jamie challenges is the subject/object divide in science. Plumwood criticizes the western epistemology for the radical separation of the subject of knowledge from its object, for such divide leads to the commodification of nature and facilitates an emotionally and ethically disengaged way of knowing, which she calls "sado-dispassionate ethical and epistemic positioning" (*Environmental* 47-53). Plumwood's criticism mostly concerns the human/non-human divide in science, but this criticism can be applied to subject/object divide in medicine, too. Jamie gives an example of this in "Pathologies" when she thinks about the people whose colon and liver are being examined in the pathology lab while the patients are hospitalized

upstairs. As she is in the lab, she watches her friend cutting up a colon to see if the tumours in it are cancerous, but she cannot easily cope with what she has seen because she “kept having to do a mental exercise, every so often, to unhook [herself] from the colon being cut up, in front of [her], which was not a beautiful object of contemplation” (*Sightlines* 29). She cannot detach herself emotionally from what is happening in the lab:

To think upstairs, I mean, to that person lying ill and frightened and anxiously awaiting ‘the results from the lab’. Other people in the room were working on lumps taken from breast, an appendix. I’d said as much to Frank, about having to make an effort to empathise, and as he’d worked and I watched, we’d talked of people we knew who’d had cancer, even in our families. (*Sightlines* 29)

It is apparent that Jamie feels uneasy about the thingification of a body part, which has become the routine of lab people and seeks to see a sign of emotion on the side of scientists working on body parts. She feels the same discomfort when she is invited to watch a post-mortem conducted because the wife of the dead person wanted to learn about the cause of her husband’s death, which, to the wife, was too sudden. Jamie watches how the doctors lay the organs on cold trays and examines them. When the doctors are done with their job, one of them asks if she was hungry and adds: “Let’s go and get a sandwich. That’s the tradition” (*Sightlines* 40). While Jamie cannot easily leave behind what she saw, the habitualness in doctor’s actions and invitation for lunch disconcerts her. As she ends her trip to the lab, she admits: “Enough bodily marvels for one day ... That heart smell haunted me: for a while it was unshakeable, as though, like a wolf, I could sense it everywhere; in the old and middle-aged and babes in arms, all seeking their way towards their relatives and friends” (41). It can be claimed that Jamie has a hard time accepting the emotional disengagement of doctors working in the lab, but she is not judgmental of them.

One reason why Jamie is not judgmental of the doctors who work mechanically in the lab could be that the doctors help her physically see the ordinariness of a human body, which is culturally attributed several meanings. Professor Cleming, who carried out the post-mortem, must have felt Jamie’s malaise during the port mortem because he uses the expression “the natural evidence of our mortality” to describe dead organs as if

he wanted to normalize the operation for Jamie (*Sightlines* 40). Jamie eventually comes to terms with the fact that a human body is a biological entity: “Hearts and lungs, a colon that could be a pig’s. That’s the deal: if we are to be alive and available for joy and discovery, then it’s as an animal body, available for cancer and infection and pain” (*Sightlines* 40). In fact, she is already aware of this when she states that the similarity between a pig’s colon and a human’s colon “shouldn’t really surprise us” (28). This experience, which causes Jamie to develop oscillating feelings about the human body and medical interventions in it, shows the futility of the human/non-human separation as it was clearly seen in the lab.

On top of the above-mentioned dichotomies it intends to dismantle, “Pathologies” is a significant essay also because it challenges the hierarchies imposed within the non-human nature. The very reason why Jamie wants to go to a pathology lab after her mother’s death and the subsequent conference where speakers talked about their transforming experiences with polar bears and sea-lions is to question the “foreshortened definition” of nature which was troubling her: “There is our own intimate, inner natural world, the body’s weird shapes and forms, and sometimes they go awry. There are other species, not dolphins arching clear from under us” (*Sightlines* 24). It is evident that Jamie is not content with the definition of nature if it remains confined to species that are found pleasing. In this respect, she seems to be in an effort to dignify the overlooked. In *Xerophilia* (2008), Tom Lynch suggests that environmentally responsible writing should awaken our intellectual and emotional awareness of overlooked species and grant them dignity (Voie 26). Another instance when Jamie displays a critical attitude to the eulogizing of nature is the moment she sees the colon being cut up. She likens the colon under her friend’s hands to mushrooms and the fat squished under his fingers to cottage cheese: “It might have been ‘nature’, but there was nothing uplifting about it. Well, we are predators and omnivores, we are meat and made of food, and the colon is part of how our animal bodies deal with food” (28). The sense of disgust at the sight of the colon followed by an acceptance that this is what we are can be read as Jamie’s reconciliation with the fact that nature is not meant to please us. In this regard, with her visit to the lab, Jamie seems to be reminding the reader that nature is much more than a romanticized account of the non-human.

“Moon” is another inspiring essay in which Jamie looks at dichotomous hierarchies with a critical eye. In most of the examples covered so far, Jamie’s criticism of culture/nature divide is partially based on the idea that it is pointless to impose such a separation between the two because they are inseparably intermingled. It is important that as Jamie tries to dismantle this dichotomy, she does not defend the supremacy of nature versus culture. In other words, she has no intention to reverse the opposition in favour of nature nor underestimates human-made products. On the contrary, she seems to be hinting at the use of human-made tools in appreciating the non-human. For example, in “Moon”, as she is on a plane with a friend who is terribly afraid of flying, she wants to console her friend: “He is still scared and I want to tell him that, like the lights of New York City that blazed below us for ages, livid and thrilling, taking off in a 747 is the business- truly the modern sublime” (*Sightlines* 127). Similarly, while on the island of Rona, which is currently an uninhabited Scottish island, to help a bird-watcher who works on the storm petrels that breed on the island, she pays attention to the rings used to track birds. Although she feels “uncomfortable about the metal ring”, she appreciates their use because people could learn that swallows and storm petrels migrate to the south thanks to ringing (215-16). As Jamie says, “The ring shows only that it [the storm petrel] was wedded to the sea and, if anything, the scale of its journeys made it seem even wilder than before” (216). Apparently, Jamie does not display a hostile attitude to technology as something harmful for the planet but instead offers to see it as an instrument to realize the capabilities of birds to migrate and cover long distances without any help as in “The Storm Petrel” and appreciate the beauty of the city lights and moon they see from the plane as in “Moon”.

“Moon” is a significant essay also in the way it approaches subject/object divide. Jamie is sensitive to what Plumwood calls “caring rationality”. Caring rationality is a form of ethical engagement in scientific rationality, which treats nature as active in the production of knowledge and calls for respect towards what is being studied (*Environmental* 55-56). At the beginning of her essay titled “Moon”, Jamie refers to a line from a poem by Elizabeth Bishop: “He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties” (qtd. in *Sightlines* 121). Based on this, it can be said that seeing the moon is not the same as observing it. It is apparent that Jamie does not want to look at

the moon as an object of science but wants to see it for its mere existence or for the emotions it triggers in her. Anthropomorphic it may sound, her description of the eclipse is worthy of note: “There was something unnerving about the movement of this shadow, or, rather, about the passivity of the moon. She couldn’t wipe or shake away the encroaching shadow” (125). In this example, not only does Jamie show her personal response to the eclipse but she also tries to imagine the eclipse from the moon’s perspective. Though in vain, her attempt to look at the eclipse from the moon’s angle can be read as an objection to subject/object divide in science.

Jamie’s stance against an ethically disengaged scientific rationality gets clearer in her experience with a dead storm petrel, to which she dedicated a chapter titled “The Storm Petrel”. She finds the ringed bird on the island of Rona. Jamie informs the reader that if one finds a ringed bird, s/he is asked to notify the British Museum of the bird by filling out a form as part of conservationist efforts (*Sightlines* 212). Jamie draws attention to the questions to be answered in the form: ring number, type of bird, sex of bird, age of bird, what happened to the bird, where and when (212-13). The questions Jamie has in mind, however, are different from the questions that require measurable or observable data. She wonders the smell of the bird when it was found and she wants to describe what kind of a day the bird was found, for it helped to find the bird. As if she wanted to give the bird a story, she writes: “A lively, companionable summer’s afternoon, with a sun bright enough to glint on a tiny metal bead, and make us notice it, the only man-made object in all that place” (213). Plumwood argues that it is possible for scientists to operate in dialogical care models finding in the nature they study the basis for awe and environmental commitment (*Environmental* 55). As a poet who voluntarily engages in environmental conservation efforts with her friends who werespecialised in diverse fields, Jamie seems to be showing such a commitment without being emotionally disengaged from the non-human she encounters.

4.1.2.4 A Move from Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism

In the twenty-first century nature writing, it is possible to talk about an obvious will on the side of authors to criticize anthropocentrism. It can be said that writers’ critical attitude to anthropocentric accounts of the non-human push them to attempt to imagine the non-human from a non-human perspective. Though language is a

significant barrier in that, Jamie tries to overcome this obstacle. Buell argues that “No human can speak *as* the environment, *as* nature, *as* a nonhuman animal... At most we can attempt to speak from the standpoint of understanding humans to be part of what Aldo Leopold called ‘the biotic community’” (*The Future* 7-8). Jamie is well aware of the fact that humans are a part of a whole just like whales or insects are, but her efforts to think about the non-human go beyond this acceptance. Though it cannot be claimed that she is speaking as a non-human animal, she is trying to imagine how they might feel. This effort makes her narrative more biocentric than anthropocentric. For example, in “The Gannetry”, she tries to look from gannets’ perspective and imagine how gannets would perceive humans watching them: “We were close enough to see their eyes, and they are sharp-sighted, but if they noticed us they made no sign. We were nothing, land things, and gannets disdain land” (*Sightlines* 75). Jamie imagines that gannets might be looking down on humans which they could see as mere “land things” (75).

As she watches the gannets while they are breeding, she notices fighting birds, one of which is beaten and falling in disarray toward the sea. Of the breeding, she writes: “This was exhausting. Exhilarating, but exhausting. What it must be for them, this breeding business. Shredded nerve and argy-bargy and sexual tension, and the young weren’t even hatched yet” (*Sightlines* 79). Observing this breeding environment, which she finds fiercely competitive, she wonders if there would be any gannet that would choose not to integrate with the colony: “D’you suppose there are any who just don’t bother? Any gannets who fly in and take one look at all this, and think yuk, and head straight back out to sea?” (80). Like in her experience with the Braan salmon mentioned in *Findings*, she tries to understand how the gannets might be feeling, but she inevitably fails to provide an answer.

In another instance, she tries to think about gannets individually rather than as a group. In her own words she “tried to watch individuals to follow particular narratives, but to no avail; each story wove into another” (*Sightlines* 77). During her bird-watching activity, she cannot focus on a single gannet and think about its story. The reason why her efforts to create individual stories for gannets fail could be again human incapability of understanding gannet language. This incapability makes her narrative anthropomorphic at times. For example, of the lone gannets that do not mingle with the

colony she writes: “I like to watch gannets interrogating the sea, like some old patrician poet frowning over his papers” (81). She uses adjectives like noisy, aggravated, angry and frustrated to describe the bird colony. From this perspective, she seems to be attributing human characteristics to the non-human, but as she constantly tries to empathize with gannets, her anthropomorphism remains acceptable. Therefore, in “The Gannetry”, though she cannot wholly avoid anthropomorphism, she can create a non-anthropocentric narrative for gannets by inviting the reader to try to imagine how they might be feeling about the breeding act, their life in the colony and even humans.

“The Hvalsalen” is another essay where Jamie tries to think like the non-human. “The Hvalsalen” is about Jamie’s trip to the Bergen Natural History Museum in Norway, where they keep mainly whale specimens. During her subsequent visits to the museum, Jamie is enthralled by the majesty of these sea mammals, and she tries to imagine what being a whale might be like: “Spend a little time here and you too feel how it is to be a huge mammal of the seas, to require the sea to hold you, to grow so big at the ocean’s hospitality” (*Sightlines* 98). Seeing the huge whale bones in the museum, Jamie tries to visualize the whale’s size and points at the animal’s embeddedness in the ocean. She imagines the harmonious relationship between the whale and the ocean that enabled it to grow that big. Jamie’s interest in whales is evident in her essay “Voyager, Chief”, too. In this essay, Jamie writes about the whale relics she sees in Stromness Museum in Scotland. In the museum, she shows interest in whales’ eardrums, which were, as she informs, very popular among the whalers of the time because they believed that they could hear the sea or whale songs through these eardrums (232). It can be argued that the sailors of the whaling era wanted to preserve eardrums from whale carcasses to obtain a benefit for themselves, that is to listen to whale songs or the sea if they could. In this regard, they had a human-centred approach. However, Jamie finds the eardrums “beautiful and sad and complete; all that can be said about sea-waves and sound waves, song and utterance, is rolled together in these forms” (233). Jamie implies whales’ capability of hearing voices from the ocean, which humans cannot, instead of highlighting her desire to hear such a sound. In this aspect, she gets closer to a biocentric approach, whereby “earth’s non-human forms are believed to have a kind of value that belongs to them by their very nature” (P.W. Taylor 12). From Jamie’s point

of view, whales' value is independent of humans or what humans can get from them. In "Voyager, Chief", as she mentions the whale bones that stand as a decorative object in Meadows Park in Edinburgh, she wonders how these bones ended up in a city park and then informs the reader that the bones were brought to Edinburgh in 1886 as part of an international exhibition of science, art and industry, which was a way to show off for the Empire (*Sightlines* 221). It is worth attention that while Jamie shares this historical information, she underlines that "this is the human side of the story" and "the whales' own narratives are unrecorded" (221). The human side of the story obscures whether whales were deliberately killed for the exhibition or the bones were taken from a stranded whale. Again, Jamie implies human inability to reach the whale side. In Jamie's understanding, humans are neither omniscient nor omnipotent. Paul W. Taylor argues that biocentrism necessitates us to see each and every living organism as "a teleological (goal-oriented) centre of life, pursuing its own good in its own unique way" consciously or unconsciously (45). With her biocentric sensitivity to whales, Jamie seems to call for the need to let living organisms go in for their own good in their own unique way.

In the Hvalsalen museum, Jamie notices the explanations showing the breed and length of the whales and writes: "There was next to nothing in the way of explanations or information aside from some handpainted signs dangling from the skeletons: 'Finnhval 1867. 15.7 m.', Blahval. 24m. Finnmark 1879'" (*Sightlines* 98). Finding these signs insufficient, Jamie implies that human measurements or names do not suffice to penetrate the world of whales. Although she is aware that human mind would fail to comprehend whale existence as a whole, she keeps trying to imagine their existence: "Being up on their platform, in the presence of these whales, allowed you to note differences in their anatomy, gave you a feel for them. It was as though you could imagine- purely by their skeletons hanging from their chains- differences in characters they had in life" (108). Her efforts to imagine whales as individual characters show her tendency towards a more biocentric narrative. As she closes her essay, she reminds the reader that whales have been here long before humans appeared, and the only feeling

she can name while she is cleaning⁴⁷ the whale bones is “shame” no matter how much effort there is now to protect them: “I turned the rib in my hands, stroked it with the sponge. Shame and shame” (119).

In *Sightlines*, whales and island birds are in the foreground because most of the essays in this collection are rooted in Scottish islands, where it is more likely to encounter these animals more than other parts of Britain. However, Jamie’s attentiveness to the non-human expands to a magpie moth, too. In her essay “Magpie Moth”, Jamie shares her memory with a moth, which she notices on the lochan as she is having breakfast by it. She sees the moth “held flat by the surface tensions of the water” and wants to save it using her spoon (*Sightlines* 173). She partially succeeds in her attempt and leaves the moth on a rock (174). As the moth cannot easily move on the rock, she feels guilty and says: “Perhaps I should have left it alone” (174). Despite her discomfort with the moth’s position, she cannot satisfy her curiosity and tries to watch the moth with her magnifying glass: “The moth having been rescued for good or ill, would now suffer itself to be scrutinised” (175). While examining the moth through the magnifying glass, Jamie sees its eyes and wonders: “Moth eyes. What do they see with their moth eyes?” (175). Yet again she asks herself a question she cannot answer pointing out human inability to reach the magpie moth’s side just as she experienced with salmons, gannets and whales.

“Magpie Moth” is a significant essay also in that it shows Jamie’s effort to include a variety of species in her essay collection. In other words, an essay dedicated to a moth, which can go unnoticed by an untrained eye, shows that nonhuman is too rich a term to confine to a few species. As Jamie pays heed to “tiny creatures, flowers, bacteria, opening, growing, dividing, creeping about their business”, she seems to reject speciesism in favour of biocentrism (*Sightlines* 176). With her attention directed to the moth, Jamie appears to invite the reader to consider the ontological status of a magpie from a biocentric point of view. Taylor argues that amateur naturalists may in time have a sharpened awareness of the plant or animal they study and end up seeing it as an irreplaceable individual: “One can then imaginatively place oneself in the organism’s situation and look at the world from its standpoint” (120). As an amateur naturalist and

⁴⁷She was invited to the museum to help with the cleaning of whale bones.

poet, Jamie is not particularly interested in magpies, but still she tries to look at the world from the moth's perspective when she says: "Perhaps I should have left the moth alone; I'd probably done it more harm than good. After all, laid on the water, its patterned wings unfolded and perfect, it looked to be in a state of bliss, but what do we know?" (176). Though Jamie's imaginative effort to think or feel like the moth is doomed to fail due to the language barrier between species, it is worth attention that Jamie is worried that she might have hurt or disturbed the moth, which shows that she feels an ethical responsibility towards the non-human.

4.1.2.5 Anthropocene and Ecological Awareness

Contemporary nature writers do not remain indifferent to the ecological crisis we are facing. Considering the works included in the special edition of *Granta* titled "The New Nature Writing", the editor Cowley also accentuates the anxiety felt by authors and says that the authors in the edition all have the feeling that humankind has left no landscape or ecosystem untouched by its members (9). Jamie is certainly one of those authors who feel that anxiety. For example, her attention to the plastic accumulation on the islands can be seen as a sign of her sensitivity to the ecological problems. As she draws attention to the plastic garbage in Ceann Iar in *Findings*, she mentions the same problem for the gannets' nests in "The Gannetry" in *Sightlines*. She notices the plastic waste "woven into the nests were shreds of nylon rope, orange and blue, or scraps of net" (*Sightlines* 78). Jamie informs the reader that gannets are curious and acquisitive creatures that want to get what they see, so they tend to collect colourful plastic things as they arouse their interest. The problem is, as Jamie puts it, that "Sometimes the youngsters get entangled in this stuff and die like that, hanged from their natal cliffs before they can fly" (86). With her attention to the plastic threads in gannets' nests, Jamie shows not only how human has infiltrated non-human but also how an ecologically irresponsible human act, whether deliberate or not, might cause the death of another species. Maria Johnston argues that Jamie's writing is informed by the reality of threat and extinction (171). In *Sightlines*, which is predominantly composed by essays derived from Jamie's excursions to remote Scottish islands, Jamie appears to be truly sad because of the threat faced by other species that once frequented the islands.

Jamie's awareness of the anthropogenic harm can clearly be seen in her essay "The Hvalsalen", too. As Jamie observes the huge whale skeletons, she wonders how all those specimens were collected in the nineteenth century, when the museum was opened. The reader learns that there is hardly any record about how all the whale skeletons and specimens were gathered back then. Jamie draws attention to a warning in the museum, which says "Do not touch the animals". Highlighting the irony in this warning, she notes: "'Do not touch the animals.', but it was a bit late for that. The whalers' harpoons had got them, the flensing iron. Where else could the whales have come from? All, presumably, had met their deaths through violence, in the days of industrial whaling" (*Sightlines* 97). Had the whales not been brought to the brink of extinction through whale hunting, there would be no special section dedicated to whale skeletons, which now need to be protected even against touch. Jamie's visit to the museum demonstrates this bitter irony in natural history.

A little while after her first visit to the Hvalsalen, Jamie is invited to participate in the cleaning project in the museum, where the experts would remove the dust off the skeletons to preserve them better. In her second visit, too, she draws attention to whale hunting, indirectly though. As she joins the team meticulously working on specimens, she is alerted by a smell which she thinks is very much like the smell of wax crayons she used to have in her childhood. When she mentions the smell, the director of the project, Gordon says: "Probably made of whale oil ... Most things were" (qtd. in Jamie, *Sightlines* 105). Jamie learns in her adult life that something which she liked to own in her childhood might have contributed to the extinction of whales. Gordon further informs her that there were many objects made of whale oil. In the museum, she sees a whale skeleton which is being cleaned and realizes that the bones are brown. A project member informs her that the bones got brown because the dust got mixed with the oil, which is still leaking from the dead animal. Upon this information, Jamie reacts: "Poor whales, didn't they know when to stop? The same whale oil that greased the machines and lit the streets and parlours, the oil of soap and margarine. All that oil!" (102). Jamie obviously feels sad that whales were killed for humans' sake: "The skeleton seemed to emit a nineteenth-century glow. You could imagine the kind of light a whale-oil lamp would have cast, on the corner of some Victorian street" (105). From crayons to

margarines, several pieces from human's daily lives stand as the proof of human brutality against the non-human, and the museum itself stands as a funny compensation for human atrocity. As Gordon says, "A million whales up in smoke, and this is all we've got to show for it" (qtd. in Jamie, *Sightlines* 105).

Of the Hvalsalen, Jamie writes that "the effect of the Hvalsalen was dreamlike. The vast structures didn't seem to offer any reproach. Rather, they drew you in. Undisturbed for a century, they had colluded to create a place of silence and memory. A vast statement of fact: Whales is what we were. This is what we are" (*Sightlines* 98). As Jamie refers to what humans did to whales in the past and what they are now doing for them, she implies how humans evolved from anthropogenic harm to anthropocenic awareness. She shows this transition also through the materials humans use against whales: "The full gamut of human attention- from the exploding harpoon and flensing iron, to the soft sponge and the toothpick" (118). The materials used with whales reveal that human-whale relation has evolved from brutal killing to preservation. Similarly, in "Voyager, Chief", Jamie mentions a dispute between the National Museum of Scotland and the inhabitants of the Scottish island of Coll, where a fin whale washed up a few years ago (234). The museum and the islanders had an argument because while the museum wanted to keep the carcass for its collection, the islanders wanted to keep a few of its bones as a souvenir to remind them of whales (234). Both parties apparently wanted to preserve the carcass although the islanders seem to have a more emotional response as they protest: "It seems everything disappears, and we have nothing to remember the whale" (234). Jamie's reaction to this argument is as follows: "Such has been our violence toward these animals that we sense in a jawbone arch a memorial not just to that particular whale, but almost to whalehood itself" (234). Given the anthropogenic harm to whales as a species, the discord between the museum and islanders over a dead whale's bone sounds ironic as much as assad, and Jamie skilfully foregrounds this sad irony as she refers to the effort to preserve a memory with a bone.

4.1.2.6 Porosity and Enchantment

In the chapter on new nature writing, porosity was explained in terms of the self being open to forces and powers beyond itself. Taylor contrasts porous selves of the pre-modern times with the buffered selves of the modern times by claiming that the

former was thought of as open to supernatural forces and powers beyond itself, and the latter was conceived as independent and autonomous with its thoughts and feelings that belong to mind (“Buffered”). Taylor argues that our ancestors with their porous selves lived in an enchanted world with forces crossing boundaries, but we are living in a disenchanted world with a much firmer sense of boundary between self and the other (“Buffered”). While the antique and medieval porous self accepted the forces it could not control as divine and sacred and interacted with them through magic or prayer, the modern self demystified them separating itself from nature (Hampton 461). It appears that in Taylor’s and Hampton’s discussions, porosity is associated with enchantment, and it is taken more as an abstract concept rather than material. Recently, however, the term porosity has been used in a more material context. For instance, Iovino draws attention to the porosity of matter and bodies and states that “Porosity occurs at many levels, both material and semiotic, allowing transformations, metabolism, and flows of matter, energy, and information” (“Bodies”101).

In fact, Alaimo particularly addresses the porosity of bodies with her concept “trans-corporeality”. Alaimo basically argues that “There are material interchanges between bodies (both human and non-human)” (“Bodily” 16). The permeability of bodies can be understood by the fact that human body is open to toxic substances, which can enter our bodies without our control (Alaimo, “Material” 91). Such an interconnection and interchange between human and non-human bodies means that human is inseparable from the “environment” (Alaimo, “Bodily” 2). In *Findings*, with her essay “Pathologies”, Jamie has already given an unusual example to support the invalidity of such a separation. Trans-corporeality also offers an alternative perspective to consider how we achieve knowledge. To be more specific, within the framework of trans-corporeality, knowledge is a set of embodied practices, highlighting the importance of sensorimotor capacities to reach knowledge (Iovino, “Bodies” 102). As Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch explain, cognition “depends on the kind of experience that comes from having a body with sensorimotor capacities” that are “themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological and cultural context” (qtd. in Iovino, “Bodies” 102). Based on this, it can simply be argued that one can receive knowledge from what s/he smells, touches or sees, and this

knowledge matters, too. Under “1.2 Bodily Experience” above, Jamie’s reference to her sensory skills, primarily vision and smell to learn about the non-human was detailed. Her sensory experiences with the non-human world cover a porosity aspect as well. For example, in her essay “The Hvalsalen”, she appears to be so much affected by the whale bones that she writes: “The presence of all those whales’ bones – they’d had got under my skin, so to speak, so much so I stood there in the cold unsure what to do, where to go next” (*Sightlines* 98). Jamie’s understanding of porosity covers an abstract dimension and even enchantment in the sense that whale bones cause her to find herself in a situation beyond her control. It also contains a physical dimension in that it is what she sees and smells in the museum that drags her into this state. She expresses her feelings with the idiom “get under someone’s skin”, which is significant because this idiom points out a body part associated with touch to mean “to affect someone positively even though he or she does not want or expect to be affected that way: grow to like something” (“Get”).

Referring to the still valid pleasure of ghost stories told around a campfire and the attractiveness of myths, David Morgan claims that enchantment is a part of our lives whether we achieve it through arts or in our everyday reality (11). Despite the long history of the disenchanting of the world, which, according to Weber, started with the Jewish monotheism and gained acceleration with the rise of science and technology hymned by the Enlightenment and exploited by the Industrial Revolution and rational administration, people have not given up enchantment (1-11). Morgan alleges that “People prefer enchantment in matters of love, fear, hatred, or enjoyment derived from suspending disbelief in the experience of things as varied as religious miracles, theatre, art, rumours, humour, of the sensation of a scandal or a mystery. We often favour the incredulous” (11). So does Jamie.

Jamie’s need for enchantment is strongly felt during her visit to St Kilda. While on the island, Jamie distances herself from the team of archaeologists she is working with by avoiding measurable observations about the island. In any opportunity, she tries to experience and enjoy the landscape watching the lambs and birds, climbing the cliffs and feeling the wind. She is part of a team that came to the island for a scientific purpose, but for her “there was always time to admire a pair of golden plover,

innocently parading their bright speckles, then go carefully for fear of trampling their nest or shield our eyes to watch a dogfight between a bonxie and a screaming seagull” (*Sightlines* 158). In fact, more than the mere pleasure of watching the non-human in their natural habitat, Jamie seems to be seeking a bit of joy instead of working with tools and devices to reveal the magic of the island. She writes: “You could close your eyes, feel the sun on your skin, and fancy yourself far from the world with all its technology, were it not for Ian checking his data-logger to see if more satellites had climbed into the cultural landscape of heavens” (*Sightlines* 159). Jamie’s discomfort with this scientific endeavour becomes evident when she admits that “It was disquieting, to be aware of all the time of satellites prowling unseen above the sky” (159). With the presence of satellite above, she moans: “Nothing here escaped notice—not a bird, not a stone, certainly not a person” (159). Accordingly, it can be assumed that Jamie does not want to demystify the island or its inhabitants.

One day while on the island they receive a message that a snowy owl, which is very rare to see, was observed flying over the sea, and they were given information via VHF radios about where to go to catch its sight (Jamie, *Sightlines* 160). From the way she tells the reader about this memory, it can be inferred that Jamie felt a bit disappointed by the fact that the snowy owl did not come to them as a surprise but was spotted by the satellites: “Nothing escaped attention. One day a snowy owl wafted over the sea, probably from Iceland. It wasn’t long of course, before he was spotted, and the news was relayed to us” (160). If the owl had escaped the satellites and if they had seen it out of the blue, Jamie would have felt enchanted. Morgan implies that art makes enchantment possible, which is why people are allured to it: “The enchantment of art commonly consists of the way it speaks to you, mysteriously, directly, out of the blue, addressing matters you’d only dimly glimpsed, but which now suddenly rush forward into the uncanny light cast by the work of art” (14). It can be claimed that Jamie would rather experience a sense of enchantment because she mentions her discontent resulting from the island being constantly scrutinized leaving nothing, not even the sight of snowy owl to be surprised by. She implies how the experience of seeing the snowy owl all of a sudden on that remote Scottish island would differ from the experience of being warned about its arrival. In fact, Jamie’s quest for enchantment can be observed more

clearly from the way she reacts to the sudden appearance of the whales as she works on the Rona Island. In her essay “On Rona”, the whales appear out of the blue while they are working on separate things on the island. Jamie and her friends start to run around the island to catch up with the whales. Jamie cannot remember if she screamed when she saw them. Of that moment, she notes: “Hampered by thick grass, our own pounding hearts, we hadn’t a cat’s chance of keeping up, but it was worth trying” (198). Given the difference between the way she reacts to the appearance of the snowy owl and the way she reacts to the whales, it can be argued that Jamie prefers to be enchanted by the natural world, not informed of it.

4.1.3 *Surfacing* (2019)

Preceded by *Findings* and *Sightlines*, *Surfacing* is the last book of Jamie’s trilogy. Like its precedents, *Surfacing* is composed of essays, which are respectively titled: “The Reindeer Cave”, “A Reflection”, “In Quinhagak”, “The Eagle”, “Links of Noltland”, “The Inevitable Pagoda”, “Surfacing”, “From the Window”, “A Tibetan Dog”, “The Wind Horse”, “Elders” and “Voice of the Wood”. Considering that these three books cover the last fourteen years of the writer’s life with short flashbacks to her youth and her mother’s childhood, it can be claimed that they altogether form an eco-memoir, in which Jamie tends to write about the non-human more than she tends to create a self-centred narrative. In fact, this trilogy seems to offer less information about Jamie herself than it would be expected from a memoir. A memoir is, after all, an autobiographical account whereby, as Lee Quinby notes, the autobiographical self is revealed to the reader in his/her relation to others (qtd. in Smith and Watson, *Reading* 198). Though not much, this trilogy allows the reader to collect pieces from Jamie’s life in relation to her human companions. In *Findings*, as stated above, Jamie exposes herself to the reader by mentioning how she felt when her husband got seriously ill, when her grandmother became dependent on their care and when her mother recovered from her childhood pneumonia. In *Findings*, Jamie appears also as a parent, whose parenting responsibilities keep her away from excursions to faraway locations and cause her attention to be turned to her immediate surroundings to satisfy her desire to be in and with the natural world. In *Sightlines*, on the other hand, Jamie seems to be assuming fewer parenting responsibilities as she can travel further, particularly to Scottish islands,

and stay there for a couple of times to do some voluntary work. Compared to *Findings*, *Sightlines* provides fewer clues about Jamie's life in relation to her human companions. *Sightlines* is indeed more focused on the non-human environment including but not limited to whales and island birds, in whose place Jamie tries to posit herself as much as she can. From *Findings* to *Sightlines*, Jamie appears to have developed a more biocentric approach. When it comes to *Surfacing*, which Jamie writes as she has lost her parents and sent her now grown-up children away for education, she looks freer with fewer care giving responsibilities. Yet *Surfacing* also provides a more nostalgic and melancholic account of Jamie's life bringing the trilogy closer to a memoir. In *Surfacing*, the reader reads about a Jamie in her late fifties doing voluntary digging in archaeological excavations in Quinhagak, Alaska and in Noltland, Orkney as well as a Jamie in her late twenties in Xiahe during the 1989 China-Tibet conflict trying to leave behind an unwanted "hasty" marriage. As the title might suggest, *Surfacing* is

a book full of archaeology: the revelation of the deep past in the present moment, the peeling back of layers of history to reveal the stories written into landscapes. It's also the way that memories surface, suddenly and seemingly randomly, until more profound reflection reveals echoes and affinities between seemingly unrelated points in time. (Preston)

Therefore, *Surfacing* can be read as a double-sided effort on Jamie's part: to bring to surface what remains hidden in the earth from former civilizations and to bring to surface personal memories long forgotten. Though *Surfacing* appears to be the most self-centred narrative of the trilogy, it is interestingly the one where the writer displays a more political attitude to the Anthropocene and the cultures left behind, too. In this part, while analysing *Surfacing*, I will follow the same pattern applied to the analysis of the first two books to trace the common traits that ensure the continuity from the first to the third book and focus on Jamie's response to the Anthropocene as well as to the cultures hidden in the earth.

4.1.3.1 Anthropocene and Ecological Awareness

In her previous two books, Jamie's awareness of the anthropogenic harm was evident in her attention to the plastic waste accumulated on the remote and deserted Scottish islands as well as in her lament for the dramatic decline in the number of

whales, whose bones and specimens people are now trying to preserve in museums. Voie argues that “anthropocenic awareness” involves the recognition that material interactions between nature and culture have reached such a point that there is no longer meaning in trying to disentangle the two (2). Jamie’s attention to the plastic threads that accumulate in birds’ nests and cause the entanglement of nestlings, her interest in a plastic toy that washes ashore on a distant Scottish island where there is no longer human settlement and her awakening to the possibility that the wax crayons she very much liked to use in her childhood contained whale oil are some examples from *Findings* and *Sightlines* where the author seems to suggest that any effort to separate culture and nature looks useless in this age of Anthropocene. Jamie is aware that anthropogenic harm has reached such a level that any understanding of a pristine nature as something separate from human is more meaningless than ever.

In *Surfacing*, Jamie’s anthropocenic awareness is evident right on the first page of the first essay, “The Reindeer Cave”, or “The Bone Caves”.⁴⁸ “You’re sheltering in a cave, thinking about the Ice Age. From the cave-mouth: a West Highland landscape in spring, in the early Anthropocene” (1). It is noteworthy that with her very first sentence Jamie takes the reader first back to the Ice Age and then jumps to the present time she names “early Anthropocene”. While thinking about the caves that have been there since the Ice Age, Jamie mentions global warming, which is one of the most urgent ecological problems of the Anthropocene: “Ten thousand years- in the great scheme of things, we’re living through a warm bank holiday weekend” (*Surfacing* 3). The opening essay of *Surfacing* is significant as Jamie makes mention of the Anthropocene and global warming, which will be a recurrent topic in the rest of the book. Ernest Hilbert also agrees that the essays in *Surfacing* show Jamie’s “engagement with the natural world and our place in it, though these latest pieces are fraught with an emerging panic at the destructive effects of climate change” (“In”).

In fact, climate change has been addressed as an important theme in many novels, particularly in science-fiction since 1970s to such an extent that there is now a climate change fiction on its own (Trexler and Johns-Putra 185). It has been a theme also in

⁴⁸The Bone Caves, which are known to have been formed during the last ice age, are important, for they house pieces of reindeer antlers dating from 47,000 to 8,300 years ago (D. Ross).

travel writing, nature writing and life writing (185). Thus, it is only to be expected that as an ecologically minded writer Jamie refers to climate change. Her reference to climate change is significant in that the reader is invited to consider the consequences of global warming through real life experiences. In her essay “In Quinhagak”, Jamie mentions the effects of global warming on the village of Quinhagak in Alaska, where a team of archaeologists have been working to uncover the Yup’ik materials buried in the earth. Jamie informs that people could start to dig the earth and work on it for a longer while because it thaws early, which is a consequence of global warming. On the other hand, with the sea levels rising rapidly, there is also the risk of losing the coastal line to the water, which is again a consequence of global warming: “Because sea levels are rising fast, this tundra is eroding quickly; every day clods of earth and vegetation fall to the sand to be washed away. And, because permafrost is melting, the land is losing its grip on itself, the more ready to surrender to the sea” (Jamie, *Surfacing* 18). Jamie participates in the team of archaeologists to save the history of Quinhagak from climate change, if not the village itself. Jamie’s and her friends’ efforts to excavate the area as soon as possible and raise to surface the things that belonged to Yup’ik people, the ancestors of today’s Quinhagak people who presumably lived in the area five hundred years ago, call for a need to reconsider climate change not just as an environmental problem but also as a cultural threat.

Randall Roorda and Scheese claim that the nature writing in the Anthropocene cannot separate human and nonhuman lives, for both are affected by the large-scale alterations to the environment (qtd. in Voie 2). By addressing Yup’ik culture in relation to global warming, Jamie helps the reader to consider Anthropocene from a wider perspective merging human and non-human lives. Clark indicates that though originated as a geological term, Anthropocene now applies to “new contexts and demands- cultural, ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and political- of environmental issues that are truly planetary in scale” such as climate change, deforestation, overfishing, etc. (*Ecocriticism* 2). That Jamie draws attention to global warming in connection with Quinhagak culture overlaps with this understanding of Anthropocene as a multilateral problem. Voie implies that since Anthropocene affects all life forms, humans appear both as perpetrators and victims of the harm caused to the planet (28). Jamie’s essay “In

Quinhagak” approaches Anthropocene from both angles where humans are both perpetrators and victims.

“In Quinhagak” is not the only essay where the reader can see Jamie’s anthropocenic awareness. In “Voice of the Wood”, for example, she notices the decline in the number of bears and wolves in the woods. During her solitary walk, she calls attention to decreased biodiversity: “You sense the woods miss the bears; they ought to be here huffing around the old trunks and berry-shrubs, but there is no huffing now. Wolves, though- the wood is old enough to remember them, just” (*Surfacing* 244). It is estimated that Britain’s last wolves were hunted to extinction by 1760s and brown bears are believed to have gone extinct one thousand years ago because of hunting (“A changing”). It is meaningful that Jamie draws attention to the loss of wolves and bears during her hike in the woods, which shows that she is unlike the romantic wanderers of the pastoral tradition, who, in Cowley’s words, “walk into the wild to rhapsodize and commune” (9). It is, even more meaningful that she tries to imagine biodiversity loss from the perspective of the woods, which, she argues, could be missing the bears. Though through anthropomorphism, Jamie tries to think about the possible relation between trees and non-human animals inviting the reader to think about biodiversity as a human-induced change which affects the interconnection between life forms not just as a threat to the survival of our species.

In “A Tibetan Dog”, too, Jamie’s sensitivity to anthropogenic harm is evident. In fact, “A Tibetan Dog” and the subsequent “The Wind Horse” are essays derived from the notes Jamie took during her sojourn in Tibet in late 1980s. Neither essay is directly linked to Anthropocene or an environmental cause. On the contrary, these essays are more self-centred than the writer’s other essays in the collection. Remembering her travel to Tibet, Jamie states that she needs to explore her youthful memories at a time when she goes through a biopsy and is determined not to die: “I wouldn’t die of this cancer, not this time, not now. I was being nipped, and would be released” (*Surfacing* 189). This determination is what leads her to delve into her past to surface her stay in Tibet, where she went to escape an unhappy marriage but found herself in the middle of a political conflict. It is significant that writing about such a hectic period of her life, Jamie remains sensitive to an anthropogenic harm as she makes mention of the Yellow

River in Tibet: “The Yellow River is three thousand miles long and is nowadays dammed in a dozen places and poisoned by industry” (187). The fact that The Yellow River has been polluted and dammed has no direct relevance to Jamie’s memories in Tibet, but she needs to highlight this detail. It is even more significant that Jamie refers to the pollution in the river and her cancer simultaneously. Alaimo draws attention to trans-corporeality which involves material interactions between bodies- both human and non-human- and indicates that trans-corporeality offers an understanding of human “as the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world” (*Bodily* 12). To be more specific, from Alaimo’s point of view, trans-corporeality claims that there is an interaction between human body and the larger environment and human body is enmeshed in the more-than-human world (2). Accordingly, as Alaimo puts it, “Human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies” (13). In this respect, human body appears to be permeable as much as vulnerable. Though Jamie does not build a narrative centred on her experience of cancer and assures the reader that she is now well, she hints at how she has had to face the vulnerability and permeability of her own body: “As you may know, having biopsies can be horrible. The tests themselves are awful: hospitals and long needles, shock and bruises, but then comes the waiting and fear” (*Surfacing* 188). Jamie does not elaborate on her condition more. Nor does she openly establish a link between Anthropocene and her health, but it is meaningful that Jamie draws attention to the contamination and thingification of the river along with the contamination and thingification of her body in the same essay, implying the impact of the Anthropocene on both human and non-human.

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, contemporary nature writers’ awareness of the Anthropocene involves an activist spirit, too. Voie argues that there is an increasing activism in the genre because of the writers’ fear of what is happening or may soon happen to a chosen landscape or species followed by their “appeal to confront the reader to confront human impact” (6). Jamie, too, has an activist spirit though she does not adopt a fervent tone in her writing. However, in her final essay “Voice of the Wood”, in which she chooses to use the pronoun ‘you’ as if she was talking to herself while encouraging readers to take the essay as a direct note addressed at them, Jamie

writes about her walk in the woods with a satirical and even angry tone: “What are you doing here anyway, in the woods? Ah well, that is the question. You wanted to think about all the horror. The everyday news- the guns, the wars, the children’s tears down ashly faces, the chainsaws, the sea creatures tangled in plastic” (*Surfacing* 244). That she refers to wars and plastic pollution provides her writing with a political dimension in a way justifying Macfarlane who claims that today’s nature writing is sensitive to the “the dark histories of landscapes and to the structures of ownership and capital that organise – though do not wholly produce – our relations with the natural world” (“Why”). Yet Jamie remains self-critical. Immediately after asking herself what she is doing in the woods, she responds: “No, not to think about it exactly but consider what to do with the weight of it all, the knowing... how to cope with it scroll down flick the page unplug the telly send a few quid. Really? Or take a long walk in the wood ’cause you are the lucky one and can do that, you can just shut up shop and go let the wood embrace you. And here you are” (*Surfacing* 244).

Jamie is evidently critical of any reluctance to face the anthropogenic harm done to the world at least as much as any attempt to take shelter in the woods and forget about it all. This reaction certifies Macfarlane’s remarks on the best of recent writing, which he finds “ethically alert, theoretically literate and wary of the seductions and corruptions of the pastoral” (“Why”). With her self-criticism, Jamie seems to be asking the reader not to ignore or escape the human impact on the planet but to confront it and even do something for it. Voie argues that the nature writing of the Anthropocene is “critically aware of how environmental sins of the past have affected and continue to shape the ecosystemic condition of the present landscape” (18). The concluding paragraph of the “Voice of the Wood” goes one step further than such confrontation and calls for action: “Voice of a crow ... Voice of the forest ... Did you hear something move out the corner of your eye? The same moth came back? Or another lead falling? You are not lost, just melodramatic. The path is at your feet, see? Now carry on” (*Surfacing* 245). With her indirect call to the reader to “carry on” and not to be “melodramatic”, Jamie seems to be boosting an activist spirit against “rhapsodizing tendencies”, which, as Lilley suggests, were a reason for nature writing of the previous century to be downgraded (1).

Also, the letter addressed at the Neolithic people in her essay “Links of Noltland III” can be read as a call to revise anthropocentric attitudes to the non-human. As it will be detailed below, “Links of Noltland I-II-III” is an essay trilogy on a Neolithic site in Orkney, Scotland. Allan Massie thinks that with her essay on this five-thousand-year-old Neolithic site, Jamie reminds the reader that “Our modern world with its marvellous world wide web is an incident in the Earth’s history, a mere speck in time” (“*Surfacing*”). Therefore, this essay can be considered as a call for self-assessment, which appears as a need in modern times marked by human arrogance. In finishing her letter, in which Jamie mainly meditates on Neolithic people’s lives, she turns to modern human beings, making an indirect call for self-questioning.

By now, we number in our billions, have built mega-cities with instant global communications, and send spacecraft to explore unknown shores. We can live to be eighty, ninety, a hundred years old! You early farmers were a success beyond measure. But millions shrink in poverty. Others build high walls and fabricate missiles. Sea levels rise, storm winds are bearing down on us. We are becoming ashamed of our own layer-plastic and waste. (*Surfacing* 173)

With the way she highlights anthropogenic damage that threatens both humans and non-humans through a letter targeting Neolithic farmers, who were at the very beginning of a series of human-induced changes, Jamie displays her awareness of the Anthropocene, which has been slowly developing since early human mastery over nature and gained an incredible speed starting with the second half of the twentieth century. As can be seen, Jamie’s attention to climate change, loss of biodiversity and environmental pollution in *Surfacing* all add to her anthropocenic awareness, signs of which have already been detected in *Findings* and *Sightlines*, especially in relation to plastic pollution in the islands and extinction of whales. Jamie’s awareness of Anthropocene in *Surfacing*, however, contains sensitivity to indigenous communities and thus relates to environmental justice, too.

4.1.3.2 Environmental Justice

Voie asserts that there is a turn to matters of environmental justice in nature writing of the Anthropocene (6). Simply put, “Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national

origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (“Environmental”). Most environmental justice claims have been built on the fact that poor communities, indigenous communities and communities of colour receive fewer environmental benefits while they are more prone to environmental hazards and get less protection (Schlosberg 4). Robert D. Bullard has identified three subcategories for environmental justice: procedural, geographic and social.

Procedural equity refers to questions of fairness, the extent to which governing rules and regulations, evaluation criteria, and enforcement are applied in a non-discriminatory manner. Geographic equity refers to the location of environmental hazards with regard to communities of colour and poor communities. Social equity concerns the way in which social factors, such as race, ethnicity, class, and political power, have an impact on and are reflected in environmental decision making. (qtd. in D.E. Newton 5)

From this perspective, environmental justice movement looks like an anthropocentric movement; however, David Schlosberg claims that environmental justice covers principles linking “cultural integrity with environmental sustainability and sustainability of humans along with other beings” (46). In fact, if we remember the first rule of ecology, which is “Everything is connected to everything else” and if we consider the meaninglessness of hierarchic separations between culture and nature and human and non-human, it is reasonable that environmental justice advocates defend both human and non-human rights. When it comes to the relevance of environmental justice to Jamie’s writing, it is argued in this dissertation that Jamie’s simultaneous interest in the lost cultures, which is evident in her frequent participation in archaeological diggings in Scotland and Alaska, as well as her interest in the lost species, which is evident in her visits to natural history museums in Scotland and Norway, posit her within the realm of environmental justice.

In “In Quinhagak”, we learn that Jamie embarks on “an archaeological adventure by the Bering Sea” (*Surfacing* 21). The aim of the archaeological excavations in Quinhagak is to recover the objects that belonged to the Yup’ik people who lived in the area five hundred years ago. Once the objects are recovered from the earth they have

been buried into for five hundred years, they are cleaned, preserved and catalogued in Aberdeen by academicians. When the job is done, they are meant to be sent back to Yup'ik land and exhibited in their local museum so that the descendants of the Yup'ik community can have an idea about their long tradition. Of the archaeological project, The University of Aberdeen, which has undertaken the excavations in Quinhagak in cooperation with the local company Qanirtuuq Inc. says that

Archaeological sites, as well as the modern infrastructure in the region, are threatened by melting permafrost and rising sea levels along the Bering Sea. Our work focuses on the Nunalleq site, a 14th-18th century pre-contact Yup'ik village with exceptionally well-preserved organic remains. Since 2018, we have been processing finds in a Quinhagak-based lab in the newly opened *Nunalleq Culture and Archaeology Center*. (Nunalleq)

As a voluntary participant in the above-mentioned project, Jamie makes friends with locals during her stay in Quinhagak. Warren, a local, who is also the head of the local company working for the project notes that

It's pivotal. Last year we held a dance. The dig inspired it. Did you know that? On that site, they are discovering dance-masks that our ancestors wore. The missionaries told us our ceremonies were devil worship! They brainwashed us! There hadn't been a ceremonial dance in this village for a hundred years. Well, one of the teachers put this dance together from elders' memories and fragments from other villages. They made that dance and the youngsters performed it. (qtd. in Jamie, *Surfacing* 35)

The joy felt by Warren is obvious in his short but loaded sentences. He is apparently pleased that young generations are reclaiming their past thanks to these excavations, which they eyewitness and even voluntarily participate in. From the perspective of environmental justice, it is meaningful that Jamie gives voice to locals' feelings. Locals suffer from the effects of global warming first-hand, but in the experience of Quinhagak village they are not doomed to silence or passivity in the face of the coming crisis. In fact, archaeological diggings conducted in the region have ironically been made possible by global warming, which has a serious impact on locals' way of life, for they get stuck in their region when the ice melts more than usual and when they cannot travel

on their usual frozen paths. Global warming also threatens their village, for the rising sea might inundate it in the coming years. However, they want to save their history from global warming before it is too late, and they are glad that they can. Of the dance they performed in commemoration of their ancestors after some objects were recovered from the earth, Warren says: “Well, the first time that drum hit, the hair on my neck stood up. I thought, It’s *back*” (qtd. in Jamie, *Surfacing* 35). The locals’ claims to their past are, thus, represented through Warren’s excitement, which Jamie shares with the reader.

Global warming obviously comes with a burden, which will affect the settlements in the far north more quickly than the rest of the northern hemisphere. Quinhagak people are among the first people to feel the effects, but with this project, which is given the biggest share in Jamie’s *Surfacing*, it is demonstrated that local communities are voicing up: They voice up against the degradation of the environment as well as cultural depletion. Jamie underlines that the locals are aware of the harm caused to their way of life by colonialism and capitalism. While in the village, Jamie sees a grocery store, which she describes as follows:

Hunters-gatherers with a grocery store. I went in there, to drift in fascination down its American aisles. Pop-Tarts, pizza, a few wilting cabbages. There were even coconuts, flown across the tundra in the shuddering plane. But no booze. Quinhagak is a dry village. We’d all been warned against bringing any. ‘Alcohol use has contributed to more death and injury in rural Alaska than bears, cold water and weather combined. Because of this we must have a zero tolerance policy regarding alcohol.’ (*Surfacing* 32)

Though Quinhagak people cannot fully escape global capitalism and consumerism, they are at least decided not to have any soul lost to alcoholism, which may, as Bernard Segal notes, be read as some natives’ way of responding to rapid industrialisation and rapid cultural changes in Alaska (276). It is significant that Jamie gives coverage to the problem of alcoholism and locals’ sensitivity about it. Obviously, locals’ requests from the volunteers coming for the archaeological digging in their village shows that Alaskan locals want not only to survive but also determine their own life at least from now on.

Given locals’ claims to their past and presence, it might be thought that “In Quinhagak” is an essay where concerns about the Yup’ik’ cultural sustainability come to

the forefront keeping Jamie's writing away from nature writing and highlighting the human aspect in environmental justice. However, Andrew Powter and Susan Ross inform that cultural sustainability, which was, initially associated with the protection of human-made heritage, has now evolved to include green ideas because the concept of heritage itself has expanded to include landscapes, industrial and engineering works, urban and rural dwellings, intangible elements like art forms, skills and ways of life (5-7). Similarly, UNESCO sees a link between culture and environmental sustainability at various levels: "through the intrinsic links between cultural diversity and biodiversity, through its influence on consumption patterns, and through its contribution to sustainable environmental management practices as a result of local and traditional knowledge" (Turner 19). In "In Quinhagak", Jamie shares real-life experiences certifying the connection between local knowledge and sustainability of life. In Quinhagak Jamie is invited by the locals to experience traditional way of life, which is inevitably defined by hunting and gathering in the middle of tundra with no other means of subsistence. She even joins a family on a fishing trip with the hope of seeing "bear or moose or birds on the riverbanks" (*Surfacing* 73). Jamie observes that today's Quinhagak people can partially resist consumerism and try to remain attuned to the landscape as they are struggling to maintain their traditional arts and culture. For example, John, a walrus ivory carver continues traditional Yup'ik art of carving. When Jamie "daftly" asks John how he obtains walrus ivory, John mentions the harpooning of a walrus by a teacher, which Jamie finds "confounding" (49).

Jamie is evidently startled by the idea of a teacher harpooning a walrus. However, the way Jamie mentions locals' hunting does not demonize them. On the contrary, John's following statement about hunting makes the reader stop to think that what sounds cruel in an urban setting might be a matter of survival for human as a biological being in the middle of a tundra: "We harpoon them. We gotta remember. If the planes stop flying and no food comes in, we gotta remember how to live" (qtd.in Jamie, *Surfacing* 49). In fact, in indigenous traditions, hunting involves no capitalist motive, which is why the way they have been hunting for years has ensured thousand years of co-existence of humans and non-humans (Curry 27). Quinhagak people go hunting, fishing and berry-picking not for recreational or commercial purposes but to

survive. They have a supermarket, but they need to know they cannot rely on it if flights stop. From Jamie's perspective, their lifestyle is embedded in the landscape, which is heavily influenced by weather conditions. To Quinhagak people, weather conditions' paralysing the life is not a theme of a thriller movie, but a reality of life. John, the local walrus ivory carver remembers a time when "came a morning of haar-cold sea fog. No planes flew. There was a sense of closing down" (Jamie, *Surfacing* 50). Therefore, it is vital for Quinhagak people to sustain their culture so that they can survive in an extremely harsh climate and in a challenging geography where "the land is eroding so fast" with the rise in sea levels (41).

Jamie also realizes how attentive Quinhagak people are to the non-human nature in their surroundings: "They notice the bag cotton and its passing, an influx of owls, that there are bears around" (*Surfacing* 54). What is a pastime activity or a passion for a westerner turns out to be an indispensable part of villagers' lives. Talking of the animals around them, Quinhagak people do not alienate themselves from the non-human, which Jamie appreciates: "I liked the people talked so readily and unembarrassedly about animals and birds and the land. They didn't give 'information', instead they told incidents, anecdotes" (53). With her observations of the Quinhagak people, Jamie points out a different epistemic habit derived not from books but from the landscape and non-human: "The whole place must be in constant conversation with itself, holding knowledge collectively" (54). For example, Jamie's local friend, Warren tells Jamie that "our elders taught us to look for ravens. When a raven swoops, something is down there. If there is bunch of them, they might be following a moose or a bear. If you suddenly hear seagulls, something's crossing the river" (79). Also, John shares an anecdote about a man caught in a blizzard:

He had been travelling and the blizzard was dreadful, but all at once the dogs stopped and refused to go. Nothing would make the dogs move. So the man had to dig in and wait till the storm passed or the light came- and when it did, he realised the dogs wouldn't go home because they were already home. His house was right there" (qtd. in Jamie, *Surfacing* 48)

In both examples, it is revealed that locals do not regard non-human animals as an object of study but rely on them as a subject that generates knowledge. As can be seen,

by sharing local ways of knowing, Jamie shows how indigenous people learn from the non-human. Doing this, she erases not only the human/non-human hierarchical separation but also the subject/object divide that Plumwood thinks marks modern science (*Environmental* 41). Plumwood argues that modern scientific epistemology is nature-devaluing and reductionist giving absolute authority to the scientist that does the research and makes observations (*Environmental* 41); however, “In Quinhagak” uncovers a lifestyle where such “nature-devaluing knowledge” proves to be worthless. From this point of view, “In Quinhagak” appears as an essay in which nature and culture are intricately combined. “In Quinhagak” tells the story of Quinhagak’s indigenous people who claim their past from a deep-seated colonialism and underlines that the natives are vulnerable to global warming not only because their way of life is threatened but also because their past could be washed away by the rising sea (*Surfacing* 60). In this regard, the struggle in Quinhagak is a struggle of survival with both cultural and natural dimensions. Therefore, Jamie’s “In Quinhagak” shows how nature and culture are interlocked in indigenous communities’ lives. In fact, the below-mentioned objectives listed by the archaeological project team also attest to Jamie’s efforts to show how culture and nature are interconnected and how the fight for one cannot be separated from the fight for the other, which is the underlying idea of environmental justice, too:

Generate new information about the pre-contact history and culture of the Yup’ik people by recovering artefacts and other materials from actively eroding archaeological sites. Evaluate the impact of rising sea levels on the cultural resources in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and develop locally based expertise and facilities to address those impacts. Create new educational and economic opportunities for the people of Quinhagak and surrounding region. Provide training and experience in community-based archaeological research for a new generation of scientists, land managers and community leaders. Produce data about human adaptations to past climate change that will be relevant for local decision makers dealing with the effects of global warming. Develop a local archaeological repository, cultural centre and museum where the archaeological material will be housed. (Nunalleq)

Thus, just as the archaeological project itself, which is an act of serving justice to the Alaskan natives and can be interpreted within the framework of environmental justice, Jamie's article "In Quinhagak" can also be read as a contribution to environmental justice efforts aimed at Quinhagak people. When viewed in this angle, in "In Quinhagak", Jamie appears to be establishing relationality not only with the Yup'ik people but also their contemporary descendants. In fact, relationality has been an important feature of Jamie's writing from *Findings* to *Surfacing*. Therefore, in what follows, I would like to focus on the relationality aspect in *Surfacing*.

4.1.3.3 Relationality

Relational means "characterized or constituted by relations" ("Relational"). Therefore, relationality should describe the state of being characterized or constituted by relations. As a literary term, we come across relationality within autobiographical criticism. According to Smith and Watson, relationality in autobiography implies that "one's story is bound up with that of another" (*Reading* 64). In other words, in autobiographical narratives, "I" is presented to the reader in its relation to others in the text (64). "Relational narratives incorporate extensive stories of related others that are embedded within the context of an autobiographical narrative," explain Smith and Watson (64). As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Allister extends the scope of relationality to non-human others in autobiographical narratives and draws attention to the connection writers establish with the non-human world (9).

To be more specific, Allister focuses on life writing examples where "relationality is spread out to numerous human and nonhuman others that are rarely the subjects of "classic" autobiographies" (171). Sue Hubbell's *A Country Year*, Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge*, Bill Barich's *Laughing in the Hills*, William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways*, Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*, Gretel Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces* are all grief narratives, whereby the writers focus on external subjects to replace their loss (Allister 1). At the end of his analysis, Allister concludes that the writers he has chosen "all have come to feel ... that because of trauma and loss they have incoherent scripts for the world as they have known it ... they tell stories in order to live, stories of human and nonhuman others that might teach them how their script coheres" (169). In this regard, it is possible to infer that in the autobiographical

narratives analysed by Allister, where the writers establish relationality to the non-human, one can trace the evolution of a self or follow the inner journey of the authors with the non-human playing a decisive role. However, in Jamie's writing, the aspect of relationality seems to be changing its direction: It is not the authorial self that is being narrated through earth others, but it is rather the earth others that are being narrated through the writer. Amanda Bell reminds that Jamie has "expressed distaste for the omnipresence of the author in contemporary landscape writing" ("Surfacing").

In fact, it can be claimed that Jamie takes relationality one step further in *Findings* and *Sightlines* as she pushes her own life story into the background and highlights earth others. She tries to give visibility to earth others not to constitute an autobiographical "I" but simply to represent them because of what they are, and thus urges her readers to imagine that they can see the world through their eyes. For instance, she tries to imagine what it should be like to be such a big animal like a whale as she walks through its bones in a natural history museum. She tries to imagine how a gannet might feel if it chooses to remain outside the colony as she watches the gannets during their breeding season. She tries to imagine how a salmon can smell the river as she watches the salmons during their jumps in the River Braan. In many encounters with the non-human, Jamie puts an effort to posit herself in the place of the non-human other, which makes her writing more biocentric than anthropocentric. She succeeds in this so subtly that, as Alex Preston notes, non-human animals in Jamie's essays "lose the otherness that can distance them from our experience" ("Surfacing"). In this regard, the relationality in Jamie's writing is more empathetic to the non-human. Bell says that Jamie's "narrative voice is focused and restrained; she brings a sense of empathy to her topics" ("Surfacing").

In *Surfacing*, Jamie maintains the same kind of relationality. One of the specific moments Jamie's relationality with the non-human can be seen in her essay "The Eagle". While Jamie is driving down the road on a summer day, she stops in a glen, which she describes as "a place of entrancing desolation" (*Surfacing*101). With no people around, Jamie enjoys the landscape on her own and at one moment she notices a pair of birds, which, she thinks, are eagles. As a passionate bird-watcher, she is fascinated by their flight. Of the eagles, she thinks that "what marks them out is the way

they treat the air as a resource, a birthright, theirs in never-ending abundance” (*Surfacing* 102). After her encounter with the eagles, she consults a friend who is a glider pilot about what kind of a feeling it is to feel the air as one flies. She needs to ask this question probably because she wonders about the flight experience of the eagles. Her friend tells her that there are different textures of air, which humans are also capable of feeling as they fly in a glider and she adds: “I often imagine what it must be like for the big birds. Like eagles, who feel the air so much more than we do, much more sensitive ... It must be like swimming in a lake, bathing now in warmth, now in coolness” (*Surfacing* 103). Jamie shares her friend’s curiosity about how an eagle feels as it flies. This effort to understand how a non-human might feel, think or smell constitutes a recurrent theme in Jamie’s essays from *Findings* to *Surfacing*. Like in her previous encounters with the non-human, in this encounter with the eagle, too, Jamie reaches no conclusions about how the eagles might be experiencing the flight. The reason is clearly the language barrier again: There is no language known to the human beings to ask earth others what they feel or think, but this barrier does not discourage Jamie from writing an eagle’s story. As a result, while one might expect to read about the writer’s feelings in a story that starts with a road trip by a glen in an isolated geography, Jamie’s narrative turns into the eagle’s narrative that knows no human barriers giving the essay its title “The Eagle”. Towards the end of the essay, the pair of eagles fly over a “ramshackle old hut” with the warning “DANGER: KEEP OUT”. As the eagles fly over a human barrier that humans are not allowed to pass, Jamie notes:

The eagle has just passed over it, but the shed distracts me for a moment too long. What danger could there be in a ramshackle old hut? And who would go there, anyway? In that moment, in that change of my attention, a lurch like when you drive from smooth tarmac onto cobbles, I lose sight of the eagle altogether. It’s vanished, its mate has vanished, and there’s nothing to do but drive on. (*Surfacing* 104)

A moment of inattention suffices to lose the eagles, and it is no coincidence that Jamie ends the essay as the eagles disappear, which shows that it is the eagle that is the focus of the narrative, not the writer herself.

However, unlike the other two books in trilogy, *Surfacing* covers more moments when the writer establishes relationality with her own kind than earth others. For example, in her essay “Surfacing”, which gives the book its title, Jamie appears as a granddaughter and daughter who pays tribute to her grandmother and mother: “You are forgetting the sound of your mother’s voice, and your grandmother’s. They died within eighteen months of each other a decade ago and today you realise you can’t quite bring their voices to mind” (*Surfacing* 179). As Jamie realizes that she is about to forget their voices, she makes an effort to remember things about them, or surface some memories with them. She remembers her Nana tell her that her father had a mine accident and his body was “brought to the surface after a blast below ground” (*Surfacing* 179). She remembers Nana seeing herself in the mirror and saying in bewilderment “I look like ma mither!” (182). She also remembers the time when her Nana was covered in sheets in bed, and her mother sent her away to collect sweets from McColl’s so that she does not witness Nana’s coma (180-81). She remembers these moments, but she cannot remember “the sound of the telling”, which she apparently misses.

In “In Quinhagak”, Jamie tells the stories of people who fear losing their history to the sea, and in “Surfacing” the same fear is downscaled to Jamie’s own life. In her essay “From the Window”, which comes right after “Surfacing”, Jamie appears this time as a parent who finds herself in “late midlife” watching her daughter leave (*Surfacing* 184). Jamie reflects her feelings about her daughter’s coming departure as follows:

You watch her go- long hair, skinny jeans- thinking, what? Thinking: may she be spared. Thinking: okay, what now? You go home. The evening is your own. Having put the colander and tea towels in her room along with her new things, bedsheets and plates, you spend a long moment looking out of the window as the light changes, thinking: okay, then, what now? (184)

In relation to these two essays, Tim Hannigan makes the following remark: “There is a continuation here of a theme from Jamie’s two previous books, spaced seven years apart: motherhood of young children, followed by the sudden arrival of old age in one’s own parents, then the departure of those now adult children and the death of the parents” (“Surfacing”). The question “okay, then, what now?” remains unanswered, and

the next essay in the collection, “A Tibetan Dog” takes the reader to another experience in Jamie’s life, when she learns that she needs to have a biopsy done and finds herself digging up her own past by looking for a diary in their attic, which she kept as a traveller in Tibet in her twenties. Hannigan notices the melancholy “laced through *Surfacing*, with its insistent reflections on time’s passing—on both the grand scales of ancient woodlands and prehistory, and in the minute span of a human life” (“*Surfacing*”). From this perspective, these essays can be distinguished from the others because of the self-narrative they contain. The “personal voice, personal reflection and personal witness” which Moran observes in new British nature writing (49-59) are most obvious in these essays, through which Jamie tries to bring to surface certain memories.

As stated above, different from the two previous books, *Surfacing* offers readers more pieces from Jamie’s life, in which she tells about herself in relation to her grandmother, mother and daughter. Yet like *Findings* and *Sightlines* (in particular the essays, “Darkness and Light”, in which she writes about her trip to the Neolithic cairn, Maes Howe in *Findings*; “The Woman in the Field”, in which she writes about her voluntary participation in archaeological excavations in North Mains, “Three Ways of Looking at St Kilda” and “On Rona”, in which she writes about the abandoned Scottish islands, “La Cueva”, in which she writes about her trip to a Palaeolithic cave in *Sightlines*), *Surfacing* shows that Jamie stretches the concept of relationality to cover people and cultures long gone, that is to people whom she could have never met even if she had wanted to.

In fact, as Nancy Lord underlines, Jamie “tells readers early on in *Surfacing* that she has long enjoyed a fascination with archaeology and cultural histories. She was especially taken with Inuit art and artifacts and had a habit of prowling British museums, keen on seeing what British whaling captains had collected in the north” (“From Quinhagak”). Also, Massie notes that in *Surfacing* “Jamie is concerned with the worlds we have lost, barely remember, yet seek to recover”. In Quinhagak” and “Links of Noltland I-II-III” are two very long essays where Jamie’s sensitivity to the cultures and people lost long ago comes into prominence. Both essays stem from the writer’s ability to establish relationality with the people who lived centuries ago. However, now that “In Quinhagak” covers an interest in the contemporary culture of Yup’ik

descendants with Jamie portraying villagers she has met, I would now like to focus on “Links of Noltland” to discuss how Jamie stretches the concept of relationality to the people of the past.

On its website, The Links of Noltland is described as an archaeological site located on the island of Westray in Orkney that contains the remains of human settlements dating from the Neolithic period up to the Bronze Age period (“Links”). In fact, just like in Quinhagak, where the melting ice helped to surface the precontact Yup’ik village, it is a climatic factor, namely rapid erosion that helps to uncover this Neolithic village. Similarly, just as Quinhagak is exposed to rising sea levels, Links of Noltland is exposed to erosion. As Jamie informs,

Orkney is a windy place, storms are not unknown, but the couple’s [Hazel Moore and Graeme Wilson] archaeological report had called this sustained erosion ‘exceptional and unprecedented’. But with the sand and vegetation scoured away, a ground surface had been exposed as an extensive Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement. Houses, workshops, walls, even field systems and soil, it was all here. They wouldn’t last, though: having been exposed after their long burial, those remains too were immediately vulnerable to the wind. (*Surfacing* 110)

As is seen, it is the changing weather conditions that help to unearth this settlement which remained buried for very long years. On the website it is stated that when there was no “subsequent development or farming, the remains at Links of Noltland lay largely undisturbed until the latter part of the 20th century” (“Links”). Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that this Neolithic settlement shows the interconnectedness of nature and culture, for it is nature that preserves a culture, and it is again nature that threatens it though human-induced change in climatic patterns clearly has a role in this threat. Hazel Moore, whom Jamie contacts to get information about the digging regrettably says that

The whole site is not going to last. And it’s not just Orkney, this erosion is something we’re seeing throughout Scotland. The archaeology we are digging has been buried for five thousand years, and it has never been exposed like this

all that time. What's happening is significant really to... well, to archaeology, but also to us, the human race. (qtd. in Jamie, *Surfacing* 110)

As the erosion helps to unearth a Neolithic settlement, which no one expected to be that big, "Historic Scotland commissioned excavations to record, maybe protect, what remained before it was lost." (Jamie, *Surfacing* 110). Jamie appears in the essay "Links of Noltland I" as a voluntary participant in the diggings. She not only works on the site but also tries to seize any opportunity to experience the island "where everyone seemed weather-worn under the Orkney light and salt winds" (*Surfacing* 111). During her stay in Orkney, she remains attentive to the non-human, particularly birds. In fact, this intense attention is typical of Jamie as observed in her other works. As Lord also says, "Jamie is alert to the natural world around her". Yet this essay offers a portrayal of Jamie more in relation with the Neolithic people than the non-human. Working on the site, Jamie feels for the Neolithic people:

I tried to picture that pioneer generation, landing on a lonely shore with provisions stowed and live animals tethered in the bottom of their boats. Sheep under a net, seed corn and tools, the transforming 'Neolithic package' that had been pushing across Europe for a couple of thousand years before it reached here. It was a way of life that bound you inescapably. (127)

Like in most of her essays analysed so far, "Links of Noltland I" also covers questions Jamie leaves unanswered. For example, she wonders if the life was peaceful back then, but neither Jamie nor the archaeologists on the site can provide a concrete answer: "Was there peace? They'd found no evidence of real conflict or warfare. But they had discovered a body roughly buried, a body without head. 'You wonder what transgression that was...' Graeme said mildly" (qtd. in Jamie, *Surfacing* 127), but there is no way to know it for sure. Also, she wonders if the Neolithic people had any concept of wild: "I began to wonder what it might have meant to them then, back when 'wild' was a new idea. Did stories linger of a way of life before farming, before cattle raising and sheep? Did the 'wild' thrill them, darkly? Shame them?" (127). Jamie tries to imagine their lifestyle and mindset looking at their remains. As she examines beads and pins made of animal bones excavated by her friends, she wonders about their clothing, tattoos, accents, tools and stories: "Doubtless there were stories. Origin stories. Contact

with other people of the same ilk, who spoke the same language, at other settlements” (146). Like she does with the non-human, she tries to imagine herself in their place. The fact that Jamie constantly tries to think out of herself is obviously what makes her writing altruistic and truly relational to her subject matter, erasing once again the subject/object divide.

While on the site, Jamie learns that due to budgetary problems, Historic Environment Scotland might stop funding the project leaving the remains more exposed to the winds once uncovered (*Surfacing* 134- 36). Upon the possibility that the project might come to an end, Jamie questions:

Does this matter, is the question. Do we want to know how it was to be human, here, five thousand years ago? Do we want to know where we’re coming from as we cruise into the future? What we were, or might be again? How we ‘engaged’, if that’s the word, how we configured our relationship with the rest of the natural world, with the planet. (136)

This time Jamie’s questions have their answers in them. In fact, by including “Links of Noltland I-II-III” in her latest essay collection Jamie already demonstrates that it matters to know the past. However, it should be recognized that Jamie’s curiosity for the past is not nostalgic but realistic and empathetic. For instance, as she imagines how an average Neolithic person would spend a day, her friend Hazel simply comments: “They must have been sitting on the wall, flint-knapping” (qtd. in Jamie, *Surfacing* 137). Jamie’s own reasoning is also realistic: “Sat right there on their village wall in the afternoon sunshine, working and chatting. I almost saw them” (137). Jamie never attempts to eulogize a historical period nor offers an idealized depiction of the past. Her plain, realistic and caring way of writing about the people long gone may help the reader identify themselves with the Neolithic more readily.

While working on the historical remains on the island, neither Jamie nor the rest of the archaeology team is disconnected from the present time. They have internet connection and even watch Netflix at night. During their social gatherings, they talk about “climate change, global forces and corporations” (*Surfacing* 136) with frequent reference to the Anthropocene including the leakage from the oil rig floating away from the island of Lewis, the shortage of resources and the energy crisis the planet is facing

(156-57). In one of these chats, as they are all working on their laptops, Jamie asks a team member if she wanted to live in the Neolithic age. Her answer is worth attention: “We can’t go on like this, but we wouldn’t go back either, to the stone ploughshare and the early death” (156). Her realistic response reminds us of Raymond Williams, who objected to idyllic representations of the countryside life in the past in his *The Country and The City*. Therefore, it can be stated that “Links of Noltland I-II-III” is not a tribute to the past but rather a reflection on it with flashforwards to the present time.

Jamie deepens her reflections on the past to a higher level by writing a letter to the Neolithic people. To be more specific, Jamie finishes her essays grouped under the title “Links of Noltland” with a letter in which she envisions the life of the Neolithic people who lived in the area. She imagines how they might have come to the island: “It’s surely a fine, well-chosen day when you drag your boats ashore, with the bound and terrified cattle, the sheep under nets, the seed corn and tools and overexcited children” (*Surfacing* 170). She imagines their livelihood without ignoring the effect they exerted on nature as they gradually moved to agriculture and settled life: “You cut down trees, burn the logs that roll up on the shore from who knows where. You plant barley, though you haven’t quite quit foraging: a bit of hunting there, a bit of fishing there, an arrow and a net- but it’s the cattle you adore, those warms beasts with big horns ... Cattle you butcher with stone knives” (171).

As it is seen, the way she depicts the Neolithic lifestyle offers no romanticized account. She even mentions their illnesses: “You suffer painful joints and toothache. You die in childbirth, lose children to infections. You cough and cough” (*Surfacing* 171). However, in her portrayal of the Neolithic folk, Jamie does not concentrate only on the negative aspects. She also draws attention to their supposed interconnectedness with the non-human animals:

You know the stars in the winter dark, the green aurora borealis, the solstice moment of rebirth. Midsummer gloamings when you can ramble outdoors at midnight, enjoying the light on the sea. The birds’ movements are known to you, swallows and snow buntings, geese you can catch with a net. The voles that creep in and eat your grain- they were stowaways- you brought them with you unawares! (172)

This letter addressed at the Neolithic folk in Orkney can be read as Jamie's effort to establish relationality with the people long gone as well as an invitation to the reader to comprehend that human relation to nature has changed over time. With their knowledge of "the stars in the winter dark" and "the birds' movements", the Neolithic people Jamie imagines have no sense of estrangement or disconnection from nature, which Macfarlane thinks are "modern sentiments" ("Only"). This could be one reason why Jamie repeatedly visits archaeological sites and meditates on the people who lived there: Apparently, she likes to imagine a time when humans were more embedded in nature.

To sum up, Jamie's trilogy, which consists of *Findings*, *Sightlines* and *Surfacing*, shows her development as a nature writer in the new millennium whose focus is more on the non-human than herself. As essay collections, the books have a quite fragmented structure and offers neither a linear narrative nor a single theme that can be foregrounded: Jamie writes about whale bones as sensitively as she writes about cancerous human cells. She is concerned about the way of life in a Neolithic village in Scotland as much as she feels for contemporary Alaskan natives. She is enthralled by a magpie moth trapped in a lake just as she is attracted to a pair of eagles floating in the sky. Although her keen interest in island birds and whales is evident, which could be the explained by her familiarity with these animals, for she has spent her life in Scotland, she does not prefer to focus on one specific species. Similarly, even though most of her essays are derived from Scotland, she adopts no nationalistic tone and even expands her landscape to Alaska and Tibet. There is a great diversity in her writing, which retains a unity, however. Of these three books Marina Benjamin writes:

Structurally, tonally, even visually – with text punctuated by grainy black-and-white photographs – Kathleen Jamie's new essay collection *Surfacing* takes up the same concerns with landscape and place as her earlier books, *Findings* and *Sightlines*. In each there's a massing of a traveller's scrapbook notes detailing chance encounters, fleeting relationships and a shared pull towards a specific world, that is deepened with autobiographical anecdote, then shaken up with a vivid and urgent present-tense noticing that electrifies her connections and surroundings.

As Benjamin notes, the books cover “autobiographical anecdotes” that extend with flashbacks to the writer’s youth. It should be underlined, however, that different from an autobiographer, Jamie has no aim of having a retrospective look at her own life and elaborate on the development of her identity. She rather chooses to include some moments of her life into her writing, which, thus, brings the books closer to a memoir. Given that fourteen years passed from *Findings* to *Surfacing*, it is only to be expected that the way Jamie writes about herself has evolved. It is observed that in *Findings*, her parenting responsibilities keep her away from leaving her house or town for a long time, and she contents herself with nature in her surroundings. In *Sightlines*, she looks relatively freer and can leave home for longer excursions or short sojourns because her children have grown. As Crown notes, we see Jamie’s children in *Sightlines*, “but glancingly, leaping around with friends, mired in school intrigues” (“Kathleen”). In *Surfacing*, she has no restrictions in terms of travelling, but this time her responsibilities as a child to her father who is nearing his death and her own situation as a middle-aged parent saying goodbye to her children who leave home preoccupy her. Thus, in all three books, she makes mention of her responsibilities as a caregiver. Though she does not look especially rebellious or complaintive because she has to look after children, “There’s a strong sense throughout the collection of the freedom that their growing up brings” (Crown). Commenting on her gradually increasing mobility from *Findings* to *Surfacing*, Jamie says in her interview with Barkham that:

It’s a bit silly to pretend that the complete chaos of family life is not determining what you can do. What I would like to think I’m doing is insisting on the validity of women’s experience through different phases – young motherhood, older middle age, hopefully old age – so you have a sense of a woman’s life and what you might call deep time. (“Kathleen”)

In all these three books, Jamie portrays herself in relation to her family and her parents: Jamie depicts herself as a mother, a wife and a daughter just as she portrays herself as a nature-lover. “Women cannot divorce themselves from their life stages,” suggests Jamie (Barkham, “Kathleen”). As a bird-watcher, island-goer, nature lover and traveller, Jamie is also a daughter, mother and wife. In other words, like in the case of most women autobiographers, her lens can barely become egocentric.

In *Surfacing*, the reader gets to know Jamie more closely. In fact, *Surfacing* introduces a more melancholic Jamie. She appears to be sad that she is, as she puts it, in her “late middle age”. To be more specific, *Surfacing* represents in Jamie’s life “a stage of life, the rediscovery of the self in late middle-age, when parents are dead and children grown” (A. Bell). As mentioned above, there are serious environmental factors which greatly contribute to the melancholic tone in *Surfacing*, but the losses in her personal life are obviously one reason adding up to her melancholy. In the acknowledgements part of the book, her last sentence shows how much she has been affected by the dwindling of the number of beloved ones: “Since I began this book, my children have grown and gone out into the world, and my dear dad has passed away. So we go on. *Surfacing* is dedicated to Phil Butler [her husband], for his constancy” (247).

Thus, from *Findings* to *Surfacing*, Jamie appears “older, freer and still curious” (A. Bell). Just as the way she writes about herself has evolved from *Findings* to *Surfacing*, the way she writes about the non-human has also evolved over the fourteen years covered in the trilogy. First, the lessening of her familial responsibilities has significantly diversified her topics. In *Findings*, for example, she is more interested in her immediate surroundings like the birds she spots from her window or the sunlight reflected on her kitchen table. In *Sightlines*, she can travel far enough to watch the northern lights or stay on remote Scottish islands. In *Surfacing*, she can spend some time in Alaska and Orkney to voluntarily participate in archaeological projects. Thus, the more her geographical coverage expands, the more diverse her topics get. Second, although she has always kept her biocentric look at non-human nature, emotionally she has had a fluctuating pattern in the way she approaches the non-human. It can be argued that in *Findings*, there are moments when nature offers her a sense of freedom and joy, for she tends to seize every opportunity to walk away from home and enjoy the sight of birds, fish or cetaceans. In that sense, it can certainly be seen that she takes real pleasure being in and with nature. However, it should be noted that Jamie neither instrumentalizes nor romanticizes the non-human nature: She is not instrumentalist because in any experience she has with nature, she tirelessly tries to imagine how the non-human animals might be feeling instead of highlighting her own feelings. She hardly offers romanticized accounts because she experiences first-hand that the non-

human nature (e.g. with the northern winds which, as she puts it, have “no joke”) can be harsh with people, who are biological species with limited abilities.

In *Sightlines*, she maintains her empathetic and realistic attitude to the non-human while keeping her sense of enchantment that results from her experiences in and with nature. This time, however, she has a more quizzical attitude to what nature is. In fact, the coming death of her mother and the doctor’s advice to let nature “take its course” as well as a conference on “humanity’s relation with other species”, where she participates and observes the irony in serving deer meat in such a conference all lead her to engage in such an interrogation. Jamie, in *Sightlines*, spends long time in a pathology lab, in a natural history museum and on abandoned Scottish islands showing readers different faces of nature: Nature is in us; nature is in dead animals’ body parts, nature is in deserted islands. Thus, her expeditions in *Sightlines* show the interconnectedness of nature and culture from diverse perspectives.

In *Surfacing*, however, Jamie’s attitude to nature involves more anxiety than questioning. As Hilbert says, the essays in *Surfacing* “resume her engagement with the natural world and our place in it, though these latest pieces are fraught with an emerging panic at the destructive effects of climate change” (“In”). Jamie makes mention of the Anthropocene several times drawing attention to Alaskan natives, whose lives and history are under the threat of global warming, and the Neolithic folk in Links of Noltland, whose settlement has been brought to surface by erosion. Just as she is upset by the losses in her life, the losses in the ecosystem as well as native cultures and history seem to preoccupy her thoughts. Her sad tone in *Surfacing* does not bring about a dystopic vision of the world, however. She particularly mentions the native Alaskans who have survived due to their ability to live in continuity with the non-human nature as well as a young couple, namely Jason and Nina, who moved to Westray, Scotland from South Africa to become farmers and live in tune with nature. Both stories from completely different parts of the world are success stories that show that modern humans can learn to be part of nature without dominating it. When viewed from this aspect, Jamie is not hopeless in her approach to the Anthropocene in *Surfacing*. As Barbara Kiser notes, Jamie shows with her experiences in *Surfacing* that if we can

attune ourselves to nature and culture and past and present, we can find a way out in this age of global environmental crisis (344).

Considering the trilogy, Kiser highlights that Jamie is not a writer of rhapsodies as she writes with “a poet’s economy with words, a stripped clarity” (343). As Kiser puts it, “Jamie comes to things openly, listening and looking” (344). In fact, it can be argued that Jamie’s simple, clear and realistic way of writing about nature helps readers associate themselves with the non-human characters in the book more easily, empathize with the communities whose lives are endangered by the Anthropocene less effortlessly and think about the problems our planet is facing more realistically. Also, given that she takes a very humble position as the author of the trilogy, who does not necessarily claim to have answers to all the questions in the books and who knows her limits as a member of abiological species, it becomes easier for readers to identify with her, too. Her “seemingly disparate” essays, which were, as Crown informs, found “queer” at the very beginning, provide her trilogy with a decentred structure, but when viewed in totality, the essays represent the diversity and plurality in nature. None of the essays in the books dominate the others no matter how short or long they are. When the trilogy comes to an end, the reader is equally alerted to problems such as extinction, loss of habitats for humans and non-humans, plastic pollution and global warming.

Jamie says in an interview with Barkham that “I would like to think of nature writing as a nice little retreat. I don’t want it to be on the frontline. I want routes not to the barricades but to a more thoughtful way, a kinder way – more compassionate to ourselves and other creatures” (“Kathleen”). With her non-anthropocentric, empathetic and all-embracing attitude that marks the trilogy, Jamie seems to have achieved her goal, which is to invite us to be “more compassionate to ourselves and other creatures”. As a consequence, although she constantly says she does not like labels such as nature writer or woman poet, she permanently takes her place among contemporary British women nature writers with her attentiveness and compassion to nature, rejection of hierarchical separations such as culture/nature, subject/object and human/non-human and awareness of the current ecological crisis.

4.2 *To the River: A Meandering Walk and a Meandering Story*

In the previous chapter, based on Hampton's article titled "Post-secular Nature and the New Nature Writing", certain categories were proposed to draw a framework for new British nature writing. One of the categories Hampton offers is composed of the books in which the natural world serves as a cure for the individual dealing with the experience of crisis, not as the place for the projection of one's emotions but as the space where perspective is gained (456). In fact, as Bate puts it, "From ancient Greece, Rome and China to the present, there has been a persistent belief in the restorative power of nature" ("Nature"). In Bate's view, this belief has laid the foundations of "the passion for gardening, the enduring literary genre of pastoral, the concept of a national park and the philosophy of Romanticism in Britain" ("Nature"). In today's Britain, some of the literary examples, in which the supposed curative power of nature is highlighted, could be Liptrot's *The Outrun* (2016), whereby the author turns to her homeland Orkney after a series of failed attempts to stop drinking; Macdonald's *H is for Hawk* (2014), whereby the author has recourse to the companionship of a goshawk to get over her father's death and Norbury's *The Fish Ladder: A Journey Upstream* (2015), whereby the author walks to the sources of the rivers after she loses a baby she had been carrying. In these books, the autobiographical I relates itself to the non-human nature by stretching the boundaries of self and, thus, leaves behind the source of grief. As mentioned earlier, in such narratives, the natural world appears as a place where a new vision is gained rather than a mere setting (Allister 3). Garrard uses the term *environmental autopathography* to describe narratives that "link the destiny of the writing subject and her personal relations to that of the environment besieged by modernity" ("Nature Cures?" 494).

Considering the motivation the authors have when they set out to write self-narratives, it can be claimed that there is an instrumentalist and utilitarian approach to the non-human in such books. Besides, Cocker has already shared his concern for British nature writing that if nature writing turns into a literature of consolation, the truth that the countryside is falling apart might be overlooked ("Death"). However, given that contemporary nature writers are not in an ecological denial, which, as Plumwood puts it, means to refuse "to admit the reality and seriousness of the

ecological crisis” (*Environmental* 97), and that they respect the natural world and accept its ontological status even when they write about their own grief, instrumentalism or utilitarianism would be too harsh a word to evaluate such books. Moreover, Garrard argues that “Ecocriticism itself has long been moved by the autobiographical impulse” (“Nature Cures?” 494). In this regard, it would not be unreasonable to claim that just as ecocriticism can be fed by autobiography, autobiography can be enriched by ecocriticism, too. Therefore, it can be stated that autobiographical accounts in which the writer’s story is interwoven with that of the non-human can offer an ecocritical perspective. This part of the dissertation focuses on a book in this category, namely Olivia Laing’s *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* (2011), whereby the author moves beyond herself and provides her readers with an ecological insight during her journey by and in the River Ouse.

Laing is a well-known writer and a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, who was awarded the 2018 Windham-Campbell Prize for non-fiction (“About”). Born in 1977, Laing grew up in Buckinghamshire, spent her childhood moving around the South of England and started to study English at Sussex University, but then she dropped out (“Biography”). A former student of English and a protestor, she lived alone in the countryside of Dorset for a short while (“Biography”). It was clearly her love of “arboreal, wayward life” that led her to quit her studies and set out on an experience with and in nature (“My unforgettable”). Her self-reflective remarks clarify her choice:

In my late teens, I made a career out of saying no. I turned down a place at Cambridge in favour of Sussex and its radical curriculum. I gave up meat and milk, stopped brushing my hair and began to attend protests. I was against everything you could imagine: road building, arms trading, genetic engineering, fox hunting and factory farming. (“Once upon”)

During her time in Dorset, she stayed in a hut she built herself using the tricks she had learned from her years on street protests (“Once upon”). She lived in an abandoned summer dwelling that was once frequented by Roman Gypsies in Dorset, and her lifestyle was quite different from her way of living in the developed world, for she had to wash in a bucket of water, cook her vegan meals over a fire and use a compost loo and had little contact with people (“Once upon”). Her experience in Dorset sounds

partially comparable to Christopher Johnson McCandless's experience as shown in the film *Into The Wild*, which she also acknowledges ("Once Upon"). It appears that both McCandless and Laing felt early in their twenties that there was something wrong with the developed world, with which they failed to click, so they both decided to get away from it all, one heading to the Alaskan wilderness and the other to the English countryside. However, while McCandless was a romantic adventurer who went north to Alaska in late 1980s to escape all the greed and arrogance of the modern world but had little preparation for harsh climate conditions (Cowley 7-8), Laing, a romantic with a higher awareness of her fears and limits, chose to try out life in the countryside, specifically in a landscape familiar to her. Of her time living alone in the countryside, she notes that

I was often frightened. I felt more exposed than I ever have since, and yet it was also a time of strange, almost dreamlike encounters with the wild. At dawn and dusk deer would sometimes graze feet from where I sat. At night I sat by a fire and watched the stars turn their slow wheels above Wolstonbury Hill and Devil's Dyke. One day I walked past the heaps of broken concrete and bindweed and disturbed an adder that rose up on its tail and hissed into my face. These were the sort of experiences I'd longed for, but still I slept with an axe under my pillow, though in reality the only enemies I had were the mice that ate everything I owned and woke me at night by running through my hair. ("Once upon")

In fact, Laing was already prepared for a life outdoors when she decided to live alone far from the conveniences of the modern world because as she puts it "I spent the summer of 1997 in a tree. I was 20 and had been hanging around the fringes of road protests for the past year or so, bunking off my English degree to steal stray weeks at Newbury and Fairmile" ("My unforgettable"). She participated in the Newbury Bypass protests⁴⁹ in 1996 and lived in the camp set by the protestors ("My unforgettable").

⁴⁹Newbury protestors tried to prevent the construction of the Newbury bypass because it would cause the clearing of an ancient landscape. The protests in Newbury marked the road protests in the UK in 1990s and are believed by some to have shaped the British campaigning culture and environmental activism though they failed to prevent road construction as a whole. For more information, please see: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jan/24/newbury-protest-camp-bypass-legacy>.

Regarding the time she spent in the camp with the company of fellow protestors as well as the fox, deer, and squirrels of the region, she states that “With such neighbours, it was no surprise that I grew wilder, too. I moved through the woods barefoot, without stumbling; I could see in the dark” (“My unforgettable”).

After her solitary stay in Dorset, which she thinks gave her courage and self-reliance and taught her how to stop and look at the world mindfully, Laing went back home and started another degree (“Once upon”). She studied herbal medicine and worked for several years as a medical herbalist before she became a journalist (“Olivia Laing”). The former book editor of the *Observer*, Laing now writes for *The Observer* and *The Guardian* (“Olivia Laing”). She is the author of *To the River* (2011), *The Trip to Echo Spring* (2013) and *The Lonely City* (2016), *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency* (2020) (“About”).

As to her writing, the way she writes is not easy to categorise, for she can assume the voice of a biographer, a memoirist or an essayist and critic all at the same time (“Olivia Laing”). Like most contemporary nature writers referred to in this study, Laing is a genre-bender, too. One reason for this could be traced back to her childhood. In fact, she had no normative upbringing, which she projected on her art, too. To be more specific, she was not used to normative borders even in her early childhood as she once stated in an interview by Annelise Beck, a Belgian journalist and writer, that having been raised by a gay family, she never thought she belonged to the heteronormative society and was aware as a child, who participated in her first gay pride at age eight, that she needed to find an alternate world (“Repairing”). Her aforementioned struggles during her early youth confirm that she was in search of this alternative world at a very young age. The experiences she gained from being an environmental activist and growing up in the queer world obviously contribute to this plurality in her writing. In addition to this, her formation as a medical herbalist enriches her writing as well. As a matter of fact, if there are various tones in a piece of nature writing, one reason is that the writer consults various disciplines. Similar to most contemporary British nature writers, Laing, too, is fed by many disciplines, and she frequently “interweaves environmental or scientific narratives with literary ones, placing side by side, for example, the topographical layout of the Ouse with its textual

representations, the physiological implications of alcohol abuse with its poetic ones” (“Olivia Laing”).

Laing’s refusal of borders is evident in her approach to art in general. She does not seclude herself as a writer to the world of literature nor separates her art from the way she lives. In fact, she incorporates not only different art forms but also digital technologies in her books as she consults sources like films, songs or YouTube videos, particularly in her non-fiction narratives (“Olivia Laing”). The fact that she does not reject modern technologies as she writes, especially about the natural world posits her in a place far from the stereotypical romantic nature writer image that has been mocked in British nature writing for solitary escapes into the “wild” romanticizing about a world that perhaps never existed. Regarding her writing, Laing implied in her interview by Gabriel Packard that she is inspired by different art forms: “I find the most fertile ideas for structure and approach come from looking at different art forms, especially music and painting. You’re constructing something out of nothing. It helps to furnish yourself with models and tools” (“Olivia”).

Despite this wide array of inspirational sources and disciplines she resorts to, Laing’s books can be brought together on a common ground, specifically considering the research method she applies while writing:

Whilst her books periodically narrate moments of shelter in archives or galleries their research methods are avowedly peripatetic, whether that means following the spectre of Virginia Woolf along the length of the River Ouse in *To the River* (2011) or travelling the breadth of the US by train in *The Trip to Echo Spring* (2013). (“Olivia”)

In that sense, some of her books get close to travelogues, which are a common form in contemporary nature writing in Britain.

To the River is the writer’s first book. It is basically the story of a week the writer spent walking along and swimming in the Ouse. Yet this one week covers much more than the writer’s riparian journey, including references to scientists and artists whose lives passed in the same area. On Laing’s official website, the book is presented as follows:

To the River is the story of the Ouse, the Sussex river in which Virginia Woolf drowned in 1941. One midsummer week over sixty years later, Olivia Laing walked Woolf's river from source to sea. In part a biography of this most fluid of writers, *To the River* is also a passionate investigation into how history resides in a landscape – and how ghosts never quite leave the places they love. Along the way, Laing explores the roles rivers play in human lives, tracing their intricate flow through literature and mythology alike. The result is a wonderfully discursive read, interweaving biography, history, nature writing and memoir. (“To the River”)

In fact, *To the River* bears the traces of new British nature writing in many ways. First of all, the combination of various writing forms and the input from a variety of disciplines including botany, history and geology overlap with stylistic hybridity and multidisciplinary, which have already been presented among the main features of new British nature writing in this study. Second, the writer's choice of a familiar landscape where she has spent a lot of time and feels connected to makes her book parochial, but as observed in contemporary British nature writing, her parochialism achieves a universal dimension as she links the history of this particular landscape to important moments in the history of the world. Third, her experiences of the river and its landscape help her closely observe the impacts of the Anthropocene on the area over the years. She sees first-hand the effects of industrialism on the Ouse and draws attention at many instances to how the river has turned into an industrial river. Moreover, her ecological awareness can be seen more clearly in her inclination towards ecocentrism. During her one-week walk by the river, she has birds, flowers, cows and sheep as her companions in addition to the scientists and artists who left a mark on the area and apparently on her. She tries to represent the non-human residents along the Ouse as if she was trying to highlight that while humans and non-human animals share the same habitat, they suffer the consequences of any harm done to it and enjoy the pleasures it offers together. In such portrayals, she makes an effort to think and imagine from her non-human companions' perspective. In this regard, she tries to move away from anthropocentrism and adopt an ecocentric approach to the land, the river and all the non-humans concerned. Another point that makes *To the River* a good representative of

new British nature writing is the moments where the writer emphasizes her bodily and sensory experiences. Laing's journey along the river is a truly embodied experience, and even though she highlights the physical pains she endures because of walking for quite a long time, she seems to have pleasure in this bodily journey which gives her joy of life. Finally, *To the River* originated from Laing's need to escape from a relationship that had just ended, which contributes to the autobiographical dimension in the book. Although Laing writes more about other people and non-human animals that she relates to the river than she writes about herself, *To the River* can be read as a writer's effort to make sense of the world when one is in grief and needs to shelter in a familiar landscape. In recognition of all these aspects that help to posit *To the River* within new British nature writing, I would like to discuss how Laing's escape from a personal grief has evolved into a journey of criticism of modern capitalist culture in *To The River* through the following subheadings.

4.2.1 Place Attachment

Laing clarifies right at the beginning of *To the River* where the idea of writing this book originated from. Having lost first her job and then her boyfriend, she is in a bad mood: "In the spring of 2009 I became caught up in one of those minor crises that periodically afflict a life, when the scaffolding that sustains us seems destined to collapse" (*To the River* 5). The reason she loses her job is, in her own words, "sheer carelessness" whereas the reason her relationship ended is because of a delicate choice. Both she and her boyfriend find themselves in the dilemma of choosing place over each other, and as they both go for place, their relationship comes to an end: "He was from Yorkshire and one of the skirmishes in our long battle concerned territory, namely where in the country we would make our home. I couldn't relinquish Sussex and nor could he quite edge himself from the hills and moor to which, he had, after all, only just returned" (5). Both characters' sense of attachment to place overcomes their attachment to one another. Buell defines place as "space that is bounded and marked as humanly meaningful through personal attachment, social relations and physiographic distinctiveness" (*The Future* 145). Thus, a place is not *terra nullius*. On the contrary, it appears as an integral part of our being. As Buell indicates, "There never was an is without a where. Both the bad things and the good that happen to human beings and

other life-forms self evidently occur when their bodies are physically located somewhere, in particular location” (*Writing* 55). It is, however, not just our physical dependence on it that makes place meaningful. Apparently, a place hosts values and feelings as well: “Yi-Fu Tuan, a Chinese- American geographer defines place as “centre of felt values” whereas Eugene Victor Walter, an American sociology professor and writer claims that “A place is seen, heard, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered” (qtd. in Buell, *The Future* 63). From this standpoint, it is understandable why and how one develops place attachment. As a person ascribes personal meaning to a given space, s/he may consider it in connection with the social and historical developments it has witnessed and may remain attentive to its physical and geographic features. As a result, space turns into a place. As it will be detailed below, *To the River* is a book through which Laing gradually makes a place out of what may be, to the reader, just a geographic space in England. Moreover, for an ecologically minded person like Laing, place attachment is meaningful considering that from an ecological perspective, as Neil Evernden puts it, “There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (103). Laing did not want to be contextless.

Although the decision to end the relationship is made knowingly and willingly, Laing suffers for a while: “After Matthew left, I lost the knack of sleeping ... At periodical intervals throughout the day I felt that I was drowning, and it was all I could do not to fling myself to the ground and wail like a child” (*To The River* 5). Strikingly, in that moment of grief, she remains responsive to the changes in the weather and landscape with the coming of spring. Spring, however, contributes to her sadness: “These feelings of panic, which in more sober moments I knew were temporary and would soon pass, were somehow intensified by the loveliness of that April. The trees were flaring into life; first the chestnut with its upraised candles and then the elm and beech. Amid this wash of green the cherry began to flower ...” (5). She feels worse with the arrival of April because unlike the trees that are all full of life, she is about to lose her *joie de vivre*, and April is there only to remind her of this threat. Nevertheless, instead of surrendering to misery and sorrow, she chooses to be in a familiar landscape: “The shift in season was intoxicating, and it was then that the idea of the walking the

river locked hold of me. I wanted to *clear out*, in all senses of the phrase, and I felt somehow deep inside me that the river was where I needed to be” (*To the River* 5). The river here is the Ouse, which Laing knows very well and loves deeply.

After the crises in her life, Laing wants to take shelter in the Ouse, for whose sake she seems to be compromising a ten-year relationship. Therefore, the Ouse, to Laing, is not just a river but a lifelong companion, to which she returns “over and over again, in sickness and in health, in grief, in desolation and in joy” (*To the River* 1). Buell stipulates that in ecologically oriented writing “non-human environment must be represented as an active presence and player within the text” (*The Future* 51), and Laing gives the river and its surroundings this active role. As Paul Shepard states, “Habitat is not merely a container but a structured surround in which the developing individual makes tenacious affiliations” (26). Given that Laing grew up near the Ouse and takes the river as a witness to various special moments in her life, it becomes clear why she resorts to it in time of despair. The river holds her together when she feels things might fall apart: As she says, “When things began to falter in my own life, it was the Ouse to which I turned” (4). It is, however, noteworthy that although Laing starts this journey to keep away from sorrow, she barely mentions her own troubles in the rest of her narrative. Instead, she chooses to focus her attention on the river as an entity in itself.

Obviously, the Ouse means a lot to Laing, but it is important to note that she does not limit her memoir to her own affiliation with the river. In other words, she does not monopolize the river to highlight her own story. In the same vein, she refers to some historical events that took place around the Ouse, one of which is the Battle of Lewes (1264). Laing thinks about the Battle of Lewes, which has an important place in the history of England, as she stands on Pikes Bridge over the Ouse watching the pool below (*To the River* 115-16). She provides details about the battle sometimes by directly quoting from the chronicles and sometimes by commenting on the events (116-132). Although her comprehensive description of the battle might look like a digression at first glance, her reference to the battle shows that she has historical consciousness of the place she is writing about. Buell informs that “Place consciousness and bonding involve not just orientation in space but temporal orientation also” (*The Future* 72), and

by mentioning the battle, Laing points out the spatiotemporality of the Ouse, to which she is strongly attached.

Buell notes that turning a space into place, namely place-making is “a culturally inflected process in which nature and culture must be seen as a mutuality rather than separable domains” (*The Future* 67). Laing’s coverage of the Battle of Lewes in her memoir shaped around the Ouse reflects this mutuality. Laing does not conceptualize the Ouse and its surroundings as a geographical space freed from the culture that it helped to shape and that, in return, shaped it: “What happened by the river almost eight hundred years before had left a mark on both the landscape and the nation that remains visible in certain lights, for it is one of the stories by which England herself was shaped” (*To the River* 116).

Laing’s elaboration on the Battle of Lewes might make some readers think that she inclines towards a nationalistic tone; however, this would be a mistaken deduction because Laing remains critical of the past events, and she mourns for the deceased with no intention of eulogizing or glorifying the past: “The past seemed to have fallen across the landscape like a body that though voiceless somehow still leaked or bled its language with pause. The horror of what had happened here had seeped into the soil as the rain will do, waiting in the hidden interstitial spaces like groundwater before a flood” (*To the River* 129). Remembering the history of the place does not do her any good: “I felt I couldn’t walk another step, and yet I couldn’t bring myself to stop in that horrible, poisoned place” (132). As she continues to walk under the sun and visualize all the killings and brutality of the war, she needs to calm down and connect with the non-human nature around: “I began to count to a hundred over and again, and the green tips of the woodland stayed just out of reach until all of a sudden I was plunged within them, breathing the reek of dog shit and elder-blossom, the contaminated summer air” (132). Therefore, Laing’s response to the history of Lewes could not produce the undesirable results such as nationalism or xenophobia, which, Buell thinks, might be caused by too much place attachment and local stewardship (*The Future* 68).

4.2.2 Rivers as Agentic Matters

As a person “haunted by waters”, Laing is particularly interested in rivers to the extent that she does not feel “freely truly at ease on this earth unless there is a river

nearby” (*To the River* 3). She is so much amazed by rivers that she writes: “There is a mystery about rivers that draws us to them, for they rise from hidden places and travel by routes that are not always tomorrow where they might be today. Unlike a lake or sea, a river has a destination and there is something about the certainty with which it travels that makes it very soothing” (7). Given the way she describes rivers, it can be claimed that she attributes rivers agency as put forward by material ecocritics. Agency, which can roughly be defined as the ability to act and induce a change from a material ecocritic’s perspective, “is not to be necessarily and exclusively associated with human beings and with human intentionality, but it is a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter” (Iovino and Oppermann, “Introduction” 3). Material ecocritics claim that intentionally or not, all matters, even the rubbish which one would despise, have the power to cause an effect in this web of the animate and inanimate world. Bennet proposes the theory of distributive agency by granting the power to exert effect to all matters:

There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play... To figure the generative source of effects as a swarm is to see human intentions as always in competition and confederation with many other strivings, for an intention is like a pebble thrown into a pond, or an electrical current sent through a wire or neural network: it vibrates and merges with other currents, to affect and be affected. (31-32)

Apparently, Laing does not consider humans as the sole subject of actions, for she underlines the role of rivers in the birth of civilizations and reminds the reader of how the rivers act like “an electrical current sent through a wire network to vibrate and merge with other currents” in the history of the world (*To the River* 6). To be more specific, she thinks that there is a connection between rivers and the invention of writing, too: “I do not think it a coincidence that the advent of the written word was nourished by river water” (6-7). She offers no historical information about the emergence of writing and its connection to rivers, but her speculation causes the reader to think that though a human tool, writing was probably made possible because a river enabled people to start agricultural activity and people needed to record their produce. From that moment on, she makes the reader look at rivers as more than a flow of water

as the reader also remembers that it is the Ouse that made Laing write what s/he is reading. Thus, the Ouse simultaneously becomes a text and a context.

In fact, during her hike along the Ouse, Laing draws the reader's attention to rivers' agency in many instances by referring to myths, stories and poems engendered by rivers. As she comes to the source of the Ouse to start her riparian journey, she remembers Athena blinding the seer Tiresias for seeing her bathing nakedly in a spring on Mount Helicon (*To the River* 21-22). Laing interprets this mythological encounter by the spring as follows: "The sources of rivers are often freighted with taboos, and for all their eerie beauty they do not seem, at least according to the records of mythology, wise places for humans to tarry" (21). It can be thought that Laing refers to this myth because of her own discomfort at the source: "I was feeling uneasy, and the sense of trespass in the little copse had become overwhelming" (21). She tries to relieve her uneasiness through mythology. After all, in both cases, the spring is the cause of trouble for a human, which triggers the formation of stories.

As Laing tries to reach the source, she does not have a smooth walking experience, for the river does not always follow a walkable path. She sometimes hears the river and sometimes sees a very weak flow of water after a turbulent one. At one point, as she notes, "The stream was barely shifting now and it was hard to believe it could change its nature so entirely" (*To the River* 20). As she observes the changes in the amount and movement of surface water, she remembers a line from the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney's "The Diviner": "As I waited there I remembered a stray line from a poem by Seamus Heaney, part of the vast disordered library of river literature. It was about dowsing, and it seemed to catch something of water's strangeness: 'suddenly broadcasting through a green aerial its secret stations'" (20). Thinking about Heaney's poem on dowsing reminds her of W. H. Auden's poem "In Praise of Limestone". Laing writes: "I've always been fascinated by the idea that the planet contains hidden lakes and rivers as well as those that run open to the sky, the sort of concealed richness that Auden was thinking of when he wrote 'In Praise of Limestone'" (20). She quotes the end of the poem:

Dear, I know nothing of
Either but, when I try to imagine a faultless love

Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur

Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape. (22)

Much has been written about “In Praise of Limestone”, which is accepted to be among Auden’s finest poems. Yet as Rebecca Price Parkin notes, it is hard to classify this poem under a certain genre: “In a very broad, loose way it might be categorized as a topographic-reflective poem” (296). In the light of Parkin’s remarks and considering the poet’s preoccupation with limestone as a matter, Laing’s reference to the poem is to the point. After all, Laing is also sensitive to the topography and cares about inanimate matters. However, Laing’s allusion to Auden’s poem is only superficial. She neither elaborates on the poem nor establishes a connection between the poem and her writing. After referring to Auden, Laing continues to think about dowsing –“water witching as it is known in America”- (*To The River* 21) . She is attracted by the movement of water, which, she thinks, might go unnoticed in the modern world:

Humans by necessity must once, like all animals, have been attuned to the dark frequency by which water travels. No doubt this sensitivity has grown vestigial now, or become gummed up by car horns and the repetitive trilling or mobile phones, and yet there have been many times, when, out walking in a wood, I have found myself drawn by chance or instinct to a pool or stream I didn’t know existed. (21)

In addition to mythical references, her quotations from the poems on underground waters and her reasoning about the journey of waters, be it on or beneath the surface, might look like a digression. However, such deviations might also be read as the writer’s effort to reveal what rivers and waters have given rise to throughout history. From the perspective of material ecocriticism, “endowed with meanings and thick with stories, matter is a site of creative becomings and dynamic expression” (Oppermann, “Material Ecocriticism” 89), and in *To the River*, rivers’ role in the creation of meanings and stories is highlighted through such references. To a material ecocritic, every matter has the ability to produce meaning (89), and the poems and mythical stories Laing shares show how an inanimate matter might trigger and contribute to the creation of meaning.

In fact, of all the allusions to literary works somehow connected with the Ouse in this book, the most dominant is Laing's coverage of Virginia Woolf, her life and works. Laing's devotion to Woolf is felt strongly. Bate assumes that "The Sussex Ouse draws Laing because it is the river by which Virginia Woolf lived and in which she drowned herself in 1941. The book's project is to use the river to enter the stream of Woolf's consciousness and to follow in her literary wake" ("To the River"). Though *To the River* is obviously more than homage paid to Woolf, Laing's feelings for Woolf affect her narrative. At the very beginning of her memoir, Laing makes it clear that she identifies and sympathises with Woolf:

That spring I was reading Woolf obsessively, for she shared my preoccupation with water and its metaphors. Virginia Woolf has gained a reputation as a doleful writer, a bloodless neurasthenic or again as a spiteful, rarefied creature, the doyenne of airless Bloomsbury chat. I suspect the people who hold this view of not having read her diaries, for they are filled with humour and an infectious love for the natural world. (*To the River* 9)

Laing's admiration of Woolf goes beyond Woolf's love of nature. Laing and Woolf literally have a common ground: The Ouse and its landscape. As Laing notes, "She [Woolf] was acutely sensitive to landscape, and her impressions of this chalky, watery valley pervade her work" (*To the River* 9). Considering Laing's attachment to the Ouse, her reference to Woolf, who is a prominent British writer with a sense of place, is only to be expected. On the other hand, Laing's repeated references to the couple and their life might at times make the reader question whose memoir s/he is reading: Laing's or the Woolfs'? However, given that the writer's main concern is the Ouse, this book could be read as the Ouse's memoir as much as Laing's. Thus, *To the River* would be incomplete without Woolf, for the Ouse is a river which she lived by and died in. Similarly, Woolf had an impact on this river. As Paul Farley notes, "History hasn't crossed paths with the Ouse very often, and if we only know one thing about this river, it's likely to be that it was where Virginia Woolf drowned herself" ("To the River"). As a lover of the Ouse who accepts the river's agency, Laing would not ignore the mutual relationship between the river and Woolf, which extends into her own life, too.

To the River includes references to many other non-literary sources and names. For example, Laing dedicates some pages to the British physician, palaeontologist, and geologist Gideon Algernon Mantell (1790- 1852) born in Sussex, where the Ouse flows. Mantell is known for his discoveries of dinosaur fossils in Sussex, which he made famous in the history of geological discovery (“Gideon”). While walking in the same region as Mantell, Laing notes: “The earliest traces of the iguanodon were found at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the obstetrician and geologist Gideon Mantell, just over a mile from where I now stood” (*To the River* 36). Laing’s reference to Mantell in a detailed way could be seen as another digression in the memoir because she details how Mantell, a son of a shoemaker who chose medicine as a career but never gave up his passion of geology and palaeontology, strived hard to be admitted by the scientific community of the era that attempted to undermine his work due to his lack of formal education (36- 45). It is important that Laing gives place to a scientist, who was marginalised for most of his lifetime, in her memoir. Also, it is equally important that she pays tribute to Mary Ann Mantell, Mantell’s wife. In fact, Mary Ann was the one who came across the giant tooth, which was later associated with iguanodon, and “this tooth, which Mantell sometimes claimed he’d found himself, was the key to the bone puzzle, though it would take some four or five years to properly decode” (39). Yet as the reader dives into the history of fossil discoveries in the Sussex region, where Laing is walking, s/he might feel lost. The question why Laing pays homage to the Mantells in her riparian memoir could preoccupy the reader. At this point, Laing’s following remarks show that she needs to mention the couple because it is thanks to their discoveries that we can understand what a long history Sussex has:

In this landscape of erasure, one plant stood out as an anomaly, a living fossil. The horsetail that choked every half-damp ditch I passed had been here when the Weald was still a tropical swamp long before the chalky Downs were formed. If a nuclear winter ever comes to pass it’s the horsetail I’ll put my money on, rising stiff-fronded through the dust and rubble as it has for the last 230 million years. *Equisetum*, as it is properly known, is the living link between our own age and that of the dinosaurs. (36)

As the quotation above shows, Laing points out the long history of her region, which is not limited to the human presence there. Laing implies that humans, as a species, is relatively new to the Earth, where the horsetail has been living for the past two hundred and thirty million years. Of the fossils, she writes: “Fossils are often at odds with the regions in which they’re found, the stony remains of shellfish, cuttlefish and oysters abandoned many miles from the shore” (*To the River* 34). With such an interpretation, Laing reminds the reader that the Earth is much older than the human history. While humans are trying to figure out what happened to the natural world looking at fossils, some species have been present in this world since the time when those fossils were alive. This mere fact is presented to the reader through the horsetail and the fossils discovered by the Mantells. This is another example why matter should matter: Matter helps us think and make inferences. “Whether a thing or a living creature, ... every being has a story to tell,” say material ecocritics (Ioviono and Oppermann, “Introduction” 7). One may not know for sure what kind of a story the horsetail or dinosaur fossils would tell us on their own accord, but one can interpret the world by valuing them, and this is what Laing does by paying tribute to the Mantells.

According to Iovino and Oppermann, every being has an interplay of agencies that have a spatiotemporality set within this world (“Introduction” 7), and Laing points out the spatiotemporality of her beloved Sussex through such references. Besides, her focus on the horsetail and dinosaur fossils in Sussex reflect her humility. Plumwood argues that humility is what humanity needs in order to have a less anthropocentric approach to the non-human world: “One of the most important things to aim to establish in any strategy for countering instrumentalism then is some degree of human humility and sensitivity to nature’s own creativity and agency” (*Environmental* 113). By highlighting the agency of the river itself as well the endurance of the non-human through millennia, Laing aptly shows this humility and sensitivity.

As Laing plunges into the history of the Ouse, she does not reveal the agentic power of the river only within the context of myths, stories or history. From Laing’s angle, just as the river can contribute to the creation of meaning and stories, it can also destroy lives, both human and non-human. In other words, *To the River* is not a

rhapsody for the Ouse. To illustrate, Laing recalls the inundation of Lewes by the Ouse in 2000:

The Ouse also breached its banks gushing out into the land between Barcombe and Hamsey until all the pastures had disappeared beneath a swelling lake. By lunchtime, Lewes's defences were also overwhelmed and the dirty, rain-coloured river came surging over the embankments and into town. Water rushed down the streets at the bottom of the hill and by mid-afternoon, the Phoenix estate, the new houses at Malling and the old ones at Cliffe had been submerged". (*To the River* 147)

In the aftermath of the flood, "Wherever you looked it was carrying off something: prayer books, children's toys, underwear, the sodden bodies of rats" (Laing, *To the River* 148). From Laing's account, it can be gathered that the 2000 flood had a severely destructive effect on the region. Ruth O' Keeffe, a Lewes resident even said: "Anyone in Lewes who wasn't actually flooded probably felt quite guilty about it, like the survivors of an aeroplane crash" (qtd. in Melrose). However, Laing's depiction of the inundation causes neither the vilification of the river nor the victimization of humans, for she notes that the Ouse is just following its natural course, which may not fit well with the towns built along the Ouse with little thought of the risk: "For centuries this tendency to inundation affected farming, but now houses and industrial estates have sprouted in the floodplain, and the last time the Ouse seriously breached into its bank the outcome was very bad" (146). Material ecocritics emphasize that human agency is just a part of a web of complex agencies where more-than human forces and substances merge with our bodies and places visibly or imperceptibly (Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction" 3), and the flood in Lewes is a visible example of this merge where humans, as a species, might remain vulnerable and human agency might fall short.

Laing's memories of the flood in 2000 trigger a chain of thoughts in her mind. Her mind starts to wander, and she makes mention of the Biblical flood and then jumps to local and global myths about the civilizations drowned and some contemporary examples of apocalyptic fiction in which cities are submerged (*To the River* 149- 152). Starting with the flood in Lewes, she attributes all of this anxiety about floods and the power of water as reflected in fiction to human struggle of control.

The 2000 flood, it was clear, was not an isolated occurrence, but rather part of a long and painful struggle for control, in which the town and its outlying fields were periodically encroached upon by water. Sitting there in the dark, it began to seem to me that the folktales were a way of charting the same ancient, ongoing battle, or at least of managing the fears and fantasies that water's wilfulness engendered. (152)

Laing, herself, does not create a tale out of the Lewes flood, but the flood shapes her text, which, as Sarah France mentions, "displays a return to materialism" (40). According to material ecocritics, from material-discursive encounters are born literary stories: "Playing together this shared activity of human and non-human agents generates new narratives and discourses" (Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction" 8), and Laing's preoccupation with the representation of flood in myths and her own preference to cover the flood in her memoir could be seen as the result of such an encounter.

4.2.3 From the Ouse to the Planet

Laing's attachment to the river is manifest. Yet one might wonder if place attachment would be restrictive for an ecologically oriented writer. This takes us back to the problem of provincialism and universalism, or localism and globalism as some would name it. As mentioned earlier in this study, the question that preoccupies critics such as Heise who support eco-cosmopolitanism against localism is whether writing about one specific place would prevent a writer from thinking about environmental issues from a global perspective and cause him/her to have a more regional or national agenda. Buell, too, warns that being attached to a place might yield to undesirable outcomes, which are "maladaptive sedentariness, inordinate hankering to recover the world we have lost, xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders and wanderers" (*The Future* 68). However, it is hard to observe these unwanted results in Laing's case. In the first place, Laing has not confined herself to England. She has lived in the US and even written about her life abroad. Also, in *To the River*, Laing neither offers a nostalgic account of the life along the river nor tries to idealize or beautify the river. On the contrary, she is quite realistic. For example, she points out that the river has been used as a resource, that is for its utility. Reduction of non-human nature to a resource which is valuable only as long as it serves the humankind is a distinctive feature of an

instrumentalist world view (Plumwood, *Environmental* 109). Highlighting that the river has been used for centuries for the benefit of humans, Laing exposes the instrumentalist approach to the river: “The days of watermills and salterns may have passed, but the Ouse remains a working river” (*To the River* 7). Laing also implies that the instrumentalization of the river has had its consequences to the detriment of the river ecosystem, for the river is now “feeding a brace of reservoirs and carrying the outfall from a dozen sewage works” (7). Buell indicates that one’s awareness of the changes in a certain place over time contributes to place attachment (*The Future* 73). Such place attachment might help to foreground local experiences from past to today, and in *To the River*, this is evident. Laing is knowledgeable about the history of the Ouse because she has obviously both read about it and witnessed some of the changes first-hand. However, this heightened sense of place does not make her oblivious to the negativities.

Laing adds that swimming in the Ouse may not always be a pleasant experience because of the pollution: “Sometimes, swimming at Isfield, you pass through clotted tracts of bubbles; sometimes a crop of waterweed blooms as luxuriant as an orchard with the fertiliser that’s washed from the wheat” (*To the River* 7). Laing’s sensitivity to the instrumentalization of the Ouse as well as her attention to the waste dumped into the river reveal both her ecological awareness and her critical eye. Plumwood warns that place sensitivity necessitates critical and emotional approach (*Environmental* 233), and Laing has both. Another instance where Laing’s critical approach becomes evident is when she complains about the impossibility of walking along the river as freely as one would expect. As mentioned earlier, her walk by the river is not an effortless one. She has to change paths because of the private property restrictions: “There are no automatic rights to roam riverbanks and much of the land the Ouse coils through is private, strung with the barbed wire and *Keep Out* signs by which England’s old divisions are maintained” (Laing, *To the River* 16). Laing’s reproachful attitude to the fencing of riverbanks is more than an objection to her walk being interrupted. In fact, it can be claimed that by referring to the “old divisions”, Laing alludes to the enclosures that have changed the British landscape and suggests that the natural environment has been manipulated to meet human requirements. As it is seen in Laing’s zigzag tracks, while

deeply established property relations prevent some people from experiencing nature, they give the same right to a privileged class.

A global dimension is added to Laing's memoir as she draws attention to the Anthropocene beginning with its effects on the Ouse and its landscape. One day, for example, as she is taking a rest by the river, she remembers an old map of the region she was shown (*To the River* 177). When she saw that map but failed to recognize the land, she was puzzled, and such a big difference made her realize once again how much the landscape has been changed by human intervention: "The river's transformations bothered me because they seemed to highlight the wrongheaded rapaciousness of my own species, carving the world up with no thought to its consequences" (178). As it is seen, her concerns go beyond the Ouse, and she criticizes human greed and arrogance as we recklessly change the landscape. In envisioning ecological advocacy on behalf of the non-human world, Heise underlines the importance of broadening of horizons and being tied to "territories and systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole" against local ties (10). Despite her attachment to her locality, Laing can manage to broaden her perspective and develop a critical approach to the Anthropocene. At another instance, as she lies down on a flat field to take a break after a tiring walk, she starts questioning. Such a smooth field is what she needed after an exhausting trekking, but she feels uncomfortable:

There was something subtly oppressive about these flat, dredged fields and swift, featureless river. The land should have been a model of man's ingenuity and instead the banks left me uneasy, for it seemed that the river was held back by the application of enormous force, against which it threatened momentarily to break through and take the valley" (216).

Human intervention in the landscape bothers her, and after so many human-induced alterations, she wonders "what a future we have stored up for us, when an ooze of mud replaces these false pastures, sheep-cropped and sewer-seamed, on which the wind rolls unimpeded" (216). Her critical eye to the landscape "which should have been a model of man's ingenuity" but which leaves her "uneasy" shows that she can expand her memoir to cover the way man has recklessly changed the landscape, which is a global problem.

The questions Laing asks to herself and by extension to the reader during her hikes show the anxiety she shares with most contemporary nature writers, namely “the sense that we are devouring our world”, as Cowley put it (9). In fact, as mentioned earlier in this study, nature writers of our times would not remain indifferent to the Anthropocene considering the scale of the environmental harm done to the planet. Laing, too, observes the environmental damage in her locality throughout ages. To illustrate, as she makes mention of the Lewes flood, she goes back in history and makes a comparison between the 2000 flood and a flood that happened in the same area in 1960 with the same severity, but she states that the latter “caused less damage, for in that period the floodplain hadn’t yet filled with the housing states and supermarkets that clutter it today” (*To the River* 177). As a local who witnessed the construction of settlements in the region to the detriment of the landscape, she feels disappointed. One day during her hike, she watches the landscape and ponders:

For the last ten years, I’d laboured under the impression that this view was almost natural, and now I felt a fool. Landscapes, we all agree, these days, are palimpsests, laid down in layers over the centuries. While this is undoubtedly correct, it is also true that some eras work in pencil and others in indelible ink.

The river bore the signature of the Industrial Age: its previous character might be discernible, but it cannot be retrieved. (177)

Laing thinks that it is practically impossible to restore the Earth fully and undo Anthropocene. Her awareness about the Anthropocene also covers the climate change. Referring to Lewes’s “periodic and continuing floods”, she regretfully informs that the “Environment Agency is agreed that too much of the Ouse’s catchment has been reclaimed and that if Lewes is to survive the travails of climate change some land must be relinquished to the river” (179).

Laing is equally concerned about the threat against biodiversity in her region. For example, one day as she sees the larks filling the sky, she remembers the wheatears, which were once abundant in the region but then hunted so much so that “their trapping became a kind of micro-industry” (*To the River* 238). Even though she accepts the gains of current wildlife protection programmes such as “The Wildlife and Countryside Act” (241), she confronts the past and implies that today’s conservation efforts are the result

of the past mistakes that cost the lives of the non-human. Her sensitivity to biodiversity can be observed when she passes by a house, which she and her ex-boyfriend once considered buying. However, instead of focusing on this house and their memory of it, she draws attention to a reservoir to be built in that region, namely Clay Hill, at the cost of the non-human lives there:

A reservoir will leave them [the bats] with nowhere to feed or roost: no rotting trees, no woodland pools, no flowering meadows where the moths- the Oak Eggar, the Garden Tiger- circle above the pale yarrow and the glowing heads of clover. The farm and its Georgian cottages will be plucked down, I guess, and there will be just water, an abundance of it, and somewhere beneath it the ghosts of massive oaks. (182)

Laing is worried about bats, moths, clovers, yarrows and oaks, which shows her holistic approach to the natural world. She is deeply sorry that the floods and droughts which are predicted to increase with global warming are to be remedied through a reservoir which will be constructed at the expense of the non-human (*To the River* 181). Looking at the oaks to be lost to the water, she remembers a sentence by Sir Thomas Browne: “Generations pass while some trees stand” (182). However, in this specific case, even long-lasting trees will fail to endure human-induced changes. In this respect, it is seen that Laing’s concerns about the Ouse and Lewes are essentially caused by the Anthropocene. Her focus on her native land gives a local aspect to her memoir, but indeed her anxieties can be related to, in Heise’s words, “a global ecosystem whose functioning transcends humanmade borders” (25).

4.2.4 Challenge against Dualist Thinking

Laing’s short riparian journey brings to light her attachment and respect to the Ouse as well as her local and global environmental concerns. Her sensibilities and sensitivities about the Ouse and her region could, in fact, be positioned within a wider framework that can be regarded as a challenge against dualist thinking. Whether Laing takes a rest by the river or in a motel bedroom, whether she continues to walk or stays still watching the landscape, she is always contemplating. Her ideas often follow a winding course, and she jumps from geology to mythology and from literature to botany

probably because she is a writer and researcher who holds a degree in herbal medicine. Yet in all these meanders, she remains critical of the anthropocentric dualistic thinking.

First and foremost, Laing's objection to hierarchical binary oppositions can be observed in her approach to nature. Similar to most contemporary nature writers, Laing does not have a purist notion of nature, and she exemplifies, in many instances during her walk, the intermingling of nature with culture. For example, as she informs the reader that the region where she is walking through was once known for iron industry, she explains that the Weald was suitable for iron industry because of its clay rich in ironstone and its dense woodland that facilitated the charcoal fires (*To the River* 28). Pointing out the effect of non-human nature on the growth of an industry, she concludes that "The idea that nature can be prised free from civilisation is, in England's overpopulated south at least, absurd. The landscape hereabouts has been shaped by centuries of man's activities, as man I suppose, has been shaped by the land" (28).

One of the most thought-provoking examples, through which she points out the inseparability of nature and culture is the embankment⁵⁰ that was made to prevent the flooding of the Ouse. During her hike, she passes this embankment between the Ouse and Southerham corner. As Laing notes, in the mid-nineteenth century, when the railways were being constructed in the area, the workers dug a well full of hundreds of bodies that belonged to the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Lewes of the thirteenth century (*To the River* 139- 140). After the railwaymen found those bodies, they "dredged out the bones, lauded them onto trucks and hauled them into the marshes" which later on contributed to the formation of the embankment (140). Upon learning this fact, Laing's reaction is as follows: "It took me a while to make sense of the story. The trains to Hastings and Newhaven, to Glynde and Ore and Seaford, travel each day across the compacted bones of the men who fought here in 1264?" (140). Laing's bewilderment is understandable because she realizes that human bones were used to form an artificial slope aimed at preventing the flooding of the river, which, in fact, results from human intervention in the land. In this intricate story, where human bones

⁵⁰An embankment is "a raised structure (as of earth or gravel) used to hold back water or to carry a roadway" ("Embankment").

are used to relieve the effects of a human-induced change, it is literally impossible to separate culture from nature and vice versa.

On the other hand, from the way Laing responds to this story, one can gather that she is disturbed by the use of human bones in the embankment. She shares an excerpt from the diary of Gideon Mantell, the above-mentioned fossil-hunter, whom she calls “this good doctor”: “In perfect accordance with the spirit of this railway age, this heap of skeleton of the patriots and royalists of the 13th century, which filled thirteen wagons, was taken away to form part of the embankment” (*To the River* 140). Because she sympathizes with Mantell, whose own spine was exhibited in the museum of Royal College of Surgeons that was destroyed during a clear out in 1970, it can be thought that she inclines to anthropocentrism and even nationalism. After all, Mantell mourns for the royalists and patriots. The question whether she would show the same reaction if the embankment had been made of non-human bones or the bones of civilians might come to mind, especially when one considers humans as an ordinary part of the ecosystem. However, as an ecologically minded writer, Laing keeps clear of anthropocentrism with her following comparison: “It almost made me laugh to think of it: that the train line was built on a bank of compacted femurs and tibias, just as the Downs behind it were made from the accumulated bodies of single-celled algae and phytoplankton” (141). Laing’s reasoning echoes Morton’s concept of “mesh”, which refers to the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things: “All life forms are the mesh, and so are all dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and nonliving beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth ... We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism” (*The Ecological* 29).

Laing’s rejection of culture/nature and human/non-human duality is evident in the way she posits herself within the natural world, too. In the course of her walk, she barely encounters any human, but this does not make her feel lonely. She considers herself just like any other living being that happens to be in that geography as it was the case in her experience with a deer drinking water in the wood: “She was neither rare nor extraordinary, that deer. There were thousands like her, as there were millions like me. But there she was, attending to her own path, which, for a moment, intersected mine”

(*To the River* 51). Laing portrays herself as a human walking past the non-human that are busy with themselves and their routine: “Here, in the fields, moving at my own pace, I did not feel islanded or isolated. There was too much occurring. Like- now!- those two oystercatchers on the far bank, still as bookends, monochrome save their tangerine beaks, crying in pitched, plaintive voices *peeppeeppeeppeeppeeppeep*” (*To the River* 191).

Because she posits herself as part of the ecosystem, she does not feel lonesome during this solitary walk. Throughout her journey, she remains attentive to the non-human. Flies, sheep, oaks, rooks, jackdaws, foxes as well as brick-pink valerians, rosebay willowherbs, bindweeds, poppies and marguerites all catch her attention. She wonders what the rooks that gather *en masse* might be doing: “Holding a meeting? Plotting a coup?” (*To the River* 48). To pass an enjoyable time, she counts the flowers she sees as she lies down to take a rest (180). When she ruminates about the effects of the Anthropocene on the Ouse and its region feeling sorry for the dwindling biodiversity, two redshanks, which scream at one another, save her from “this melancholy line of thought” (235). Thus, she takes the non-human as her companion during this journey.

Besides, her portrayal of the very few people she comes across during her hikes is no different from her depiction of the non-human. When she writes about the two men from the Electricity Board sawing the lops and tops of an ash tree (*To the River* 32), a man with binoculars walking past her (190) and three men fishing in the river (29), she never tends to privilege them against the non-human. Those men are only a part of the geography just like their cars and tractors. Laing is aware that we are not in a position to draw sharp lines between nature and culture. That is why during her time out, the pastoral silence of the countryside can suddenly be interrupted by a train or a plane, which, to her, do not necessarily spoil the moment. Laing can hear the wood pigeons just as she can hear a train passing from far (49). She does not focus on one to neglect the other. Morton writes that “Really thinking the mesh means letting go of an idea that it has a centre. There is no being in the ‘middle’- what would ‘middle’ mean anyway? The most important? How can one being be more important than another?” (*The Ecological* 38). Laing’s depiction of the landscape including all human and non-

human elements parallels, once again, the idea of a decentred mesh as put forward by Morton.

Laing's non-dualistic thinking can be seen in her approach to time, too. She does not seem to be approving of strict divisions in time, which echoes Jay Griffiths. In her book *A Sideways Look At Time* (2004), Griffiths claims that western time, which declared itself "the time" following the British marital supremacy in the nineteenth century, is divorced from nature and serves for the purposes of the industrial and post-industrial age with all its numerical divisions (14-15). In Griffiths's opinion, Greenwich time, which was basically intended for the colonization of the seas, is ideological and oppressive, for it ignores the local varieties derived from nature and geography (*A Sideways* 14). Similar to Griffiths, Laing seems to be critical of the modern monopoly over time, and her critical attitude is evident in the way she dissociates rivers from "landlock chronology": "A river is more shift, relinquishing possessions haphazardly and without regard to the landlocked chronology historians hold so dear" (*To the River* 8). According to France, Laing suggests that rivers resist attempts to map and order them with their openness to flux and movement (45). To certify France's argument, Laing writes: "There is mystery about rivers that draws us to them, for they rise from hidden places and travel by routes that are not always tomorrow where they might be today" (7). The fluidity and permeability of rivers, to which Laing is attracted, posit them against any rigid conceptualisation of time.

In addition, a great part of Laing's memoir covers references to the history of the river and the relevant works of writers, geologists and scientists long gone. She is physically following a trackable path from the source of the Ouse to where it meets with the sea, but her writing, which is fed by this very same path, does not follow a linear timeline because of her frequent allusions to the history of the region. In this light, it is possible to claim that Laing has no sharp distinction of past and present in her narrative. Just like in her memoir, she seems to be losing track of the time during her walks, too. At one point, she even asks herself: "What country was I walking in, what age?" (*To the River* 80). She challenges the strict linearity of time as her thoughts move across the centuries during her one-week journey. For example, once she thinks about Leonard Woolf who went back to London after Virginia Woolf's death and stayed in their

bombed house. She recollects that Leonard Woolf wrote about how sad it was to stay in a bombed flat: “But I have experienced few things more depressing in my life than to live in a badly bombed flat, with the windows boarded up, during the great war” (qtd. in Laing, *To the River* 222). Yet she is fast to give hope to the reader when she writes that “It was around this time that the bombsites of the city began to fill with flowering weeds that grew in great profusion among the mangled churches and destroyed streets” (222). That she highlights the flowering weeds in the bombsites is significant in terms of her conceptualisation of time because the death-life cycle observed in the bombsites evokes the circularity of time in nature rather than the linear progressive time.

Then Laing remembers a plant called London rocket which grew in abundance in the seventeenth century London but then became rare only to come back to the city centuries later (*To the River* 223). She associates such recurrences in the natural world with the circularity of time and states that the “London rocket returns in our cities as a clock returns to midnight” (223). The following paragraph demonstrates that Laing chooses to follow the regenerative time of the non-human nature rather than the restrictively progressivist man-made time:

The rosebay willowherb swells up through the ruins of law courts and cathedrals, the dandelion marches across battlefields and infiltrates the gardens of mansions. Gallant soldiers, Oxford ragwort, Atlas poppy: these weeds have come and will come again, time immemorial, time without end. It is as well to remember this, for humans believe against all evidence in stasis, though the history of the world does clearly testify that it is rot and regeneration will be out lot. (223)

In this respect, Laing finds another middle ground with contemporary nature writers such as Katherine Swift, Jay Griffiths and Kathleen Jamie who have, in their own ways, challenged the concept of linear time in their writings by referring to the occurrences in the natural world.⁵¹ Of them, as discussed earlier, Jamie is particularly interested in archaeological excavations and tries to understand how the earth hides the past, which somehow means that the past is never past but just hidden. Like Jamie, Laing is also impressed by the fact that geography contains history, or nature contains culture. For

⁵¹Please see Swift’s *The Morville Hours* (2008) and Griffiths’s *A Sideways Look At Time*.

instance, as she thinks about the Battle of Lewes, which took place exactly where she is walking, she writes: “The past seemed to have fallen across the landscape like a body that tough voiceless somehow still leaked or bled its language without pause. The horror of what had happened here had seeped into the soil as rain will do, waiting in the hidden interstitial spaces like groundwater before a flood” (*To the River* 129).

As it is seen, similar to most contemporary nature writers, Laing is critical of dualistic and anthropocentric thinking, and it is possible to observe the traces of such criticism in her attitude to binary oppositions such as animate/inanimate, culture/nature, human/ non-human and present/past. During her one-week journey along the Ouse, Laing is engaged in a deep questioning about such divisions with references to myths, history, literature and science. In fact, there are so many references to mythical, historical, literary and even scientific sources that, as Farley notes, “it is easy to lose grip” in this memoir (“To the River”). Laing herself and her own story seem to be overshadowed by the stories, historical facts and discoveries that result from or relate to the Ouse. Smith writes that when nature writing is engaged in an ethical and ecological resistance to anthropocentrism, the authorial ego might be curbed (“The New” 268). In Laing’s memoir, as it has been discussed so far, it is easy to identify the writer’s objection to anthropocentrism, but it is hard to trace an authorial ego that puts the writer at the centre of the narrative. Laing’s voice is a humble voice, which is not muted though. “The book’s subject and structure fuse pleasingly, weaving and meandering, changing pace and tone, pooling into biographical, mythical or historical backwaters before picking up the thread of Laing’s riparian journey again,” writes Farley (“To the river”). In other words, Laing manages to surface in all this “weaving and meandering” and thus enables her audience to catch up with her as the guide of this riverine journey.

4.2.5 A Humble “Authorial” Voice

As mentioned earlier, the very reason why Laing set out on this journey by the Ouse is to walk away from troubles in life and find solace by the river, which she holds very dear. It is, however, meaningful that she very seldom refers to her grief during her journey, and her attention is mostly focused on the non-human elements that form the landscape and the cultural extensions of the river. In other words, she seems to show a greater interest in things other than herself. Yet this selfless attitude does not mean that

Laing is completely erased from her own memoir. For example, one night when she stays at a manor in Fletching, a conversation she listens in brings her heartbreak to surface. The woman she overhears complains about Brighton and its people who never forget anything (Laing, *To the River* 83). Laing, too, agrees that “*No one ever forgets anything*”: “It’s all piles up here somewhere, on the surface or under the ground. It never stops, that’s the trouble. It keeps on coming, like that golden wind, breeding from out of its own ruin” (85). She cannot easily get over her breakup with Matthew no matter how much the non-human world helps her turn attention away from her own reality. Similarly, at another night when she stays at the White Hart in Lewes, where she has already stayed with Matthew, she starts a questioning that appears to be about the past permeating the present. However, it turns out that she questions herself and her inability to forget Matthew:

I lay on the bed almost weeping, suddenly overwhelmed by the past few months. I hadn’t thought I was running away, but now all I wanted was to turn tail and fly, back into the woods, the dense, enchanted Andredesleage where no one could find me or knew my name. Why does the past do this? Why does it linger instead of receding? Why does it return with such a force sometimes that the real place in which one stands or sits or lies, the place in which one’s corporeal body most undeniably exists, dissolves as if it were nothing more than a mirage? The past cannot be grasped; it is not possible to return in time, to regather what was lost or carelessly shrugged off, so why these sudden ambushes, these flourishes of memory? (*To the River* 135)

Her desire to change into a non-human animal by “turning tail and flying” and to shelter in the woods shows that she clings to the non-human to recover. Laing helplessly accepts that the present is permeable and lets the past in, but she does not sink into the depths of despair. She alludes to Virginia Woolf’s *A Sketch of the Past* and *Between the Acts* and brings herself to confront the fact that “one can only make sense of the violent-the violating- present by looking back, to what has disappeared from view” (138).

In both anecdotes, Laing’s thoughts about her relationship come to the surface when she goes to bed. That is, she is submerged by her thoughts when she stays still. While walking, however, her attention is elsewhere. Walking seems to have a healing

effect on her. As Farley writes, her journey “feels like a clearing and a clarifying, bringing to mind the old Latin tag *solvitur ambulando*: literally, sorting it out by walking. She immerses herself in the landscape” (“To the River”). Laing’s allusions to a variety of sources about the river might make us think that such profound thinking about the river makes it easier for her to leave behind her problems and immerse in the landscape.

Laing is, with no doubt, intellectually and emotionally active throughout the walk. Yet her walk by the river and her immersion in the landscape have a bodily aspect, too. Like her contemporaries, Laing is attentive to her bodily and sensory experiences during her hikes, which adds another personal aspect to the memoir. The bodily aspect of Laing’s one-week journey by the river in the middle of summer is mostly marked by her physical discomfort. With no tendency to romanticize her hike along the Ouse, Laing highlights many times how physically tiring the walk has been. Once she stays overnight at Navigation Cottage, where she enjoys the dinner with the owners, but she feels so tired that she cannot stay long for a chat after dinner and goes to sleep even before it is dark (*To the River* 219). In another instance, after a two-hour walk “in the teeth of the wind”, she decides to stop at a point where she reaches her target for the day, and she sits and eats an “oatcake” to celebrate (215). At that time, she realizes that her toenails were bothering her, and she regrets that she had not brought her nail clippers with her. She then adds that she would miss also her mascara if she were to walk in the hills for years (215). She also complains about the heat and needs to protect herself against the sun by smearing herself with “Factor 30” (57). With the sun burning, the grass she is walking on loses its beauty and the walk becomes unbearable: “My hair was wet at the nape, and my back was soaked with sweat. What a multitude of mirrors there are in the world! Each blade of grass seemed to catch the sun and toss it back to the sky” (81). All she needs at that moment is to let her brain cool down and drink some water. Also, one day, when Laing feels hungry and comes across a pub after a long walk, she feels excited that she can finally have “a ginger beer and plate of ham and mustard sandwiches” (72). Her need for daily objects like nail clippers, mascara or sun protection cream as well as her joy in eating something nice not only show that a walk is, above all, a bodily experience but also enable the reader to identify with Laing

as a modern-day human walking in the middle of nature under the sun. Farley states that it is easy “to warm to Laing” because of her self-confessions as it is the case when she says she might miss her mascara and when she feels happy because of a beer and ham (“To the River”). In fact, such simple bodily pleasures and pains help to strengthen the autobiographical aspect in *To the River*.

Based on walking theories that posit walking as an act engaging both body and mind, France argues that Laing rejects the mind/body dualism in *To the River* and states that “Laing’s physical wanderings draw together the binary entities of mind and body” (42). In fact, by referring to the British writer Kenneth Grahame who draws a parallelism between walking and writing, Laing justifies France’s point. Of the trance-like states that might be triggered by walking and that, in turn, might trigger the inspiration required by writing, Grahame wrote: “Nature’s particular gift to the walker through the semi-mechanical act of walking- a gift no other form of exercise seems to transmit in the same degree- is to set the mind jogging” (qtd. in Laing, *To the River* 90). Laing herself gets into “one of those trances that come from walking far, when the feet and the blood seem to collide and harmonise” (90), and the outcome of her one-week walk is *To the River*. *To the River* is a memoir whereby Laing’s physical presence is felt as much as her intellectual and emotional side. Moreover, this physicality does not result only from walking. As a hydrophile, Laing enjoys swimming, and during her journey she does not miss the opportunity to swim whenever she can. Her relation with the Ouse is a bodily one, for she likes to surrender to the river with her entire body: “I’d enter the swift water in trepidation that gave way to ecstasy, tugged by a current that threatened to tumble me beneath the surface and bowl me clean to the sea” (4). Also, when she reaches the mouth of the Ouse, she cannot wait to swim in the sea. As she gets into the water, she is truly enchanted: “What a bay! What a day! I turned full circle, treading water, liking the way the land seemed to hold out two chalky arms to fend off or embrace the ways... I kicked out my legs and wallowed there in joy” (263).

All in all, *To the River* is an eco-memoir that includes autobiographical moments that help to situate Laing as the writer and narrator of this one-week journey though such moments are outweighed by the author’s preoccupation with the river as an entity in itself and what it has engendered in history and literature. Throughout the book, the

reader is let into many mythical, scientific and historical accounts as well as ecological concerns that Laing associates with the river. Thus, Laing's narrative branches out just like a river. Bate finds this ramification excessive at times ("To the River") whereas France thinks that this is an example of *écriture féminine* with its rejection of a clear timeline and plot centred on a protagonist (40). This study, however, offers to read *To the River* as a story of both the river and an ecologically-oriented woman attached to it. Therefore, all the digressions are considered as a natural outcome of this interweaving effort. At the end of her journey, Laing is relieved: "I didn't want to go home, it was true, but I was nonetheless as purely happy as I've ever been right then, in that open passageway beneath the blue vault of sky, walking the measure allotted me" (*To the River* 266). Given that *To the River* is a transcription of her one-week walk by the Ouse, it is clear that the river, the walk and the writing process have all healed Laing. However, in this healing story, Laing manages to walk out of herself as the centre of attention and offers the reader a non-anthropocentric way of looking at a river. With all the human and non-human elements it is related to, the Ouse is more than a body of water that flows in England. A life-long shelter to Laing, the Ouse, no matter how much it has been instrumentalised and polluted by industrialism, still carries history, inspires stories and invalidates human-made boundaries both in minds and on the Earth itself. *To the River* is an attempt to record the Ouse's flow in case it is lost to the Anthropocene.

4.3 *On the Marshes*: From a Therapeutic Journey to a Political Call

The phrase nature writing evokes pastoral and idyllic images no matter how much it has branched off and enriched throughout history. However, in contemporary Britain, nature writing has gone far beyond rosy depictions of the non-human nature and expanded into a comprehensive genre that allows writers to offer an environmental critique by using diverse forms of writing such as memoirs and travelogues. In a similar vein, this part of the dissertation focuses on Carol Donaldson's *On the Marshes: A journey into England's waterlands* (2017) with the aim of discussing how a personal therapeutic journey transforms into the questioning of the modern capitalist and consumerist system. As the title of the book suggests, this time the landscape in question is the marshes, which are probably not what immediately comes to mind when nature writing is in question. Donaldson sets out on a journey on the marshes to get away from the troubles in her life. Therefore, *On the Marshes* can be likened to Laing's *To the River*. As a matter of fact, just like *To the River*, *On the Marshes* invites the reader to the author's healing journey, during which the non-human is posited as a possible source of relief. Hubbard and Wilkinson, on the other hand, propose to read *On the Marshes* as "a typical entry in the emerging genre of new nature writing focused on edgelands" (254). *On the Marshes* merits separate attention for its focus on the edgelands, which do not match the pastoral image of the countryside, as well as the writer's special interest in the human residents of the marshes, which is not the dominant tendency shared by the other authors this study focuses on.

Carol Donaldson's deep interest in the Kent marshes and the people living there parallels her own life story as she, herself, lived on the North Kent marshes while she was employed by the RSPB. Originally from Essex, England, Donaldson is a nature writer, conservationist and environmental consultant. At the age of nineteen, she spent her summer holiday in Canada volunteering to renovate the houses of Native Americans and lived in a trailer tent by a lake with no electricity or running water (Donaldson, *On the Marshes* 11). She studied creative writing at Derby University (Swainson), and she had her postgraduate degree in Country Management at the University of London, where she carried out a study on water voles on the River Ingrebourne as part of her dissertation project ("Carol Donaldson"). She has written for *BBC Wildlife Magazine*,

The Telegraph and *Wanderlust* and was chosen *BBC Wildlife Magazine*'s Travel Writer of the Year in 2011 ("Carol Donaldson"). As a freelance ecologist, Donaldson undertakes wildlife surveys, river restoration, flood management and works with farmers across North Kent helping them manage their wetlands for birds ("About"). Indeed, Donaldson has more than twenty years of experience working for environmental organizations such as RSPB, Kent County Council and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers ("Carol Donaldson"). As it is seen, Donaldson has been actively and professionally engaged in the protection of wildlife in her country. In fact, she has managed to combine her love of the wildlife with her love of writing ("Carol Donaldson"). Briefly, similar to most contemporary nature writers who have chosen to take active roles in the field, Donaldson, has pursued a career path clearly marked by her ecological orientation and love of nature.

On the Marshes is the transcription of Donaldson's one-year journey from Gravesham to Whitsable in the wetlands along the River Thames and River Medway in the south-east of England. On the surface, this 80- mile walk in the estuary looks like Donaldson's confrontation with who she is, what she wants to do in life and whom she wants to be with after she has lost her caravan, where she had been very happy to live, her job, which she had enjoyed doing very much, and her boyfriend, with whom she had been together for fourteen years. During this reconciliation walk, Donaldson "narrates her relationship with the liminal landscape of the north Kent Marshes" bringing together her observations of the place and her memories living and working on this part of the coast (Hubbard and Wilkinson 254). As this therapeutic journey unfolds, however, Donaldson's concerns about herself are gradually intermingled with her worries about the marshes and diverse lives they host, which adds a critical perspective to her memoir. Like her contemporaries, Donaldson, too, follows the hybrid pattern in new nature writing and blends autobiography and ecocriticism. This study aims to reveal how Donaldson's personal therapeutic journey evolves into a critique of the modern capitalist and consumerist system through the following subheadings.

4.3.1 A Woman on the Edgelands

Donaldson's critical attitude to the way the marshes are treated has multiple facets. Above all, the author deserves to be credited for choosing to write about the edgelands, - in her case-, the marshes. Marion Shoard defines edgelands as follows: "Often vast in area, though hardly noticed, it is characterised by warehouses, rubbish tips, road interchanges and sewage works, business parks and derelict factories, superstores and allotments, golf courses and travellers' encampments and fragmented, frequently scruffy farmland" (74). In fact, Donaldson's own description of the marshland in her column in *The Guardian* matches Shoard's definition: "The marshes are not an obvious beauty: it is a rough-edged love, full of derelict industry, broken barges, wide bays of mud; icy with blue light and shrill with redshanks' calls in the winter, fields and scrub bubbling over with nightingales in the spring" ("Walk"). A landscape full of rubbish, sewage works and derelict factories can hardly be pictured as a pleasant place, and edgelands are, thus, likely to be ignored. "When we think of the land of Britain we think of town and village, countryside and coast. Our image of Kent is still one of towns, wealden or coastal, neatly demarcated from downs, orchards and fields. When we think of Scotland, we think of Edinburgh Castle and heather-clad hills," writes Shoard (75). Yet Donaldson moves away from persisting stereotypical images of the British landscape and chooses to write about North Kent marshes, to which she is deeply attached. Ben Eagle, a book reviewer, nature-lover and local from the area, describes Donaldson's marshes as follows: "This is a place where culture and nature mix in complex ways; where gangs of teenagers smoke alongside waders and tufts of grass vetchling, and graffiti is sprayed on sea walls on top of nature's own paint of orange lichens" (46).

Donaldson's choice of the marshes is significant not only because she keeps away from typical representations of the British landscape but also because she attaches importance to a landscape that has conventionally been downgraded. Donaldson's choice brings into mind Slovic's concept of "appreciating the unappreciated" as well as Buell's analogous concept of the "dignification of the overlooked". Both concepts are relied on the idea of extending empathy and concern to what has been overlooked or disdained in the non-human world (Voie 26). According to Voie, the dignification of the

overlooked or disdained has an environmentalist motivation, for it necessitates equal attentiveness towards all the elements of the natural world (27). In *Xerophilia* Lynch offers to show aesthetic appreciation to all segments of the natural world such as the invertebrate kingdom:

Regardless of one's position on the matter, it seems undeniable that the chances of survival of such creatures are enhanced by this poetic attention. When such creatures become a part of our storied landscapes [...] they also become a part of our moral landscape, and hence must be taken into account in our moral judgments. (qtd. in Voie 27)

To Voie, the dignification of the overlooked is a defining feature of the anthropocenic nature writing in the US (27). In this scope, just like contemporary nature writers, ecocritics have also started to show an increasing interest in toxic inner-city areas, namely "brownfields", which have been anthropogenically degraded (Buell, *The Future* 135). Thus, writing about the marshes, whether categorised as the edgelands or brownfields, appears to be a timely and responsible act in the age of Anthropocene, when the need to revisit the scope of our moral judgments and include the non-human in it has become more urgent than ever. In this respect, Donaldson's description of the marshes helps to eradicate prejudices against the marshes and offers us a new lens to look at them: "Beauty was in the boundless sky and private chatterings of rooks gliding across it, in the bubbling aria of a curlew, in the sound of church bells coming across the water from Essex, amplified by the river fog" (*On the Marshes* 14). Donaldson has a holistic approach to the marshes and considers them in their entirety with all their components such as the sky, birds, fog and church bells. On the other hand, she never tends to idealize the marshes and suggests that they host the leftovers of the modern industrial society:

To many this was a wasteland, not an area of outstanding natural beauty, but a landscape where man had seen a black canvas to dump unsightly industry. The remnants of these industries littered by the bays: bawley boats rotting in creeks, cranes collapsing into old gravel pits, forts lost and lonely on islands. The estuary had sucked these human fingerprints in the mud. Broken houses and sheepfolds, whose villages had been whipped into submission by the wind from

the sea. 'Bring it on,' the estuary seemed to challenge, 'I will take you too'. (*On the Marshes* 14-15)

Donaldson's focus on the marshes is significant also because she is a woman. As a woman, she defies the stereotypical white male wanderer image and sets out to walk in a place, which is perceived to be unsafe or dangerous. It should be noted that this study does not allege that it is courageous for a woman to embark on a journey throughout which she would visit desolate areas or areas mainly populated by men. This would be the confirmation of essentialist claims that women are vulnerable and fearful while men are strong and brave. In their article "Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility", Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner argue that walking in the wild has been taken as a man's job on the assumption that it requires physical endurance and courage, which women supposedly lack (225-27). They state that when women undertake similar journeys they are praised for their bravery although such a praise serves for the reinforcement of cultural perceptions about gender, not for the empowerment of women (228-29). Indeed, Donaldson, herself, seems to be disturbed by these cultural norms as she once stated in an interview: "Women who have read the book have commented that I was brave for doing the journey alone whereas a man wouldn't have thought twice about it. Personally I never really felt in any kind of danger. The fears about being out in the countryside alone were in my head rather than any real threat." (qtd. in Hubbard and Wilkinson 258).

In a similar vein, this study maintains that Donaldson's walk on the marshes as a woman is important for two reasons that nullify cultural presumptions. First, her solitary walk is a challenge against patriarchal norms that confine women to home and domesticity. Doreen Massey, a feminist geographer who studies the gendered experience of space argues that "The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of using space and constructing identity, has been a crucial means of their subordination" (qtd. in Koskela 302), and Donaldson, like her contemporaries Jamie and Laing, does not yield to such restrictions and chooses the unorthodox way. Of the reactions to her walk, Donaldson said: "I think I was doing something that didn't quite fit the expected image and this provoked curiosity from women as well as men. I'm sure many people envied my comparative freedom" (qtd. in Hubbard and Wilkinson 258). Thus,

Donaldson invalidates the Western myth of mobility that suggests that men gain status by rejecting rootedness and setting off whereas women are blamed for doing the same (Hubbard and Wilkinson 258).

Second, given that the marshes do not fit the popular image of a safe and secure place, Donaldson's choice of the marshes as a woman matters even more. Although a lover of the marshes, Donaldson states that they are not a friendly and welcoming landscape for modern humans especially with the electricity blanking out or water pipes getting frozen in the harsh winter conditions (13-14). On the other hand, marshes would be an attraction to urban explorers who like to explore "abandoned and off-limit sites and explicitly avoid any organized tourist attraction where memoir is officially scripted" (Mott and Roberts 233). "Urbex is the exploration of TOADS (Temporary, Obsolete, Abandoned and Derelict). Industrial complexes, military installations, junkyards, asylums hotels- you name it," explains Troy Paiva (qtd. in Mott and Roberts 229). Even though their initial motivation is inspired by feminist ideals in the way that they seek out to reach urban places where there could be an alternative memory that is far different from official records or accounts, the urban explorers covered in Carrie Mott's and Susan M. Roberts's study have ended up being highly masculinist, for they have turned this activity into a "virile" one, through which they believe they "penetrate" the "virgin" parts of the city (238-240). Mott and Roberts state that the modern-day urban explorers they have studied reflect the image of an archetypal explorer, who is, as the geographer Mona Domosh puts it, "a white, able-bodied, risk-taking man who with stout boots and a stout heart can go where more frail and less well equipped others dare not venture" (qtd. in Mott and Roberts 235). Donaldson destroys this archetypal image completely. After all, she is a woman who feels attached to the marshes and writes about them without hierarchically separating herself from them or reducing them to the mere object of her observations or explorations.

Donaldson's defiant attitude to the cultural assumptions about gender enables her to embark on this journey, but her defiance does not necessarily save her from experiencing some gendered constraints and even harassment throughout her walk. During her journey, she repeatedly finds herself in a situation where she is reminded of her gender in this or that way. For example, as she is cycling in Chatham on her way to

St. Mary's Island, a man yells at her to get on her bike and cycle and when she ignores him, he invites her "to join him in an act of carnal delight" (*On the Marshes* 100). Also, one day as she sets a camp on Darnet island wishing to be isolated and read on her own, she notices two men drinking beer and watching her. She is so much annoyed by their gaze that she protests: "Why? They had a whole bloody island with a fort and a thousand years of human history scattered on the beach; was I really the most interesting thing to see? A girl cooking chilli and reading a book?" (119). In addition, she lives an unpleasant experience with a boat salesman. As she is considering buying a boathouse after being evicted from her caravan on the marshes, she goes to see a boat salesman in the marina. After the boater informs her about the houseboat life briefly, he asks her if she is single and tapping her knee, he says: "They are going to love you in the boatyards" (83). To Hubbard and Wilkinson, this incidence shows that the edgelands are, in certain ways, gendered places, where a woman's presence is still found irrelevant (257). Donaldson is aware of the male domination in the boatyards, and this encounter with the salesman dissuades her from purchasing a houseboat: "I made my excuses and quickly left my head swimming with images of middle-aged men, down on their luck wandering into my boat offering to paint my deck and then staying to tell me their troubles" (*On the Marshes* 83). This withdrawal might be interpreted as Donaldson's acceptance of gender constraints, but for a woman who "craved isolation", this looks more like a self-defence and evasion of harassment in any form. According to Hubbard and Wilkinson, too, Donaldson's desire of isolation and solitude is "an escape from gendered conventions and obligations, from the domestic, from the familial" (259).

Also, one day, on a trip to the Copperhouse marshes, Donaldson gets stuck in the mud with her friends Dave and Jack. After this accident, whereby they face death and are luckily rescued thanks to Donaldson's cell phone, she remembers the day and admits: "I hadn't felt right about the plan to get back along the causeway but hadn't spoken up, not wanting to look soft and lose face in front of the men" (*On the Marshes* 126). Her silence in this situation and submission to her male companion's decision for fear of looking "soft" show that she has conformed to gender conventions. However, she understands she wronged herself: "'It's no good Carol,' I told myself. 'It's about

time you took some responsibility for yourself” (*On the Marshes* 126). Despite such occurrences where she follows gendered traditions, it should be acknowledged that Donaldson tries to abolish gender norms with the way she lives on the marshes. To illustrate, in her first winter in the caravan, when her boiler is broken, she has to call a man to repair it. The repairman charges her so much that the next time the boiler is broken, she fixes it herself. She takes pride in herself for watching and learning from another person: “I knew the satisfaction to be found in self-reliance, that feeling of being a capable woman able to take on a problem and solve it” (33). Donaldson’s self-satisfaction as a woman makes sense in a patriarchal order that assigns men the skill to survive out in the nature. She is proud of herself for undoing a norm and being self-reliant: “When I had mended the gas boiler I began to see a glimmer of possibility. If I could fix things, I wouldn’t need to pay others to do this, and even better, if I could build things, maybe I could get by without buying so much stuff” (33-34). She likes the idea that when on the marshes she is not alienated from her own life and can enjoy a sort of autonomy without the intervention of any intermediary, male or not.

Donaldson’s insistence on living in her caravan on the marshes until her forced eviction proves that she does not want to confine herself to normativity. In spite of her boyfriend’s opposition, she sticks with her idea of living on the edgelands for two years. Her attachment to her caravan does not only result from her love of nature and the pleasure she takes in living under her favourite willow tree with birds always singing. Apparently, the caravan is the embodiment of her desire to be autonomous and free. “Only dead fish swim with the stream,” writes Donaldson in her diary (*On the Marshes* 92). She rejects the imposition that the right thing to do at her age is “to get a sensible job, a mortgage, settle down and conform” (92). Yet she is eventually forced to give up her caravan due to legal constraints and agrees to buy a house on mortgage after failing to find a place to live on her own. Even then, she does not want to see herself conforming and sets out on this journey to be able to stay in touch with the marshes that remind her of her nonnormative side.

4.3.2 Justice for All: Human Dwellers of the Marshes

Compared to Jamie's excursions to Scottish Islands, Alaska and Tibet as well as Laing's riparian journey by the Ouse, Donaldson's walk offers a more gendered experience probably because she encounters more people during her walk or chooses to write about her human companions more than the other writers did. Unlike in the other books, the non-human representation in *On the Marshes* is outshined by human representation despite Donaldson's frequent and detailed references to bird species, insects, seals or hares which altogether contribute to the biodiversity on the marshes. Hubbard and Wilkinson also agree that Donaldson devotes much more attention to the human inhabitants of the marshes (256). Donaldson's explanation for this is as follows in her e-mail dated 26 March 2021:

I think some nature writers like to portray the countryside as pristine and unpeopled. I think the difference between me and other nature writers is that they seem to write as a full time job (lucky them) and the countryside is where they go for leisure whereas I have a day job. I have worked in wildlife conservation for over twenty years. My experience of the countryside is not as a pristine wilderness but as a place where people live and work.

Given that Donaldson posits the marshes as a place where people live and work, it is only to be expected that her memoir covers that many human stories, which inevitably contain conflicts peculiar to human. Hubbard and Wilkinson argue that Donaldson's walk engages with gendered and classed assumptions (259). In fact, Donaldson's interest in human dwellers of the marshes offers a critical perspective to environmental matters as something that concerns all beings equally.

Donaldson's simultaneous attention to human and non-human elements throughout her journey on the marshes is evidently an indicator of her rejection of binary oppositions like culture/nature and human/non-human, which is a tendency shared by the other new nature writers; however, her specific emphasis on human dwellers of the marshes posits her memoir within the realm of environmental justice, which is still not a prominent thread in new British nature writing. Rob White explains that "Environmental justice refers to the distribution of environments among peoples in terms of access to and use of specific natural resources in defined geographical areas,

and the impacts of particular social practices and environmental hazards on specific human populations” (43). According to White, these specific human populations, mostly defined on the basis of class, occupation, gender, age and ethnicity, are more affected by environmental ills than other people (43). This is the reason why people’s relationship with the environment started to be seen as a matter of justice: Due to class, gender, race or ethnicity, some people suffer more from the consequences of the environmentally hazardous actions, which they may not have taken themselves.

In the US, where environmental justice is protected by laws, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts defines environmental justice as follows: “Environmental justice is based on the principle that all people have a right to be protected from environmental pollution and live in and enjoy a clean and healthful environment” (qtd. in Agyeman and Evans 156). Apparently, in most environmental justice discussions, including the ones referred to in this study, humans’ health and well-being come to the forefront while non-human nature is situated as a resource at their disposal. From this perspective, environmental justice seems to have an anthropocentric agenda, which is something most contemporary nature writers try to avoid. Nevertheless, the problems raised by environmental justice activists do exist. Beyond that, environmental injustices are not new although, as White informs us, the world has been introduced to environmental rights as an extension of human rights in the last quarter of the twentieth century (44). Some claim that people have been exposed to environmental injustices since the time of Columbus around 1492 (Agyeman and Evans 156). After so many studies about environmental inequalities and some governments’ attempts to deal with environmental injustices⁵², one can no longer afford to ignore the fact that there have been injustices in humans’ access to nature as well as in their exposure to environmental hazards caused by their kind. As Buell envisaged, ecocriticism in the twenty-first century is turning our attention to humankind’s responsibility to act upon environmental injustices (*The Future* 133). Thus, Donaldson’s interest in the human condition on the marshes looks as timely as it is necessary.

⁵²For a study on the UK governments’ approach to environmental justice since 1990s, please see “‘Regulation Means Bad’: Environmental Justice in the United Kingdom.” *Achieving Environmental Justice: A Cross-National Analysis*, by Karen Bell, 1st ed., Bristol University Press, Bristol, 2014, pp. 97–118.

Donaldson's attention to the human elements of the marshes necessitates, in the first place, an understanding of plotlands in England. A peculiarly English phenomenon, plotlands are "small pieces of land laid out in regular plots on which a number of self-built settlements were established in the south-east of England from the late 1800s and up to the Second World War" ("Plotlands"). Donaldson informs the reader that when they first appeared, plotlands were bought by poor people who needed an escape from "the hated workhouses" and wished to live by "keeping chickens" or "growing vegetables" (*On the Marshes* 30). In 1920s the possibility of buying a weekend house in the countryside attracted many people who had to live in overcrowded rented accommodation (30). Underlying this phenomenon was the agricultural decline of the 1870s, which was caused partly by increased imports from British colonies and which eventually led farmers to go bankrupt and sell off their land cheaply in small plots to Londoners who were seeking affordable holiday options ("Plotlands"). Amid all these changes in the use of the land, local authorities remained reluctant to provide plotlanders with utility services: however, the latter insisted on living there simply because they could. As Donaldson puts it, "They worked out ways to help each other; what skills they lacked, they learned. Building their own houses, being self-sufficient gave them a sense of pride and satisfaction" (33).

As it is seen, Donaldson's portrayal of the plotlands in their golden era is marked by a sense of community and self-reliance, which the plotlanders of the time felt they were losing. The world Donaldson depicts is an alternative world outside the industrial society, where people are alienated from their labour and skills. The plotlands were distinct also in terms of do-it-yourself accommodation: "The plotlands took on a character of their own, some converted boats and railway carriages, whilst others built summerhouses; anything from discarded bits of mahogany joinery to sections of garden trellis were used" ("Plotlands"). Donaldson highlights this diversity: "Many people's holiday home began life as a makeshift shed but, slowly, over the years the sheds were embellished with architectural styles as varied as their owners" (*On the Marshes* 32). Donaldson is drawn to the plotlands because they gave people the chance to be self-sufficient and autonomous and connect with the physical world through their labour. Donaldson asks: "When did we stop believing that we could do things for ourselves and

instead gave the reins of our lives to others?” (*On the Marshes* 37). She needs to remain connected to herself and whatever she is doing, and the plotland life she admires offered self-sufficiency, autonomy and connection. This could be a reason why she makes mention of plotlands and pays tribute to people who lived there, primarily Lena Kennedy, a writer who chose to move to the plots in Kent with her family. However, Donaldson’s elaboration of the plotland life is more than a matter of respect.

Plotlands were a problem for city planners so much so that they were gradually “replaced with new towns and garden suburbs through compulsory purchase orders” (“Plotlands”). As a matter of fact, in the UK it has been a common charge against the planners that such restructuring plans were aimed at a systematic exclusion of poorer people from rural areas and that “countryside protection was a pretext for social exclusivity: keeping out the oiks” (Spiers 67). With the way she covers the plotlanders’ story, Donaldson takes up her position in this criticism. For example, she states that the plotlanders were forced to sell their lands on to builders for development (*On the Marshes* 39). She also shares the statements of Patrick Abercrombie, a city planner, to exemplify city planners’ hostile attitude to the plotlands: “The preserver of rural amenities cannot allow any sort of old junk cabin to deform the choicest spots” (39). Thus, Donaldson suggests that the real intention behind the expulsion of plotlanders was not to improve city planning. From her perspective, this is more of a class issue: “The fear that the working classes were arriving in places they were never meant to be persists in much of the rhetoric” (39). Hence, she is, in fact, turning plotlands into a matter of justice by featuring an example of injustice in the recent history of the UK. Environmental justice not only tries to prevent all people from being affected by environmental ‘bads’ but also necessitates an equal distribution and achievement of environmental ‘goods’ (Agyeman and Evans 156). In the case of the plotlands, however, poorer families were stopped from enjoying a direct contact with the natural world apparently to please the developers, that is the construction sector.

Such a systematized plotland settlement is now a thing of the past but forced evictions have apparently not given an end to the human settlements in the wetlands in the south-east of England. Throughout her one-year walk along the River Thames and River Medway, Donaldson encounters people who still live in the area maintaining

alternative lifestyles. The people she meets have been living in caravans, chalets, old buses, railway freight cars and houseboats and have turned wharves, reserves, woods and orchards into their habitat (Donaldson, *On the Marshes* 204). Donaldson notices that today's dwellers ended up on the marshes mainly for financial and familial reasons rather than a pressing need to retreat to the tranquillity of the marshes: "I was beginning to see a pattern. Many of the people I had met didn't consciously choose to live in a houseboat or a caravan. Instead, they had found themselves so poor they didn't have a choice. Some of these people had been enjoying fairly luxurious lifestyles before the fall" (114). Donaldson wonders "if these stories of riches to rags were a sign of the times, examples of people overstressing their credit cards and aspiring to a lifestyle that was not easy to sustain when something- divorce, redundancy, a downturn in the economy- rocked the boat" (114-15).

As a class-conscious writer, she observes that financially and socially constrained, the people currently living in the wetlands are in sharp contrast with the people living in their residents that overlook the waters: "I imagined that they felt the container homes and ramshackle sheds were spoiling the view" (*On the Marshes* 210). Though the two classes share the same habitat, the tension between them is evident. "The hard-drinking boat owners were lowering the tone in the local pub... People who lived in waterfront apartments inhabited a planet different from people who lived in a container, and the two didn't rub shoulders easily in the local boozer," notes Donaldson. She seems to be sorry for the people living on the marshes because they might be evacuated one day, for, as her friend Linda told her, "People in the new developments complained about the residents of the boatyards" (210). Donaldson asks: "If the people who currently lived at Iron Wharf were squeezed out where would they go?" (210). Obviously, she identifies with the people living on the marshes, not with the ones watching them from a distance. Here Donaldson is pointing at a problem of environmental justice again. With the way she shows the contrast between dwellers of the boatyards and waterfront apartments, Donaldson indirectly invites her readers to question: If somebody is going to make a decision about a landscape, who should that be? The ones living there, the ones watching it or the ones making money over it?

4.3.3 Justice for All: Non-human Dwellers of the Marshes

In fact, Donaldson is particularly worried about the decision-making processes when it comes to the north Kent marshes. In the first place, the reason why she wanted to walk the estuary from Gravesham to Whitstable was because she wanted to experience the land before it was too late. To be more specific, the area, where she decided to walk, was under threat from the then London mayor, Boris Johnson's desire to build an airport and from the government's plan to build roads and housing (Donaldson, *On the Marshes* 16). In fact, as Donaldson puts it, "There was another threat that was sweeping across the marshes like sea fog: the desire to tame, to sanitise and smooth away" (17). Donaldson was sad that the area was the target of politicians and constructors who did not think about the wildlife there although around three hundred thousand birds come to Thames Estuary every year (42). There were strong protests against such projects, and in early 2000s the local people and RSPB won a battle against those who wanted an airport in the area, but the government reintroduced the plan about a decade later. The UK government of the time, which had already promised to be the greenest government ever and seemed to be concerned about sustainability, proposed a sustainable transport policy which required local authorities to support strategies for the growth of ports, airports and other generators of travel (Bell 101). Donaldson's critique of the governments in this project is aimed at this very idea of progress at the expense of human and non-human lives:

The government wanted this land paved with progress in a bid to make it profitable and sanitised and serve the needs of London. It seemed to think of progress in terms of money, with little thought for the quiet pleasures that enrich life, such as villages where sparrows and dust-bathe in the road or the precious jewels of grass vetchling found in the meadows. (*On the Marshes* 42-3)

Donaldson wants north Kent marshes "as a place of sanctuary for the wildlife but also for people to come and experience the peace and the dark skies and the sound of lapwings in the spring; to forget for a moment their urban cares and twenty-first century stress and remember that life wasn't always like this and didn't have to be" (87). She rightfully asks: "Who's to say that people didn't 'need' that far more than they 'needed' another airport or Thames Crossing?" (87). As it is seen, Donaldson is critical of the

idea of growth that disregards the non-human world and calls for a reconsideration of human's relationship with the non-human.

As Donaldson meets more people during her walk in the estuary, she gets a chance to discuss the future of the marshes and realizes that the residents and visitors of the marshes fear other plans that would come along: "plans to flood the marshes, to build motorways to Essex across them, to infill the villages with houses to make one giant estate" (*On the Marshes* 247). She sees people organizing petition campaigns for the protection of the marshes because they worry that with Brexit the government would tend to care about the wildlife and nature less. Donaldson herself feels unsafe about the future of the peninsula, too: "Airport proposal followed airport proposal, followed by new roads and bridges across the river, followed by industrial states and lorry parks and housing, housing, housing" (248). She complains that the marshes, which were despised for centuries for their inclination to flooding and malaria, have now turned out to be a "prime location" as London keeps spreading. If the marshes were transformed into a settlement area or an airport, Donaldson wonders "What would happen to all the 'undesirables', the birds, the woods and all the people who already lived there and got in the way?" (248). Her protest apparently involves a call for justice for all living beings of the marshes.

Buell highlights the tension between environmental justice movement, which is mainly concerned about the rights of endangered people and moral extensionism, which favours the extension of moral values and respect to further realms of being including other species than ours (*Writing* 224-26). Given the way Donaldson sympathizes with the people of the marshes, who are financially and socially marginalised and may any time be evacuated from their dwellings, Donaldson's arguments can be considered within the sphere of environmental justice. On the other hand, as her attention is extended to the wildlife and bird colonies that are at risk because of airport and housing proposals, she appears to be getting close to moral extensionism as well. Buell argues that traditional nature writing generally concentrates on the beauty and excitement of the natural world to the extent of excluding social justice concerns as it was the case with John Muir and his disinterest in the Native American cultures that preceded him in the Sierras (*Writing* 230). According to Buell, it is only recently that literary works

began to cover an interest in the claims of environmental justice and non-anthropocentric ethics, which can be exemplified in the books of Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan, who is equally sensitive to indigenous inhabitants and massive environmental disruption in her native land (238). On the other side of the Atlantic, following this new inclination in nature writing in the US, Donaldson attempts to bring together human and non-human stories of the north Kent marshes at the junction of environmental justice and non-anthropocentric ethics. Thus, she tries to develop an all-embracing approach to the marshes, which host both humans and non-humans.

Donaldson's interest in the marshes and her call for justice for all humans and non-humans living there can be linked to her sensitivities as an ecologically oriented writer, but her own experience of injustice on the marshes is also a significant factor in her response. Donaldson lived on the marshes for two years while she was working for the RSBP. As she was happily living in her caravan in the estuary, she was suddenly informed that she had been living on a nature reserve owned by the RSBP without any planning permission, and she was, thus, obliged to leave (Donaldson, *On the Marshes* 51). This was a devastating order for her because she was fully contented with her life in the caravan. Despite her boyfriend's objections, she insisted on living there because, as she puts it, "I wanted a life under the willow tree, a life of little owls yodelling love sonnets outside my window, and mice living in the flowerpots outside my door" (15). However, this forced removal turned her life upside down. To her, the caravan was much more than a nice accommodation alternative: The caravan was the epitome of a non-conformist lifestyle outside the capitalist consumerist society, and she was deprived of this lifestyle upon a legal order. That land, where she was not allowed to live, was later on sold by RSBP to a rich farming family. Ironically enough, the farmers wanted this area with "good partridge cover" to "indulge their love of shooting" (64). As a former employee of RSBP, she had no right to buy the land from RSBP, but the rich farmers who wanted to practice shooting just bought it. This was an enormous injustice, but Donaldson could do nothing to stop it. Sometime later, when she came back to the area during her walk, she stopped by the meadow where she had parked her caravan, and in an act of rebellion, "I did something macho and primeval and correct. I peed on the spot, marking my territory, in case the farmer forgot who owned it" (*On the*

Marshes 64). She knew this was not how justice would be served, but this was all she could do.

The injustice Donaldson was subjected to is, indeed, very much related to the private property question. When Donaldson learns that she would never own the land where she had parked her caravan but a rich farming family could, she thinks of this conflict in connection with the enclosures in the history of the country, which was, as mentioned earlier in this study, a subject handled by Raymond Williams in his critique of the nostalgic feelings for the countryside in *The Country and the City*. She remembers that the idea of a common land was gradually replaced with the culture of land ownership starting with the Norman conquest (*On the Marshes* 64). In other words, Donaldson is aware that there is a long history underlying modern people's limited movements out in the nature. When she and her boyfriend Connor wanted to camp, for example, they were always cautioned by "Private Keep Out" signs (65). Like Laing, who could not walk along the Ouse as freely as she wanted because of the fences and hedges, Donaldson, too, was restricted by private ownership. On the other hand, no matter how much limited by private property, Donaldson has no nostalgic dreams of a common land. As a person who likes solitude and privacy, Donaldson is not very much for a communal lifestyle, but she thinks it is everybody's right to enjoy the countryside without harm (65). As it is seen, Donaldson is preoccupied with environmental justice questions as she asks who can enjoy the countryside and how.

Moreover, when Donaldson elaborates on the issue of private property, she considers the non-human benefits, too. For example, she mentions the efforts of Swale Borough Council, the RSBP and Natural England to evacuate the plotlands on the grounds that the way the plotlanders were using the land was detrimental to its wildlife (*On the Marshes* 218-20). Although she sympathises with the people who are forced to leave the marshland, she feels sorry for the possible harm done by the dwellers to the wildlife in the area as well. The fir trees that some plot owners have planted, the scorch marks in dry grass and noisy games that the plotlanders might be playing do not escape her notice. Therefore, she believes that the Council might be right in its claims about the wildlife preservation. Still, she cannot help thinking about the people there:

In a society where people feel alienated and powerless, where so many young people suffer from depression and use drugs to escape reality, the idea of plotlands has increasing value. Self-determination and autonomy, working with your hands, being close to nature; these are things which could help many young people, the unemployed or those suffering with mental health problems to begin to grow in confidence and turn their lives around. (*On the Marshes* 221)

Donaldson's attention to anthropogenic harm on the marshes is an evident sign of her anthropocenic awareness, which is a prominent thread in new nature writing. An Essex-born woman, Donaldson has known the estuary since her childhood, so she has observed the effects of the Anthropocene on the area first-hand. To illustrate, as she gets to the River Upnor, she notes: "The river, however, had changed so much that it was hard to even remember how it had looked when I had first come here in the 1980s with my school class" (*On the Marshes* 86). Likewise, at the Sheppey Crossing by the Swale she draws attention to the fact that "what had once been an important area of saltmarsh and wintering site for around 50,000 birds was now under miles of tarmac and surrounded by razor wire" (160). She informs the reader of the Lappel Bank and the government's attitude to it: "The surrounding area had been designated as a Special Protection Area, one of the highest levels of protection we have in Britain, but the government decided to leave Lappel Bank unprotected so that they could build on it" (160). Donaldson informs her readers that the Lappel Bank issue was taken to the European Court of Justice by the RSBP, and the Court found the government guilty, but the verdict came too late and the bank was lost (160). In fact, the case was transferred to ECJ because the English courts chose not to intervene when RSBP sued the local council for not consulting them as they started construction in the area (Buxton). Richard Buxton, a lawyer who has been working in environmental law, observes that one of the biggest challenges environmental groups face in courts is "the judicial psyche that cannot conceive of nature being superior to economic interests" ("Bye Bye"). With her reactions to the legal authorities and their role in all this anthropogenic damage in her country, Donaldson invites her readers to question the attitude and responsibility of state powers towards the non-human.

All this contemplation of the human and non-human lives on the marshes and her reactions to the authorities might help to posit Donaldson alongside environmental justice advocates and moral extensionists simultaneously though it is hard to conclude that she values plotlanders' lives more than wildlife protection efforts or vice versa. She seems to be cognizant of this impasse and notes: "There must be some middle ground" (*On the Marshes* 223), but she offers none except a call for a more holistic approach to the marshes. However, this call merits credit, for Donaldson highlights the socio-ecological dimension of the marshes instead of offering a purely rhapsodic representation of the wetlands. Claiming that the problem ecocriticism faces is not the representation of the non-human nature but the politicization of the environment CherlyLousley suggests: "Rather than attending more closely to an idealized nature, people should be paying more attention to the socio-material processes by which the world we live in is transformed" (*On the Marshes* 150). In line with this suggestion, Donaldson manages to politicize the marshes with her attention to both human and non-human dwellers.

Given the way Donaldson reveals the history of plotlands and touches upon some recent discussions about the governments' plans concerning the North Kent marshes, the political aspect in *On the Marshes* is explicit. With what he calls "political jeremiad", Slovic argues that in the political mode of writing about nature, writers try to persuade their readers "to adopt a new perspective by pointing out problems with readers' current way of thinking." (qtd. in Philippon 397). Donaldson does offer such a new perspective in thinking about the marshes as detailed above. On the other hand, her writing is more than a political manifesto for the North Kent marshes. Like most her contemporaries, Donaldson has a hybrid way of writing about the natural world, and *On the Marshes* covers autobiographical elements as well as a critical perspective. In his article on ecocritical approaches and literary forms and genres, Kerridge argues that nature writing enables writers to "integrate personal stories into the wider picture provided by science and cultural history", and he emphasizes that a new commitment to environmental care can be spread by finding personal and social meanings in nature ("Ecocritical" 372). Donaldson's one-year walk on the marshes can, in fact, be read as an effort to achieve those social and personal meanings in her beloved countryside.

4.3.4 Finding a Personal Meaning on the Marshes

Donaldson's socio-ecological concerns about the marshes do not make her insensible to herself and her own struggles in life. As she makes it very clear at the beginning of her memoir, she decides to set out on a journey to the North Kent marshes, which risk being transformed for city-planning purposes, principally to "understand this place before it was lost" (*On the Marshes* 17). By undertaking this journey, she hopes to "uncover the stories of those others, those dwellers, living on the edges of the modern world" (17). "If there was a common thread, a reason that united them all, then maybe I would find it. Maybe, in finding it, I would make sense of my own story," writes Donaldson (17). She needs to make sense of her own story because her life changes very suddenly. Upon a legal order, she has to leave her caravan and her spot on the marshes and find another place to live, which was the first blow to her dream life. Soon after that evacuation, her relationship with Conner comes to an end mainly because her boyfriend did not want to pursue the same dream with her, which was the second blow. To get over these shocks, she travels to Russia and spends eighteen months there, but when she comes back, she cannot suppress her need to go back to the marshes. Thus, given the way it started, Donaldson's journey into the marshes, seems more like a therapeutic journey, throughout which she tries to reconcile with her past. Ian Carter, too, notes that Donaldson's "journey is, in part, a form of therapy as she reflects on events and takes stock of her life" ("Sunday").

No matter how hard Donaldson tries to get out of her life and relate to the people living on the marshes during her walk, there are moments in her solo journey when she cannot prevent the return of some repressed memories. For example, when she sees her caravan "stuck in a concrete courtyard next to a house" for the first time after she sold it, she sinks into the past. With such nostalgic feelings, she cannot dare enter the vehicle: "My caravan had vanished as that life had vanished. I didn't know if I wanted to step inside and see something ... something which would remind me that I once had that life and that the person I shared it with, was, in reality, still alive, not dead as I sometimes told myself" (*On the Marshes* 44). At the beginning of her journey, she seems to be mourning for the losses in her life, and it appears that she hopes this journey to be a remedy for her grief. When she leaves her old caravan behind and

moves forward to the Cooling Castle, she feels the healing effect of the meadows full of red clovers on her (*On the Marshes* 57). She arrives in a place called “home of the heron” because of the large colonies in the woods and writes:

It was both thrilling and frightening to stand on the edge of a wood on a winter’s evening and be faced with an organism so much larger than yourself. It was a rare privilege for one moment to feel your vulnerability to nature as your ancestors would have done, to know your true place on the earth as one small creature, not the God of creation that humans nowadays imagine they are. (57-8)

This idea of facing something literally bigger than herself makes her focus on the landscape and its history and helps her forget about her boyfriend and caravan for a while. As she recognizes her vulnerability and the true place of her kind on the Earth, she not only moves away from her personal trauma but also refutes “the inability to see humans as ecological and embodied” that Plumwood claims permeates western culture (*Environmental* 19).

Despite her efforts to turn her attention away from herself to the landscape and its history, her memories with Connor surface so much so that “dominating the book’s plot is the break-up of Carol’s long-term relationship” (Eagle 46). Donaldson is walking exactly in the same place where the two spent time hiking, camping and living in the caravan: “I remembered how good he had been when we were young and I had carted him on endless nature walks across bleak reserves, but I also remembered, how, after he came to live with me, he would never join me on my evening walks” (*On the Marshes* 70). Reviewing her life with Connor, she realizes that they had already been following different paths when she thought she was in a regular relationship: “When had things changed? I could not name a day or a date when things had stopped being so good, just a gradual eroding, a corrosive drip of two people trying to reconcile their differences” (70). It is only as she walks through the marshland that Donaldson can healthily re-evaluate their time together and see that Connor did hurt her psychologically with the other women in his life. “In the end, I learned it was not the women whose names you hear that you have to worry about, it is the woman whose name is never mentioned,” writes Donaldson (103). This heartbreak might be the other reason which urges her to walk. Like her predecessor Richard Mabey, who quotes in his *Nature Cure* the Roman

expression '*solvitur ambulando*', she thinks that she can "work it out by walking" (Donaldson 21).

As she approaches the end of her designated route, Donaldson meets Connor for the last time because she needs a closure (*On the Marshes* 241). She goes to that meeting with a new haircut and a nice dress thinking that this is what a woman does before such a meeting (241). During the meeting, she wonders what Connor thinks about her as he learns that she now owns a house, which was what she meticulously avoided during their relationship: "Was I, in his eyes, normal yet?" (242). Such gender-based stereotypical reactions might confuse the reader, for Donaldson's image of an independent and self-sufficient woman, who once lived on the marshes just because she wanted to connect with nature, may be weakened as she reveals her inclination towards gender clichés. In that meeting she confesses how hard it was for her to cope with the idea of split right after the night they broke up, whereas Connor calls the same night "funny": "'No Connor', I said. 'Some things may be darkly comic, but that night and what I had to deal with the next day, really isn't'" (257). In that final conversation, Donaldson does not openly say to Connor that he hurt her. She needs to recognize that he was an important person in her life. Although Donaldson thinks such an acknowledgement is necessary for a finality, she still wants a performative act to concretize this closure. After that meeting, she throws away her engagement ring to the muddy waters of the estuary in tears hoping that this would mark the end (*On the Marshes* 257).

Through these disclosures, Donaldson convinces the reader that she is not pretending to be someone else to please her readers. No matter how gender-biased they are, her revelations about her relationship might add to her candidness in her readers' eyes. In fact, as Smith and Watson say, an autobiography is meant to be read as an intersubjective process that happens within the writer/reader pact rather than a "true-or-false story" (*Reading* 13). Donaldson seems to have started this intersubjective process with the way she unveils the truths about herself. "Autobiographical truth is an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding," write Smith and Watson (*Reading* 13). Some little facts Donaldson unravels such as her phobia of daddy long -legs, her sudden cravings for a chocolate

during her walk and her need to put a lipstick in her backpack remembering her mother whose answer to all problems in her life was to “put some lippy on” help to create that shared understanding.

Besides, there are several moments during this series of walks when Donaldson complains about how hard and tiring it is to hike. For example, one day she is caught in the rain and feels “tired and hungry and cold and grumpy”, and the only thing she needs is absolutely not one step further but a hot bath and a makeshift bed (*On the Marshes* 97). Some would tend to deride Donaldson for maintaining the habits of a consumerist society or fearing an insect as a nature lover and conversationist. Yet such a reaction would be too hasty and unjustified. All these fears, complaints and needs not only break the stereotypical adventurous male wanderer image but also make the writer easy to identify with. Like Laing who repeatedly mentions the tiresomeness of hikes, Donaldson, too, admits that a walk is a physically exhausting act before being a pleasant experience in the nature. Donaldson encourages the reader with her implied message that anyone, even those with some self-indulgent pleasures and fears of the modern consumerist society can undertake such a journey out in the nature. Smith and Watson state that readers of autobiographical narratives have expectations about who is telling a particular kind of life story (*Reading* 30). As someone who knows the marshes well and likes to walk in those wetlands, Donaldson can meet the reader’s expectations, and her openness about all her physical troubles and pleasures might contribute to this match even more.

All in all, there are a lot of traces from Donaldson herself in this memoir, but it should also be acknowledged that it is “a loosely autobiographical account” (Hubbard and Wilkinson 256). *On the Marshes* is not a self-centred memoir although Donaldson expresses grief over the changes in her life and lets these past memories come to the surface during the hike. Like the other memoirs covered in this study, *On the Marshes* is a strongly relational narrative. As Smith and Watson inform, relational narratives contain extensive stories of related others (*Reading* 65). The related others in this memoir are the human and non-human dwellers of the marshes as well as the marshes themselves. The way she covers the lives of plotlanders in the past, her approach to the fragile situation of the present residents of the marshes, her reaction to the governments

and developers that prioritize economic gains over wildlife protection and her attentive eye to the effects of the Anthropocene on the area make her memoir not only relational but also political. Eagle also agrees that Donaldson is making a political call for England's waterlands, which should be appreciated: "There is a fundamental need to protect these fluid, liminal English edgelands and avoid the dominant agenda of development at all costs. Carol Donaldson should be applauded for standing up for wildness on the edge of the metropolis" (46).

Also, as Hubbard and Wilkinson underline, her solitary walk on the marshes can be seen as a potentially collective act because the writer tries to escape gendered conventions and obligations (259). *On the Marshes* is a political narrative from a gender perspective, too because it is a political act for a woman to head for the marshes, which are, as discussed above, highly masculinised landscapes. In fact, Donaldson herself takes such experiences in the nature and their transcription as a political act for women. She writes: "Women writers certainly have a different experience and perspective on being in the countryside and I would like to see more female nature writers in the hope that it might encourage more women to set out into the countryside on their own and discover the personal confidence that can bring" in her e-mail received by me on 26 March 2021. Thus, with her personal and political journey into England's wetlands, Donaldson not only encourages women to experience and write the countryside but also contributes to the emergence of an anthropocenic memory in her country by focusing on a conventionally downgraded landscape that has now become a target of economic and industrial interests and risks being lost to urbanisation.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation originated from the awareness that our home, the planet Earth has been facing a serious ecological crisis which needs urgent response and from the subsequent question as to whether literature can contribute to this urgently needed reaction. Partly the legacy of Romanticism and mostly ecocriticism let us conclude that the anthropocentric thought system is at the roots of the anthropogenic harm done to the planet, and this thought system needs revision so that we can leave a liveable planet for all beings. This study is based on the idea that literature can and should play an active role in revising our attitude to the natural world including us as a species, if not in physically reducing the damage we have already caused to the Earth. In fact, at the junction of literature and nature, poetry was considered for a long time as a suitable genre to elaborate on human sensitivity and attention to the non-human nature mainly under the influence of Romantic poets while sci-fi novels and films have lately formed a popular arena to alert readers to the planetary crisis. This dissertation, however, focused on eco-memoirs hypothesizing that first-person non-fiction narratives could also prove to be effective in questioning our deeply ingrained attitude to the natural world because of the writers' relational way of writing that combines subjective responses with a scientific eye.

Accordingly, this study aimed to seek an answer to the question whether a personal narrative can turn into a cultural criticism and if it can ever trigger action. For this purpose, this study first offered a survey on how the perception of nature has evolved in the west from Antiquity till now and then concentrated on eco-memoirs published in the twenty-first century mainly because it is only recently that Anthropocene, a term that shows an acceptance of human inflicted harm on the planet, has gained wide currency. Twenty-first century has so far borne witness to the rise of humankind's awareness and acceptance of the Anthropocene as well as its struggle to do something about it although it is still not the shared concern by all humans. In such a time, ecologically oriented writers would be expected to write with this awareness rather than with a self-centred approach to the beauties of the natural world, for which Romantic poets were mostly blamed.

Also, the new millennium has witnessed the revival of British nature writing, a movement which has gone under the name of new nature writing. This dissertation aimed to contribute to this revival from an academic angle by trying to identify common points observed in diverse books published in this field and discuss the effects of the Anthropocene on the writers' approach to the natural world and writing about it. Among the practitioners of new British nature writing, women writers were the special focus of this dissertation because it was considered meaningful to bring together women and nature, the two oppressed of the dualistic thought system, in the same study. Besides, it was deemed necessary to pay tribute to women writing about the natural world, for it is the white male wanderer image that has dominated nature writing in the west.

The eco-memoirs chosen for this study, namely Kathleen Jamie's *Findings*, *Sightlines* and *Surfacing*, Olivia Laing's *To the River* and Carol Donaldson's *On the Marshes* have shown that first-person non-fiction narratives might prove helpful in forming a counter narrative. In her essay trilogy Jamie offers a quite rich outlook in terms of landscape diversity. The writer's familial responsibilities seem to have played a role in her choice of landscape from her first to the last essay collection. While she was writing *Findings*, the writer was mostly at home taking care of her children although she had the chance to go on an excursion every now and then. It is observed that her inability to move freely and far caused her to write about the natural world in her vicinity, but the writer does not complain about this. She even tries to develop alternative ways of looking at the natural world with a specific attention to her immediate surroundings. Thus, *Findings* invites the reader to appreciate the natural world in everyday routine through, for example, "a weakling light, stealing into the world like a thief through a window someone forgot to close" (1), "the peregrine's thin shriek" coming from the hills (29) and dead body parts kept in the "sealed, oxygen-depleted atmosphere within the jars" in Surgeons' Hall in Edinburgh, an anatomy museum where there is still change and growth (139).

Jamie's focus on the natural world that was easily accessible to her can be seen as a challenge against the stereotypical image of a nature writer, who is, as Norbury mentioned, a male wanderer who has both the time and money to travel far to write about the natural world (*Women* 9). *Findings* shows that writing about the natural world

does not necessarily require one to travel because nature is, in fact, everywhere. This can also be read as an opposition to the instrumentalist definitions of nature as if it was an aesthetic object for the human gaze. Jamie includes a bird which was probably eaten away by carrion crows, cancerous human body parts kept in jars, the head of an Ailsa Craig gannet washed ashore in her essays. In other words, her depiction of the natural world is neither rhapsodic nor romantic. What counts as nature in *Findings* involves both human and non-human, dead or alive. For example, the bones of the dead people in Maes Howe, a Neolithic cairn from five-thousand years ago situated on mainland Orkney matter to her as much as the algae that is damaging the tomb. She pays attention to the midwinter sun, wintering geese and the lone woman walking across the farm outside the cairn. The chambered tomb hidden inside the hill is the embodiment of her all-encompassing eye: the past and the present, culture and nature, human and non-human get intermingled in the cairn. Her elaboration on a Neolithic remain invites the reader to appreciate the nature within culture and culture within nature. When viewed from this aspect, Jamie's *Findings* offers a challenge to the dualist thought system, which, ecocritics think, is at the roots of our kind's destructive approach to the earth others.

The diversity of themes covered in *Findings* might startle the reader who is expecting a plot centred on a protagonist or at least a linear structure. However, as a poet who was new to prose writing at the time, Jamie offers neither linearity nor a structured narrative in this first essay collection. The book starts with Jamie's contemplation about darkness and light that extends to a Neolithic tomb and ends with her whale-watching trip. Island birds, salmons, cetaceans, seals, human bones, anatomical specimens and dead animal body parts populate her essays, all of which are set in Scotland, her home country. On the other hand, the heterogeneous world of *Findings* contains bits and pieces from Jamie's life, too, especially when she refers to her husband's illness, her grandmother's dependency, her mother's stroke and her children's need for care. Jamie stands as the care-giver in this essay collection, where she never posits herself nor any other living being at the centre. This centreless memoir, however, follows a certain thread: As Mackay suggest, Jamie's attentiveness and respect to the non-human shape the way she writes about nature (84-92). This ecocentric

attention and respect make *Findings* a fitting example of new British nature writing, which is, as mentioned earlier, marked by writers' awareness of and anxiety about the Anthropocene. In this context, Jamie's watchful eye captures not only the diversity in nature but also the harm our kind did to it just as when she notices the loads of plastic waste driven by the winds and waves (*Findings* 60).

When *Findings* ends, the reader does not feel like s/he has come to the end of the book. In this essay collection, the reader can comfortably navigate through the pages - back and forth- without getting lost in the narrative. It can be argued that such a non-linear, fragmented and decentred narration style overlaps with new nature writing, where the attention is mostly turned to non-human. After all, non-human is not a homogeneous unity and cannot be treated as such. Plumwood argues that "Homogenisation/stereotyping occurs when differences within an Otherised group are disregarded" (*Environmental* 102), but Jamie avoids this through her essays, each of which is focused on a separate species or landscape. Therefore, Jamie's experimentation with the essay form in writing about the natural world appears to be a proper choice. This could be the reason why she maintained the same form of writing in her subsequent prose, *Sightlines*, which was published in 2012, that is seven years after *Findings*. This dissertation offered to read *Sightlines* as the continuation of *Findings* because of their similarity in terms of style and form. Also, with *Sightlines* it gets clearer that Jamie is undertaking a project: She is offering an alternative way of writing about the natural world by amalgamating personal experiences with scientific observations, consulting diverse disciplines and covering a variety of themes to show the riches of the natural world.

Sightlines is similar to *Findings* in terms of the diversity of themes as well as the fragmented, non-linear and decentred narrative structure. *Sightlines*, too, presents a polyvalent outlook of the natural world, whereby the reader is introduced to deserted Scottish islands that are home to a myriad of island birds, a pathology lab and a whale museum. Like in *Findings*, the variety in *Sightlines* helps the reader to question the exclusionary definitions of nature: While the cancerous tumours Jamie observes through the microscope in the pathology lab encourages the readers to physically look into themselves to see nature, the whale skeletons in the Hvalsalen in Bergen, Norway

reminds the reader of the atrocities its kind did to those big sea mammals. In fact, just like in *Findings*, Jamie's choice of locations in *Sightlines* attests to her rejection of culture/nature and human/non-human dualism. Also, like *Findings*, *Sightlines* avoids the romanticization of the natural world. Particularly Jamie's trips to distant Scottish islands show that an experience in the natural world is not always meant to be pleasant considering human's incapacity to resist harsh weather conditions, especially strong winds. Similarly, her experience in her friend's pathology lab offers an uncommon way of looking at nature as Jamie shows that death and decay, which do not match idyllic representations of the natural world, are part of nature. In *Findings*, Jamie's interest in dead human body parts was obvious, which was confirmed by her trip to the anatomical museum. In *Sightlines*, she maintains her interest in human body as something natural just as a whale's skeleton is.

Moreover, Jamie's ecological orientation and sensitivity to the ecological problems can be observed in *Sightlines* just like in *Findings*. Her trips to the Scottish islands, where she and her friends observe the decline in the number of birds frequenting the islands, are a first-hand proof of the anthropogenic harm done to island birds. Similarly, her visit to the whale museum in Bergen is a reminder of the destructive effects of the nineteenth century whale hunting. From this perspective, Jamie's ecological sensitivity is even more manifest in *Sightlines* than in *Findings* though the latter still offers an ecocentric approach to the natural world.

Despite all these similarities, *Sightlines* differs from *Findings* in that the former features a Jamie, who is relatively more independent and can be more mobile probably because she has fewer care-giving responsibilities. In fact, Jamie makes less mention of her family members in *Sightlines* and has a more outward look. She goes to Rona, an abandoned Scottish island in the north Atlantic to assist two friends: Stuart was there to monitor leach's petrels, which must be tracked according to the European law, and Jill was there to do archaeological research on the Ronan community who once inhabited the island (Jamie, *Sightlines* 188). She also goes to St. Kilda, another distant Scottish island, which was inhabited until the 1930 evacuation. During this trip, she joins a team of archaeologists who do research on the island and helps them with their research. In both trips, Jamie works actively on the site contributing to bird protection efforts and

archaeological research into the island's human inhabitants. In fact, in *Sightlines*, the reader is introduced to a Jamie whose combined interest in archaeology and love of nature take her to isolated islands, where she can actively be engaged in preservation and conservation efforts, be it for the human societies long gone or for the non-human that is in danger. As a person who shows amateurish interest in bird protection and archaeology, she is pleased to be working with like-minded people on those remote islands, where she can enjoy a closer contact with the non-human. From this point of view, *Sightlines* provides us with a portrayal of an activist though, as Crown indicates, Jamie does not see herself as one ("Kathleen").

The final book of the trilogy, *Surfacing*, which was published in 2019, keeps the same style and format as *Findings* and *Sightlines*. In addition, as Benjamin notes, "Kathleen Jamie's new essay collection *Surfacing* takes up the same concerns with landscape and place as her earlier books" ("Kathleen"). However, *Surfacing* differs from the two former books in two important aspects: First, probably due to her relatively advanced age, Jamie frequently turns to her past and contemplates her youth. Such an inward or retrospective look was unlike Jamie in the earlier books. Thus, the reader gets to know more about Jamie herself as she shares anecdotes from her past. *Surfacing* portrays Jamie as more carefree with her children who have grown up and her parents who have passed away one after another. Yet such lack of caregiving responsibilities does not look like a liberating force in Jamie's life. Nonetheless, as Jamie herself accepts in an interview with Barkham, they are determining factors in her life: "It's a bit silly to pretend that the complete chaos of family life is not determining what you can do" ("Kathleen"). Jamie would rather regard such gendered caregiving roles as an enriching influence as she notes in the same interview: "What I would like to think I'm doing is insisting on the validity of women's experience through different phases – young motherhood, older middle age, hopefully old age – so you have a sense of a woman's life and what you might call deep time" ("Kathleen").

On the other hand, the fact that she reveals herself more to the reader does not make this last essay collection self-centred. In fact, despite her closer look into herself as a middle-aged woman, Jamie manages to show a much more heightened sense of responsibility against the damaging effects of the Anthropocene, which is the second

difference between *Surfacing* and the other books. The biggest part of this essay collection is devoted to her experiences in Quinhagak, an Alaskan village, where she joins a team of archaeologists trying to save the artifacts buried in the ground from the global warming. In fact, the village risks being flooded by the rising sea levels, which is a consequence of climate change. Likewise, she dedicates the second biggest part to the archaeological dig in the Links of Noltland on Orkney, where they are trying to protect the remains of a Neolithic and Bronze age settlement from the strong winds, which have now become more devastating with the vegetation weathered away on the island. Like *Sightlines*, *Surfacing* portrays Jamie working on the site to preserve cultural objects from the destructive effects of natural phenomena, which are ironically the result of anthropogenic harm done to our planet. Thus, in *Surfacing* Jamie refers to the effects of the Anthropocene more manifestly. Hilbert says, in *Surfacing* Jamie maintains her engagement with the natural world and our place in it, but these last essays are more loaded with an emerging panic at the destructive effects of climate change (“In Surfacing”). Besides, her focus on the Yup’ik, the indigenous Alaskan people, adds a new perspective to her ecological concerns, namely the perspective of environmental justice which was not evident in the two earlier books. The Quinhagak case serves as an example of the vulnerability of indigenous people to environmental harms. Jamie’s coverage of this Alaskan village in her memoir is significant in the Anthropocene when the rights of the marginalized and disadvantaged people vis-à-vis environmental harms have become more of a concern.

When examined altogether, these three essay collections, which span fourteen years in Jamie’s life, reveal a gradually deepening ecological sensitivity on her side. The reader observes how Jamie transfers caregiving from family to the planet. With such a selfless and strongly relational memoir, Jamie manages to create a counter narrative that can be posited against the anthropocentric thought system. Through her observations and field works, Jamie enables the reader to question well-established dichotomies related to nature and culture. Beyond questioning, her active engagement in the preservation and conservation efforts might encourage the reader to take action. Jamie, thus, sets an example for ecologically oriented people not only because of what she writes but also because of what she does.

In fact, active engagement in environmental protection and conservation efforts is a shared tendency among new nature writers. Olivia Laing, too, was vigorously involved in environmental protection struggles, especially with her participation in the Newbury Bypass protests of 1996. Yet Laing's activist spirit is not the sole reason why her book *To the River* was included in this dissertation. *To the River* was included in this study because of the writer's focus on one single place, in her case the River Ouse. That sense of place attachment was obvious in Jamie's choice of Scottish landscape in *Findings and Sightlines*, but Laing's is much stronger. Different from Jamie, who had to be contented with Scotland because she could not move freely, Laing willingly goes back to the Ouse to forget about some crises in her life. The Ouse and its surroundings have been a familiar landscape to her since her childhood. As discussed earlier, some ecocritics like Heise favour a more universal approach to ecological issues against local orientation. Some like Roberto Dainotto even despise place attachment as a feeling that might yield to regionalism or provincialism (Tomaney 311); however, with her riparian journey along the Ouse, Laing shows us how local concerns can merge with global concerns, or how the parochial can get universal. After all, as a local, Laing observes very closely how the river has transformed into an industrial river and been polluted in years, and she also knows very well how the intervention in the riverbed has affected the surrounding towns that were often flooded. Laing's direct observations and unmediated experience of the Ouse's decline can be applied to other rivers which have been exposed to industrialization, and the reader who lives in a place subjected to the effects of pollution can more readily associate with Laing's experience by the Ouse.

On the other hand, Laing does not depict the Ouse as only an industrial river that has been manipulated by man. Like Jamie, Laing has an all-encompassing attitude, and she elaborates on the river together with its cultural aspects. To be more specific, Laing contextualizes the Ouse not only geographically but also historically by referring to several historical events that took place along the river as well as many historical, literary and scientific figures that lived in the same area. In this sense, *To the River* turns into an alternative narrative where past and present, space and time, culture and nature are all melted into each other. Her frequent allusions to other people and their lives, primarily Virginia Woolf, might at times look like a digression making the reader forget

Laing herself, but throughout the book it gets clearer that Laing's text overlaps with the context: It flows and branches out just like a river, arbitrarily and unpredictably. Bate finds the digressions in the book excessive at times ("To the River"), whereas France argues that this is an example of *écriture féminine* with its rejection of a clear timeline and plot centred on a protagonist (40). This study, however, observed that *To the River* is a fragmented story of an ecologically oriented and heart-broken woman who is deeply attached to the Ouse. Laing tries to heal by interweaving her own story with that of the Ouse, which has been her life-long shelter. Though it started as a therapeutic journey, by the end of her one-week walk Laing manages to walk out of herself as the centre of attention and offers the reader a non-anthropocentric way of looking at a river. Thus, Laing helps us see the Ouse as an entity with all the human and non-human elements it is related to rather than as a body of water that flows in England, which is something material ecocritics would appreciate.

Like Laing, Donaldson sets out on a therapeutic journey to a landscape familiar to her, namely the North Kent Marshes. Donaldson's attachment to the North Kent Marshes is as strong as Laing's to the Ouse, but Donaldson's *On the Marshes* has been covered in this study for a reason beyond place attachment: First of all, Donaldson writes about marshes. Marshes can be categorised as edgelands "characterised by warehouses, rubbish tips, road interchanges and sewage works, business parks and derelict factories, superstores and allotments, golf courses and travellers' encampments and fragmented, frequently scruffy farmland" (Shoard 74). In this regard, marshes are generally stigmatized as wastelands. "When we think of the land of Britain we think of town and village, countryside and coast. Our image of Kent is still one of towns, wealden or coastal, neatly demarcated from downs, orchards and fields," writes Shoard (75). Therefore, Donaldson's preference of the North Kent marshes against stereotypical images of the British landscape is important not only because she dignifies the undignified but also because she contributes to landscape diversity, which this dissertation aimed to offer.

Furthermore, Donaldson differs from Jamie and Laing with her attention mostly turned to human. Before she set out on this one-year walk, Donaldson had lived in a caravan on the marshes and worked for RSBP keeping tracks of the marshland

birds with her colleagues. Thus, in her experience, the area is peopled, and she inevitably includes those people in her narrative. Like in Laing's case, some problems in her life led her to embark upon this journey, but she wanted to walk the marshes also because they risk being lost to urbanisation and industrialisation soon. In addition, unlike Jamie and Laing, Donaldson offers a more structured linear organization: As she walks the marshes following a planned route, the map of which she shares with the reader immediately at the beginning of her memoir, she goes over her past few years trying to leave behind a long relationship that has just finished and also cope with the fact that she has lost her job and caravan which were both on the marshes. Donaldson's walk is obviously a reconciliation walk. She wants to reconcile with her losses exactly where they happened and then move on.

However, Donaldson's focus on her life is not self-centred because like Jamie and Laing, she manages to establish relationality with others, especially the dwellers of the marshland. Although she always remains attentive to the non-human elements of the marshes, particularly birds, she manifestly gives weight to humans because as she put in her e-mail "I have worked in wildlife conservation for over twenty years. My experience of the countryside is not as a pristine wilderness but as a place where people live and work". Throughout her walk, she tries to intertwine her own story with those of the people living on the wetlands. She offers a detailed account of the plotlanders who once retreated to the marshes for holiday as well as present dwellers of the marshes who have ended up living there for financial and familial reasons. In both cases, she draws attention to the poorer communities whose presence on the marshes is unwanted by the governments and city developers as the latter want the area for an airport or residential area with no care for its existing human or non-human habitants. This dissertation posited Donaldson's attention to the disadvantaged communities and the wildlife as an example of environmental justice, which is still not a common thread in new British nature writing. Buell notes that ecocriticism in the twenty-first century is turning our attention to humankind's responsibility to act upon environmental injustices (*The Future* 133), and with her interest in the human condition on the marshes, Donaldson seems to have adopted this critical stance.

All in all, it is observed that the writers chosen for this dissertation contribute to the emergence of an anthropocenic memory in the UK and in the world through their eco-memoirs. Regardless of their specific concerns, Jamie, Laing and Donaldson share the common ground that humankind needs to reject anthropocentrism and act by considering itself not as the ruler but as a species in the world. In other words, they all manage to develop the ecological thought as put forward by Morton:

The ecological thought is a virus that infects all other areas of thinking... Ecology isn't just about global warming, recycling and solar power- and also not just to do with everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans. It has to do with love, loss, despair, and compassion. It has to do with depression and psychosis. It has to do with capitalism and what might exist after capitalism. It has to do with amazement, open-mindedness, and wonder. It has to do with doubt, confusion and scepticism. It has to do with consciousness and awareness. It has to do with delight, beauty, ugliness, disgust, irony and pain. It has to do with race, class, and gender. It has to do with sexuality. It has to do with ideas of self and the weird paradoxes of subjectivity. It has to do with society. It has to do with coexistence. (*The Ecological* 2)

The eco-memoirs examined in this dissertation cover Morton's arguments at a number of levels though they might fall short of the "race" and "class" aspect, which is probably because the writers chosen for this study seem to be the members of the white British upper middle and middle class.

Their socio-economic status, however, has not prevented them from being actively engaged in conservation efforts either as a volunteer like Jamie and Laing or a professional like Donaldson. Therefore, it is possible to trace activism in their books, which might urge their readers to do their share. Also, these three writers, who have interwoven their own stories with that of the landscape without designating themselves as the centre of attention, have shown that the personal can be the ecological. By relating themselves to the non-human and human communities of the landscapes they are writing about, Jamie, Laing and Donaldson have all tried to reach interconnectedness, which is, as Morton argues, required by the ecological thought (*The Ecological* 15).

On the other hand, though this dissertation follows the commonly agreed ecocritical argument that “the environmental crisis is a broadly cultural issue” (Buell, *The Future* vi), it also accepts that changing the way we imagine about the natural world may not suffice itself. As Buell notes, “Imagination is one thing, enactment another” (“Can” 410). Thus, ecological thinking should imagine economic change; otherwise, it will remain as another piece of the capitalist ideology (Morton, *The Ecological* 19). One deficiency of this study could be that it does not cover books that envisage a whole restructuring of the world’s economic systems. Also, this study would be more comprehensive if it covered a more diverse profile of writers, which is, as Barkham argues, what new British nature writing still lacks: “The beautiful, mostly green-covered books about British nature share one troubling feature, however: their authors are almost universally white” (Barkham “Nature”). Yet this study hopes, with all its deficiencies, to contribute to new British nature writing and indirectly to the anthropocenic memory in the UK and in the world through the selected works of twenty-first century British women writers.

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