Experiments in Ecocriticism
Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney

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Experiments in Ecocriticism: Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This is a reading of two Anglophone poets, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes. The analysis is grounded in 'ecocriticism'. More than just critical analysis, ecocriticism seeks to draw out the relationship between poets and their environments. On a more general basis, ecocriticism addresses the relationship between nature and culture in a wider sense. This thesis follows both these strains. It brings out ideas about nature-human relations expressed in Hughes's and Heaney's poems. It also uses those same poems to make visible ways in which a certain set of ecocritical theories illuminate ideas, positions and developments with regard to the relationship between nature and culture, especially as framed by environmental crisis. It is the ambition of the thesis to pursue these two aims simultaneously, and to say something both about Hughes and Heaney as eco-poets, and about theoretical developments in the ecocritical field.

These distinguished poets, a Nobel Prize-winning Irishman, Seamus Heaney (1939-), and Ted Hughes (1930-1998), one of the 20th century's great English poets, were both born in the troubled years of the 1930s. Their lives follow the accelerating environmental crises of the 20th century. Both have been well-studied by critical thinkers before, but this thesis seeks to read their poems afresh for their understandings of local places and global crisis in the century of the environment.

Contents

Introduction

In an interview from 2008, Seamus Heaney states that "environmental issues have to a large extent changed the mind of poetry"[1]. This statement was later used by columnist Robert Butler to make the point that the "idea of going green" is about much more than changing your lightbulbs:

> Every big scientific moment is also a cultural one. The Lisbon earthquake that killed an estimated 30,000 people in 1755 gave birth to the science of seismology. It also inspired writings by Kant, Rousseau and, most famously, Voltaire, who describes the earthquake in "Candide", and the impact it had on the notion that there was a benevolent God watching over "the best of all possible worlds". A century later, the ideas in Darwin's "Origin of Species" would be played out, absorbed and contested in the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Fifty years after that, Einstein's Theory of Relativity paved the way for modernism in all the arts. [2]

The "great cultural shift" that has taken place in response to the scientific findings of the last fifty years regarding the planet's finite resources and its vulnerability to human impact could be comparable according to Butler to the Renaissance or Reformation. Such a change would have a profound effect, as Heaney recognises, on the stories we tell about the natural world.

Against this background, this thesis analyses some of Heaney's poems together with some poems by Ted Hughes from the green theoretical perspective of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, the study of literature and the environment, is a literary theory that has developed in response to the notion of modern environmental crisis. In a narrow sense, ecocritical analyses address how narratives and other forms of cultural representation influence and are affected by environmental issues and crises. In a wider sense, ecocritical theory addresses the relationship between nature and culture on a more general level, beyond that of immediate emergency.

The thesis attempts two things. First, it examines how an environmental or green perspective affects the reading of a certain selection of poems by Hughes and Heaney. Second, it uses Hughes's and Heaney's poetry as the basis for an exploration of a number of ecocritical theories and methods for analysis. The second aim involves exploring in which contexts and to what extent some specific ecocritical approaches can be seen as useful, including an indication of their implications for

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[1]   Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, London: Faber and Faber, 2008, 407.
[2]   Robert Butler, "Going Green", *Intelligent Life Magazine*, November/December 2011 (accessed 2012-01-20 at http://moreintelligentlife.com/content/ideas/robert-butler/going-green).

cultural studies beyond the scope of this thesis.

The twofold aim means that a simultaneous focus is maintained throughout the thesis on Hughes's and Heaney's poetry on the one hand, and on ecocritical theory on the other. It is not the point of this thesis to discuss explicitly environmental poetry (such as, for instance, Gary Snyder's), nor to make any normative judgement about whether Hughes's or Heaney's poetry is 'green'. Rather the aim is to examine how some of these poems can be interpreted from an ecocritical point of view, and to see what kind of ideas about nature and culture that can be brought forth by such a reading. By focusing on some specific ecocritical theories (ecocriticism is by now too large and diverse a field to adopt as a single theory or method) the thesis aims to explore these in detail and 'test' how they can be seen to be of value for practical analysis of individual poems, as well as what kind of light they shed on the relationship between nature and culture in a wider sense.

Ecocriticism

Origins

Ecocriticism began to emerge as an academic field in the late 1980s and early 1990s, primarily on the North American west coast. It reflected the wider sense of environmental concern that had been developing since the 1960s, inspired by writers such as Rachel Carson. Important predecessors to the new field include, in America, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964) and in the UK Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973). With a focus on poetry, John Elder's *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (1985) was also of importance.

The first explicit attempts to introduce ecocriticism, or a green literary criticism, as a new academic field were made in the 1990s. In the UK, Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* was published in 1991. In 1996, Bate edited a special issue of the journal *Studies in Romanticism* on the theme of Green Romanticism, introduced by an essay by Ralph Pite asking "How Green were the Romantics?"[3]. This was followed two years later by *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, a critical anthology that aimed to officially establish and define the new field. The editors of the anthology, Neil Sammells and Richard

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[3]   Ralph Pite, "How Green were the Romantics?", *Studies in Romanticism*, 35.3 Green Romanticism (1996), 357-373.

Kerridge, stated in the introduction that the book was meant "to introduce ecocriticism: the new environmentalist cultural criticism: environmentalism's overdue move beyond science, geography and social science into 'the humanities'"[4].

In the meantime, some developments had taken place in the US. In 1992, one year after Bate's book, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, known as ASLE, had been formed, and a year later the first issue of their journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, or *ISLE*, came out. In 1995, one of the most influential early works of ecocriticism appeared, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Buell's book is often paired with the anthology that followed a year later, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, as the two founding texts of ecocriticism[5]. Both *The Environmental Imagination*, which came to form the first part in Buell's trilogy of ecocriticism[6], and *The Ecocriticism Reader* continue to be cited regularly, and ASLE remains the main academic organisation for ecocritical scholars, now with affiliations all over the world, including several branches with their own journals, such as ASLE-UKI's (UK and Ireland) *Green Letters*, and EASLCE's (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and the Environment) *Ecozon@*.

While ecocriticism is a new field in some respects, it builds on much older traditions. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) Buell notes that "if environmental criticism today is still an emergent discourse it is one with very ancient roots", referring to the fact that the "idea of nature" has always been more or less prominent in literary studies[7]. What was different about early ecocriticism in the way it was formulated in the 1990s were two things: first, it signified a step away from the current modes of post-structuralist and new historicist literary theory in so far that it resisted what Buell describes as a decoupling of "the word-world [...] from the material world to the point of making it impossible to conceive of literary discourse as other than tropology or linguistic play or ideological formation" (2005, 10). In his first ecocritical study, Buell describes the same

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4 *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, London and New York, Zed Books, 1998, 5.

5 See for example, *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, ed. Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic, Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2003, xvi-xvii.

6 Together with *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and, and the Environment in the United States and Beyond* (2001) and *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005).

7 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 2.

issue by stating that "[a]ll major strains of contemporary literary theory have marginalized literature's referential dimension by privileging structure, text(uality), ideology, or some other conceptual matrix that defines the space discourse occupies apart from tactical 'reality'"; in more detail:

> New critical formalism did so by insisting that the artifact was its own world, a heterocosm. Structuralism and poststructuralism broke down the barrier between literary and non-literary, not however to rejoin literary discourse to the world but to conflate all verbal artifacts within a more spacious domain of textuality. Quarreling with this unworldliness, Marxist and Marxoid (for example, Foucaultian) models of analysis during the 1980s combined with poststructuralism in Anglo-America to generate the so-called new historicism, which set text within context. But it did so in terms of the text's status as a species of cultural production or ideological work. (1995: 178)

Many early ecocritical studies address this issue of what they see as an unjustified invalidation of the referent, what Laurence Coupe calls "the referential fallacy":

> Since the mid-1970s, much critical theory seems to have been dedicated to repudiating any such 'realisation'. In various schools – formalist, psychoanalytic, new historicist, deconstructionist, even Marxist – the common assumption has been that what we call 'nature' exists primarily as a term within a cultural discourse, apart from which it has no being or meaning. That is to say, it is a sign within a signifying system, and the question of reference must always be placed in emphatic parentheses.[8]

That parenthesis becomes problematic when literary theory is combined with environmental studies, as, as famously expressed by Kate Soper, "it is not language which has a hole in its ozone layer"[9]. Motivated by concerns for the environment, early ecocritics argued for the existence and validity of the referent, or more precisely the natural world[10].

While defining and defending this in some ways basic standpoint remains an important issue for many ecocritics, especially in the United States, it has also been contested. In *The Truth of Ecology*, Dana Phillips comments, in response to Buell's first book on ecocriticism, that "[g]iven how his

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[8] *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 2.

[9] Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p. 151.

[10] See for instance Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, or Buell's later *The Future of Environmental Criticism,* (2005).

argument develops over the course of *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell seems to want there to be a relationship between trees in literature and trees in the world closer than a relationship of mere semblance would be, whether that semblance is descriptive, iconic, or metaphorical and symbolic"[11]. In the sequel to his book, Buell responds to Phillips's assumption that "mimesis presumes the *sameness* of the representation and the represented object" (Phillips, 175) that ecocritics that insist on the text's referential dimension "work from a reductive model of mimesis which, contra *Phillips*, posits refraction but most definitely *not* 'sameness'" (2005: 32). While Buell admits that "even designedly 'realistic' texts cannot avoid being heavily mediated refractions of the palpable world", he also argues that

> [y]et it is equally clear that the subject of a text's representation of its environmental ground *matters* – matters aesthetically, conceptually, ideologically. Language never replicates extratextual landscapes, but it can be bent toward or away from them. We can see this in such basic aesthetics decisions as whether or not to foreground local toponymy, vernacularization, and indigenous names for uniquely native species. (2005: 31)

Writers' decisions on questions like these can reflect, according to Buell, "both a specifically environmentalist agenda and a more broadly cultural one" in how they "position the reader *vis-à-vis* the represented language and culture" (2005: 31-32). The chapters on Heaney in thesis will discuss this relationship between language, culture and the natural world in more detail.

The second thing that was new about ecocriticism as it was formulated in the 1990s compared to earlier studies of nature and literature was that it emerged both as a result of and in tandem with the contemporary growing environmental movement. This relationship with the broader field of environmentalism means that ecocriticism, as noted by Greg Garrard, is an "avowedly political"[12] field of criticism, similar to gender studies or postcolonial literary studies. In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty and Fromm emphasise how environmental concerns, while pervading the outside world, had until the mid-1990s remained absent from literary scholarship:

> If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed,

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[11] Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 6.
[12] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd ed., London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

you might never know that there was an earth at all.[13]

Addressing the same issue, Buell points out that

> the marked increase and sophistication of environmentality as an issue within literary and cultural studies since the 1980s […] testifies to the need to correct somehow against the marginalization of environmental issues in most versions of critical theory that dominated literary and cultural studies through the 1980s – even as "the environment" was becoming an increasingly salient public concern and a major topic of research in science, economics, law, and public policy – and certain humanities fields as well, notably history and ethics. (2005: 3)

Early ecocriticism was an attempt to address this "imbalance" (Buell 2005: 5) between increasing environmental concern and increasing marginalisation of environmental issues in literary scholarship.

Definitions

As its title suggests, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* is a study of American nature writing in general, and of Thoreau in particular. In the introduction, Buell states that "Thoreau is really more my base of operations than my main subject" (1995: 1-2). The main interest of the book is to examine "the American environmental imagination generally", with the motivation that "[i]f, as environmental philosophers contend, western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today's environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it" (1995: 2). The distinction between main subject and "base of operations" is significant, as it points to two different kinds of ecocriticism (often carried out simultaneously, as by Buell in this book). The first can be described as the study of nature in literature, referring to studies of the role and representation of nature in different kinds of texts or other forms of cultural representation. The second kind refers to the reverse, that is to the study of literature or narrative in nature, referring to studies that address the role played by representation, rhetorics and other narrative structures in the wider field of environmental studies. This kind of studies go beyond the boundaries of traditional literary studies, and may focus for instance on scientific or political discourses, looking for how ideas about nature

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[13] *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996, xvi.

and culture inform, or even cause, environmental problems[14]. Buell explains the motivation or rationale behind this second type of ecocritical study of 'literature in nature':

> Although the creative and critical arts may seem remote from the arenas of scientific investigation and public policy, clearly they are exercising, however unconsciously, an influence upon the emerging culture of environmental concern, just as they have played a part in shaping as well as merely expressing every other aspect of human culture. One obvious sense in which this is true is that we live our lives by metaphors that have come to seem deceptively transparent through long usage. Take for instance "progress," literally a procession or transit, which the democratic and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century taught us to equate with "improvement," first with political liberalization and then with technological development. Whenever we use this word, unless we put it in quotation marks, we reinforce the assumption of a link between "technology" and the "good" and the assumption that continuous technological proliferation is inevitable and proper. To state this point is not to argue the reverse, merely to call attention to the power of language. (1995: 3)

There are many other cases similar to that of "progress". As shown by Phillips, the word "ecology", for instance, is so value-laden and normative that it has the potential to distort the very science of ecology:

> ecology has come to be identified in the popular mind with such values as balance, harmony, unity, purity, health, and economy. It's fair to say that many people regard these values, however utopian they may be, as all but indisputable and as all but synonymous with the very word "ecology". Few laypersons dare to question these values publicly, and imagery expressing our collective devotion to them, and indeed to everything green, pervades our daily lives. For those who applaud the apparent improvement in our attitudes toward the natural world over the past forty years, the thought that the values of balance, harmony, unity, purity, health, and economy have something other than a transcendental basis – the thought that, unlike other utopian values, they are supported by ecology, which is to say, by all the authority of science – is a source of comfort and confidence. (42)

And of course the word "nature", as Philips also notes, "is one of philosophy's least precise and most contested terms" (32). Its different meanings have been discussed at length by, among others, Raymond Williams in *Keywords*, which states that "[n]ature is perhaps the most complex word in

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[14]   This distinction has been made, for instance, by Ursula Heise in a recent interview by Eric Paglia aired 18 September 2009 on *Think Globally Radio*. Available at http://www.thinkgloballyradio.org/, accessed 28 January 2012.

the language"[15], and Kate Soper in *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human* (1995).

In his introductory volume, Buell defines ecocriticism concisely as the "study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis" (1995: 430). The phrase "environmental praxis" indicates a subject for debate, namely regarding the extent to which scholarly ecocritical enquiry is tied to environmental activism. Positions and opinions on this issue vary. In an short essay titled "Ecocriticism as a Contribution to Consilient Knowledge", Garrard states that while ecocriticism started out as "a discourse of *value*", it has increasingly developed into "a discourse of power", a development that "risks imposing upon us as professional critics and teachers an *activist* identity"[16]. Many ecocritics are uncomfortable with such an identity and resist this development, and argue instead for a need to separate intellectual or professional pursuits from personal and political convictions. At the same time, as Garrard notes elsewhere[17], ecocritics do subscribe to a general moral objective of engaging readers to strive towards some sort of balance with nature, though what exactly that actually means remains difficult to define.

Noting that the wording of his definition has provoked "some interested observers [to express] reservations about ecocriticism as too doctrinaire", Buell defends the term as useful for identifying a certain type of critical approach: "if one thinks of it – as I am inclined to do – as a multiform inquiry extending to a variety of environmentally focused perspectives more expressive of concern to explore environmental issues searchingly than of fixed dogmas about political solutions, then the neologism becomes a useful omnibus term for subsuming a large and growing scholarly field, albeit cultivated as yet (for obvious reasons) more intensely to date in regional rather than metropolitan centers" (1995: 430).

More precisely, ecocritical approaches mentioned by Buell include the addressing of issues such as how the categories of literary theory can be restructured to better take into account the dimension of the environment, to reread literary texts with concern for the non-human environment as the main focus, and to suggest how green literary texts can help to shape public values and make visible fundamental perceptions regarding nature and humans (1995: 22).

A similar definition is made by Cheryll Glotfelty in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*.

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[15] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 2nd rev. ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, 219.
[16] Greg Garrard, "Ecocriticism as a Contribution to Consilient Knowlegde", *Ecozon@*, 1.1 (2010), 22.
[17] For instance, in an article titled "Ecocriticism and Consilience", in *The Indian Journal of Ecocriticism*, 2 (2010).

Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment", and as adopting "an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii). Ecocritical questions suggested by Glotfelty include how nature is represented in a poem, play or novel, what kinds of ecological ideas a given text presents or adopts, what role metaphors play in the development of for instance land treatment policies, how is nature writing as a genre defined, to what extent do women and men write abut nature in different ways. Moreover, Glotfelty asks, "[i]n addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category?" (xix).

With a more interdisciplinary perspective, Glotfelty suggests a broader kind of ecocritical questions such as:

> What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics? (xix)

Glotfelty proceeds to identify three sub-genres of ecocriticism: (1) studies of how nature is represented in a given text; (2) promoting nature writing as an important genre; and (3) theoretically oriented studies of "the symbolic construction of species" (xxiv).

Glotfelty's and Buell's definitions of ecocriticism are narrower than the definition proposed by British ecocritic Richard Kerridge in *Writing the Environment* a couple of years later. Kerridge sees ecocriticism as a broader form of cultural criticism of nature and the environment. In the tenth anniversary anthology of *ISLE* (2003), the American editors refer to Buell and Glotfelty, and express a wish to widen their definitions. The definition of ecocriticism in the *ISLE* anthology ends up more similar to Kerridge's than to Buell's or Glotfelty's, as the editors define ecocriticism as "the reading of any work of literature (in any genre) in an effort to discern its environmental implications", and add that they "believe that every literary work can be read from a "green" perspective, and that linguistic, conceptual, and analytical frameworks developed in any nonliterary discipline may be incorporated into an ecocritical reading"[18].

A yet broader definition is made by Greg Garrard almost a decade later in the second edition of *Ecocriticism* (2012), where the maximum possible scope of the field is described as "the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing

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[18]   Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic, "Introduction", *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, eds. Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2003, xix.

critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (2012: 5). Definitions and implications of the term 'human' in relation to the natural world are explored by scholars combining ecocriticism with thoughts from the field of posthumanism. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, Timothy Clark states that "[p]ost-humanism, strictly understood, challenges dominant conceptions of the human" so that "environmentalist arguments touch on that most immediate and seemingly apolitical issue, my immediate sense of myself as an 'I'" (65). In *What is Posthumanism?*, Cary Wolfe notes that the human/animal dichotomy depends on the repression of certain aspects of the human, "that 'the human' is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether"[19]. Posthumanism questions this dichotomy, with implications for how the term 'human' is defined in relation to other animals as well as for the rights of humans to exploit other species based on, among other things, an ethics of otherness. Wolfe argues that posthumanism suggests not just "a thematics of decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates", but furthermore signifies a change in "*how* thinking confronts that thematics" (xvi), suggesting a different order of thought, especially compared to Enlightenment thinking which, as Wolfe also notes, more than other traditions promotes a separation of humans from other species based on the ability for rational thinking. In this sense, ecocritical studies address not only the natural world, but also questions, as Garrard notes, what it means to be 'human'.

Also in *Ecocriticism*, Garrard points to an important distinction regarding the kind of problems that are relevant for ecocriticism to address, namely between "problems in ecology" and "ecological problems"[20]. Problems in ecology, according to Garrard, are scientific problems, addressed and investigated by natural scientists. Ecological problems, on the other hand, are problems that involve human as well as non-human nature. These are environmental problems, if the word environment is understood as involving both natural and cultural components, shaped by human activity. According to Garrard, "[t]o describe something as an ecological problem is to make a **normative** claim about how we would wish things to be, and while this arises out of the claims of ecological scientists, it is not defined by them" (2012: 6). Using Carson's *Silent Spring* as an example, Garrard explains this distinction further:

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[19] Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis: MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, xv.
[20] This distinction was originally proposed by John Passmore in *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974). Quote from Garrard, 2012: 6.

Carson had to investigate a problem in ecology, with the help of wildlife biologists and environmental toxicologists, in order to show that DDT was present in the environment in amounts toxic to wildlife, but *Silent Spring* undertook cultural not scientific work when it strove to argue the moral case that it *ought* not to be. The great achievement of the book was to turn a (scientific) problem in ecology into a widely perceived ecological problem that was then contested politically, legally and in the media and popular culture. Thus ecocriticism cannot contribute much to debates about problems in ecology, but it can help define, explore and even resolve ecological problems in this wider sense. (2012: 6)

The distinction is important to recognise, though the boundary may be more gradual than the description in this quote suggests.

As the broadening of the definition of the field of ecocriticism suggests, the subject has since its conception developed to include a wide variety of types of studies, referring to both critical approaches and objects of study. This variety is itself a source for debate within the field, regarding among other things the need for a commonly defined theory and method for ecocriticism. There is also some debate regarding the extent to which ecocriticism should be theorised at all, including arguments regarding whether ecocriticism could or should even be considered an anti-theory. Especially early American ecocriticism was recognised by what Buell refers to as a "resistance to prevalent models of critical theory and the quest for theory" (2005: 6), and exhibited instead a wish to re-establish a durable relationship between the literary text and the world outside it, to allow a text about nature to relate meaningfully and more or less straight-forwardly to actual nature. This position or point of view is described by others as theoretically invalid or naïve (a representative of this standpoint is Serpil Oppermann, whose views are discussed in the second chapter of this thesis).

The scepticism towards theory expressed by some early ecocritics, combined with an activist streak, caused some to accuse the emerging field of being, in Buell's words, "more an amateur enthusiasm than a legitimate new 'field'" (2005: 7). At the same time, as Buell also points out, this tendency of scepticism towards theory also signifies some of the strengths and novelties of ecocriticism, including attempts to connect academic research to public policy and advocacy (2005: 7). The move from an arguably naïve resistance to theory towards indeed a quest for theory is described by Garrard as a shift "from a predominantly 'nature-endorsing' position to a 'nature-skeptical one'", a shift that on the one hand makes ecocriticism increasingly "capable of forging

productive alliances with" other strands of literary and cultural theory, while on the other hand may imply "the possible loss of the simple normative force, affective immediacy, historical depth and complexity of nature and wilderness"[21] of early ecocritical ambitions.

In light of this development, the relationship between ecocriticism and theory remains apprehensive, as reflected in, for instance, Anthony Lioi's introduction to a "Special Forum on Ecocriticism and Theory" in a recent edition of *ISLE*. Lioi asks, symptomatically: "What is [theory] to ecocritics, besides the thing we must have, the thing we mustn't have, and the thing we can't decide if we have or not?"[22]. Notwithstanding, or perhaps as a result of, that hesitancy and confusion, many different more or less well-developed ecocritical theories are now in existence, some of which are explored in this thesis. The point is to apply and 'test', in an experimental way, how these different theories can be applied both as specific tools for environmentally oriented poetry analysis and as approaches towards a more generally applicable analysis of ideas, trends and concepts that influence the way we think about nature, culture and the environment. The word experiment is used here with its meaning in literary contexts in mind, which is opposed to how the same word is used in scientific circuits: in the natural sciences, experiment usually describes something repeatable and intersubjective, while in literary studies it suggests a one-off and unique approach, something that has not been tried before.

The theories that will be applied and tested in this way are (1) nature and religion, or ecotheology, (2) postmodern ecocriticism, (3) the relationship between narrative, technology and landscape, (4) postcolonial ecocriticism, (5) ecosemiotics, and (6) globalisation and attachment to place. Each of these theories will be introduced in more detail below. The exploration of this variety of theory reflects Buell's argument that "the story of literary ecotheory's relation to critical models has been unfolding less as a story of dogged recalcitrance – though there has been some of that – than as a quest *for* adequate models of inquiry from the plethora of possible alternatives that offer themselves from whatever disciplinary quarter", implying that "[t]he environmental turn in literary studies is best understood [...] less as a monolith than as a concourse of discrepant practices" (2005: 10).

The focus on two poets, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, is meant to provide a unifying theme amidst this multiplicity of theories. Each theory will be paired with one poet, resulting in a structural format where each poet is paired with three different theories, and alternate chapters

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[21] Greg Garrard, "Ecocriticism", *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 18.1 (2010), 18.
[22] Anthony Lioi, "An Introduction: Part I: An Alliance of the Elements", *ISLE*, 17.4 (2010), 754.

between Hughes and Heaney, so that chapter 1-Hughes, chapter 2-Heaney, chapter 3-Hughes, chapter 4-Heaney, chapter 5-Hughes, chapter 6-Heaney. Each theory has been chosen with its potential to address and bring out an important theme in the work of the poet with which it is paired in mind. To allow for a more integrated comparative discussion of the two poets as well as of the different theories, a concluding section briefly considers the different chapters and results from a wider point of view and in relation to each other.

Theory

Nature and religion

The relationship between religion and environmental crisis was introduced by Lynn White in his pioneering article "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis", published in *Science* in 1967. White introduces his argument by noting that "it was not until about four generations ago that Western Europe and North America arranged a marriage between science and technology, a union of the theoretical and the empirical approaches to our natural environment"[23]. White states that the idea "that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature can scarcely be dated before about 1850", and argues that the acceptance of this idea as the general order of things "may mark the greatest event in human history since the invention of agriculture, and perhaps in nonhuman terrestrial history as well" (1203).

According to White, it was this development that "forced the crystallization of the novel concept of ecology" (1203). In relation to this historical background, the responses to environmental crisis so far, according to White, have been too partial, addressing merely fractions or symptoms of a much larger issue. White suggests that we instead need to address the underlying patterns of thought that he argues are the cause of these recent changes:

> As a beginning we should try to clarify our thinking by looking, in some historical depth, at the presuppositions that underlie modern technology and science. Science was traditionally aristocratic, speculative, intellectual in intent; technology was lower-class, empirical, action-oriented. The quite sudden fusion of these two, towards the middle of the 19th century, is surely related to the slightly prior and contemporary democratic revolutions which, by reducing social barriers, tended to assert a functional unity of brain and hand. (1204)

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[23]   Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", *Science*, 155.3767 (1967): 1203.

White proceeds to emphasise that human behaviour "is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion" (1205). This brings him to the next point in his argument, namely that it is Christianity as a belief-system that has enabled the "marriage between science and technology", and that can therefore be defined as the underlying cause of the environmental crisis:

> The victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture. It has become fashionable today to say that, for better or worse, we live in "the post-Christian age." Certainly the forms of our thinking and language have largely ceased to be Christian, but to my eye the substance often remains amazingly akin to that of the past. Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian theology. The fact that Communists share it merely helps to show what can be demonstrated on many other grounds: that Marxism, like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy. We continue today to live, as we have lived for about 1700 years, very largely in a context of Christian axioms. (1205)

The first chapter of the thesis will take White's article as a starting point, and put it side by side with an analysis of Hughes's poetry collection *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow*, published in 1970, only three years after White's article. The main points of criticism of Christianity and science and technology put forth by White are illustrated in a different way in Hughes's poetry collection. Whether Hughes read White's article is not known, nor is it necessarily relevant, the interesting point in this chapter is that the two texts are strikingly similar in their critique of technology and Christianity as intricately related as well as inherently harmful to the environment. A comparison of the two texts shows that Hughes is able to take his argument one step further than White, as Hughes proposes an alternative view of the relationship between nature and religion to the one he critiques, and in some poems even ridicules. This view is related to, and even part of, a larger trend regarding nature and the environment that has been developing since about the time of White's article, as argued and described by Bron Taylor in *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (2010). Taylor's analysis is used in this chapter to show that Hughes's views as expressed in *Crow* form part of a larger trend related to certain kinds of environmentalisms, in an era that was particularly marked by rising and developing environmental concerns.

Postmodern ecocriticism

Despite the fact that ecocriticism emerged, in part at least, as a reaction against post-structuralist and postmodern literary studies, attempts have since been made to combine postmodern theory and environmental literary criticism and to develop what could be called a postmodern ecocriticism. Advocates for such a theory argue that ecocriticism as it currently stands is theoretically underdeveloped and too much based on a realist perspective.

In "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Environmental Practice" (2006), Serpil Oppermann argues that "[i]n a world much burdened with the wide-spread ecological crisis", early ecocriticism "signalled a new and a promising hermeneutical horizon in our interpretations and understanding of the natural world and literature"[24]. However, Oppermann proceeds to state that "since its very beginnings in the 1990s, a basic problem has decidedly threatened the expansion of ecocritical practice on theoretical grounds" (103). This problem has to do with the fact that ecocriticism has confined itself to what Oppermann refers to as "the theoretically discredited parameters of literary realism", which in turn means that ecocriticism "today finds itself struggling with hermeneutical closing as well as facing an ambivalent openness in its interpretive approach" (103). Oppermann wants to address this issue by conflating "ecocriticism with an ecocentric postmodern theory", in order "first to critique ecocriticism's realist orientation as being inappropriate for literary theorizing, second to provide a valid account of postmodernism which is more reconstructive than deconstructive in its ecological field of vision" (104).

Ecocriticism's early perspective of realist epistemology was meant, according to Oppermann, to allow it to be "an open field of inquiry" (103). However, Oppermann argues that this effort has proven paradoxical because "no interpretative theory can be conceived of without language occupying its center" (103). The view Oppermann refers to is described by Timothy Clark in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Environment*:

> A persistent target of environmental critics, especially in the 1990s, was a view of language which they attributed loosely to 'postmodern', 'deconstructive' or 'post-structuralist' theory. This is the claim that language forms a kind of cultural prison, confining its users to the specific conceptions and presumptions it projects – an argument encountered often in third- or fourth-hand accounts of thinkers such as Jacques Derrida or Jean-François Lyotard, even though their actual arguments are very different. Ecocritics saw themselves as resisting claims that 'no authoritative and definitive expression or conception of reality is possible' and that 'all we can ever perceive about the world are shadows, and that we can never escape our particular biases'. At times this led

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[24] Serpil Oppermann, "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13.2 (Summer 2006): 103.

to what are now acknowledged as ecocritical caricatures of so-called 'post-structuralism'. The relatively uncontroversial argument that human beings cannot know reality absolutely, without some cultural presuppositions, was sometimes taken to be the patently silly one of denying the existence of reality altogether.[25]

This anti-theoretical stance taken by some ecocritics has according to Oppermann limited the scope of the field. This alleged limitation is counteracted by several subsequent theoretically explorative ecocritical studies, such as Clark's *Cambridge Introduction* from 2011, Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) and Cary Wolfe's *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009). Morton anticipates accusations "of being a postmodern nihilist"[26] by stating that while he does "not believe that there is no such thing as a coral reef", he also believes that environmental art and ecocriticism "must be addressed critically" (5). Morton distinguishes between a postmodernist and a deconstructionist approach, stating that "*Ecology without Nature* is inspired by the way in which deconstruction searches out, with ruthless and brilliant intensity, points of contradiction and deep hesitation in systems of meaning" (6), and suggests that "[i]f ecological criticism had a more open and honest engagement with deconstruction, it would find a friend rather than an enemy" (6). Oppermann's attempt to develop a postmodern ecocritical method for analysis is part of this wider trend toward a more theoretically complex ecocriticism.

Like Oppermann, Phillips points out that "ecocritics have characterized postmodernism as the philosophy espoused by the opposition and hence as something to be scorned" (20). However, though Phillips would also like "to cure ecocriticism of its fundamentalist fixation on literal representation" (7), he does not share Oppermann's belief that postmodernism is the answer. Phillips explains what he sees as the most important reason for this:

> The postmodern idea about nature is that nature is largely irrelevant to today's culture both on philosophical grounds (grounds articulated by poststructuralism and similar schools of thought) and as a matter of historical fact, despite our continued interest in nature as evidenced by all those zoos, parks, books, Web sites, documentaries, and essays in ecocriticism. Postmodernists like to dismiss nature by tossing off a world-weary apothegm, implying that either you savvy nature's irrelevancy immediately or you don't get to be a postmodernist. (24)

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25 Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 46.
26 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, 6.

Having said as much, Philips also argues for an 'ecocritical epistemological anarchy', suggesting that "ecocriticism needs to be more willing to hybridize than it has been: it needs to have a heart and a brain as well as arms and legs, and as many of each as possible, and it should not hesitate to borrow additional body parts here and there as the need arises" (39).

Against that background, this chapter will attempt a postmodern ecocritical reading and analysis of some of Heaney's famous bog poems. These poems relate recent victims of violence in Northern Ireland to ancient 'bog bodies' from the Iron Ages, discovered in both Denmark and Ireland. In addition to Oppermann's argument, the analysis in this chapter will also draw on Thomas Docherty's postmodern reading of "The Grauballe Man" in an essay entitled "Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney"27. With Docherty's essay as an important starting point, the chapter will attempt both to extend his reading of "The Grauballe Man" to the other bog poems, and to align such a reading with an ecocritical point of view in order to suggest some ways in which these poems by Heaney can be seen to convey what could be described as a postmodern view of nature.

Oppermann wants to develop a "field-defining ecocritical postmodern theory which can explore the problematic relations between culture and the environment in their literary contexts" (117). It should be noted that the scope of this chapter does not include a discussion of such a general turn of ecocriticism towards postmodernism, but rather attempts to incorporate and apply some aspects of Oppermann's and other postmodernists' suggestions in a reading of these particular poems.

Narrative, Technology and Landscape

This chapter moves from abstract postmodern theory towards a more realist perspective. The framework for this chapter is the relationship between landscape, technology, and narrative as proposed and described by David Nye. Nye has examined primarily North American narrative framings of technological developments, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Nye has also introduced the concept of 'anti-landscape', defined as an area that has been damaged, often by human activities, to the extent that it no longer sustains life. The definition builds on J.B. Jackson's definition of landscape as "[a] composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence"28.

In the introduction to *Technologies of Landscape: From Reaping to Recycling*, Nye states that

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27. Thomas Docherty, "Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen, London: Macmillan, 1997, 206-222.
28. J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (1984). Quote from Nye, 1999: 3.

the social construction of landscapes "occurs on two levels, material and psychological, with a constant interplay between site and sight"[29]. Narratives play a crucial role in this interplay, as Nye points out:

> the question of who is making the narrative of a place is just as important as who constructs the physical landscape. Is the Grand Canyon described as a profitless locality that cannot support agriculture, a sublime wonder, or a potential mining site? Is the smoke of an industrial city construed as pollution or a heartening sign of prosperity? Is an exhausted open pit mine filled with water to be understood as a ravaged landscape, an industrial tourist site, or a recreation area? Is the Appalachian Trail a means to to revivify the rural economy or a way to escape into a rugged wilderness experience? (7-8)

In a subsequent book, entitled *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings*, Nye proceeds to identify three types of narratives that respond to and frame technological developments, namely (1) foundation narratives, (2) counter narratives, and (3) recovery narratives. These different types of stories respond in different ways to new technologies, and frame their effects on both human and non-human nature in sometimes even opposing ways by focusing, as Nye points out, on "particular objects while deemphasizing or even deleting others"[30].

Hughes's *Elmet* poems describe a post-industrial landscape in Yorkshire in northern England, and are well-suited for a study from the point of view of the theoretical framework developed by Nye. The two *Elmet* collections, from 1979 and 1994 (revised edition), trace the history of the Upper Calder Valley, from the last ice age through agricultural cultivation and prosperity during the industrial revolution to post-industrial and post-war decline, with emphasis on industrialisation and thereafter. This chapter uses Nye's theories to identify the types of narratives that Hughes's poems represent. Adopting Nye's 'history of technology'-approach, the *Elmet* collections are analysed not primarily on the basis of the individual poems, but with a focus on the narrative presented by the entire book. The aim is to relate the *Elmet* poems to a wider context concerning the relationship between narrative, technology and landscape.

Postcolonial ecocriticism

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29 David E. Nye, "Introduction", *Technologies of Landscape: From Reaping to Recycling*, ed. David E. Nye, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, 16.
30 David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings,* Cambridge, MA; London: MIT, 2004, 11.

When it comes to studies about place, ecocriticism and postcolonialism can be regarded to some extent as two sides of the same coin. Greg Garrard has noted that while many critics have read Heaney's poems from a (post)colonial perspective, they have failed to recognise the extent to which some of Heaney's poems about language and other colonial issues are also about ecology. Garrard notes this especially with regard to a poem from Heaney's 1972 collection *Wintering Out*, "The Backward Look"[31]. This poem intertwines a description of the flight of a snipe with references to the marginalisation or disappearance of the Irish language. Garrard notes that this and a few other similar poems in the same collection

> register Heaney's awareness of threats posed to his native environments, and in particular the danger of extinction of indigenous species. They have failed to draw much attention from critics – not one is discussed in detail in any of the major monographs on Heaney – and have also tended to be excluded from the anthologies.[32]

To the extent that they have been discussed, Garrard continues, "the fact that they allude to the issue of the Irish language seems to have drawn critics off from consideration of their literal dimensions" (194). Garrard then proceeds to discuss this set of poems in *Wintering Out* from a combined colonial and ecological perspective.

This combination is not the main topic of Garrard's texts, however, and his analysis of the relevant poems is interesting and suggestive, but not exhaustive. This chapter takes Garrard's analysis as the starting point for a longer discussion, and relates it to a wider field of a combination of postcolonial and ecocritical literary theory, as well as to more recent poems by Heaney.

Postcolonial ecocriticism, though suggested early in the history of ecocriticism[33], is a fairly recent development in a more substantial sense. In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin note regarding this, in some ways obvious, combination, that

> [d]espite the recent advances of eco/environmental criticism, English studies in general, and postcolonial studies more particularly, have yet to resituate the species boundary and environmental concerns at the center of their enquiries; yet the need to examine these interfaces between nature and culture, animal and human, is urgent and

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[31] Seamus Heaney, *Wintering Out*, London: Faber and Faber, 1972, 29-30.
[32] Garrard, Greg, "Ecological Literary Criticism: Two Case Studies", PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1999, 193.
[33] See for example Buell, 1995: 6.

never more pertinent than today. After all, postcolonialism's concerns with conquest, colonisation, racism and sexism, along with its investments in theories of indigeneity and diaspora and the relations between native and invader societies and cultures, and are also the central concerns of animal and environmental studies.[34]

This citation points, as Garrard does, to persisting marginalisation of ecological perspectives in literary analysis, and is perhaps a reason why ecological themes have been overlooked by many critics of Heaney.

The point of a postcolonial ecocriticism is not, as this chapter will demonstrate, simply to add an ecological or environmentalist perspective to existing colonial theory, but to intertwine two critical traditions so that they each contribute something new to the other. Starting from Garrard's analysis of "The Backward Look", which points towards not a complementary ecological reading of the poem but to the "infolded isomorphism" (194) of the ecological and colonial implications of the poem, this chapter will attempt to show how Heaney intertwines representations of nature with colonial suggestions in ways that point beyond the allegorical.

Ecosemiotics

Ecosemiotics combines cultural semiotics with biological semiotics, also known as biosemiotics. To start from the beginning, semiotics is the study of sign systems. Traditionally, this refers to human sign systems, such as language, gestures and so on. Biosemiotics focuses on non-human signs, that is, sign activity among plants and animals, as well as within different organisms, such as communication between cells. Biosemiotics thus includes both the inner and outer environment of organisms, from large-scale systems such as forests and oceans, to small-scale systems such as micro-organisms, all the way down to molecular levels. Ecosemiotics forms a bridge between biosemiotics and traditional cultural semiotics. Ecosemioticians may study, for instance, how non-human sign systems are interpreted into the human semiosphere. An illustrative example of a sign that changes meaning across the boundaries of different semiospheres is bird song: songs that are territorial signs in the semiosphere of birds can in the human semiosphere become signs of pastoral tranquillity and peacefulness. An ecosemiotician could for instance study how meaning is transferred, and in this case transformed, across the boundaries of different semiospheres. This chapter reads some of Hughes's animal poems from an ecosemiotic perspective in an attempt to

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[34] Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 6.

decipher the role of signs in those poems, and to see how animal signs are translated into the human semisphere.

Ecosemiotics was initiated by Winfried Nöth and Kallevi Kull in two articles in the same 1998 special issue of *Sign System Studies.* The articles were entitled "Ecosemiotics" and "Semiotic ecology: different natures in the semisphere", respectively. Attempting "to give an outline of the contours of a future ecosemiotics", Nöth tries to make an initial tentative definition, stating that "ecosemiotics is the study of the *semiotic* interrelations between organisms and their environment"[35]. It is a definition that, he points out, "presupposes that the center of interest of an ecological semiotics is not a *homo semioticus*, but more generally, an *organismus semioticus*" (1998: 333).

Ecosemiotics examines "the relationship between the organism and its environment" (Nöth, 1998: 333). Nöth points out some basic and specific questions that ecosemioticians must begin by asking, and that will determine the nature of the ecosemiotic enquiry. These include questions such as whether the relationship between an organism and its environment is "always of a semiotic nature", or if there is "at least always a semiotic aspect in this relationship", or whether "we have to distinguish between semiotic and non-semiotic environmental relationships": a different but likewise fundamental question is whether ecosemiotics should "be restricted to the study of interrelations between organisms", or if there are "also semiotic aspects in the interrelations between organisms and their nonorganic environment" (1998: 333). Nöth concludes that

> [w]hatever the answer may be, ecosemiotics will be a study in sign processes that is not restricted to arbitrary
> and artificial signs. It will also, and perhaps primarily, be concerned with natural signs mediating between the
> organism and its environment. Ecosemiotics will have to be an approach to semiosis based on the assumption of
> a very low 'semiotic threshold' between signs and nonsigns if it does not reject such a threshold altogether. (333)

In the other article from the same journal issue, Kull argues for a necessary "semiotisation of ecology"[36], but defines ecosemiotics in a "slightly different way than Nöth, developing his concept in a way which allows biosemiotics and ecological semiotics to be distinguished" (348). Kull argues that Nöth's definition is too much a synonym for biosemiotics, and wants to promote a term that focuses more on a semiotically inclined subfield of human ecology, what Nöth calls "human

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[35]   Winfried Nöth, "Ecosemiotics", *Sign System Studies*, 26, 1998, 333.
[36]   Kalevi Kull, "Semiotic ecology: different natures in the semisphere", *Sign System Studies*, 26, 347.

ecology from the semiotic point of view" (348).

Kull defines ecosemiotics as the study of "the relationship between culture and external nature":

> *Ecosemiotics* can be defined as the semiotics of relationships between nature and culture. This includes research on the semiotic aspects of the place and role of nature for humans, i.e. what is and what has been the meaning of nature for us, humans, how and in what extent we communicate with nature. Ecosemiotics deals with the semiosis going on between a human and its ecosystem, or a human in one's ecosystem. (350)

Taking this definition of ecosemiotics by Kull as his starting point, Timo Maran has developed a methodology for ecosemiotics that is used in this chapter for analysing some of Hughes's animal poems.

Maran's methodology is meant to be able to "take into account the semioticity of nature itself as well as allow analyzing the depiction of nature in the written texts"[37]. For describing the result of a combination of "the written text and the natural environment" Maran suggests the concept of "nature-text". In this chapter, this concept is used for analysing two kinds of poems by Hughes. First, there are poems that point specifically to what Maran calls an "appreciation of an alien semiotic sphere" (269). These are poems that focus on the semioticity of nature, or non-human sign activity. Secondly, the idea of the "nature-text" can be used for structurally describing the different perspectives on nature that are present in a poem about a specific aspect of non-human nature. In this regard, the analysis of the poems by Hughes in this chapter could be extended to various other study objects.

Globalisation and place attachment

A globalisation process has taken place alongside the development of modern environmentalism. In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), Ursula Heise examines how these two processes result in what she calls an "environmental imagination of the global"[38]. Globalisation, according to Heise, is now the most important organising principle for literary studies, as well as for many other fields:

> Over the last decade and a half, the concept of "globalization" has emerged as the central term around which

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[37] Timo Maran, "Towards an integrated methodology of ecosemiotics: The concept of nature-text", *Sign Systems Studies* 35.1/2, 2007, 269.

[38] Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

theories of current politics, society, and culture in the humanities and social sciences are organized. In literary and cultural studies, it is gradually replacing earlier key concepts in theories of the contemporary such as "postmodernism" and "postcolonialism." (4)

Heise is specifically interested in how environmentalism and globalisation have affected our attachments to different kinds of place, on a local versus a global level, and how this is reflected in different kinds of aesthetic representations.

Heaney's career has unfolded alongside both a process of globalisation and a developing environmental movement. This chapter takes as its starting point that this simultaneity should be reflected in Heaney's poems. The issue of place and place attachment is especially relevant in Heaney's case, as he is both an internationally renowned and well-travelled poet, but at the same time also closely associated with a particular place, and known for poems about the actual soil of that place, referring specifically to early poems such as "Digging". This chapter highlights poems from various points in Heaney's career, from the 1970s to 2010, in order to see developments of a global sense of place as described by Heise. The analysis makes use of concepts such as deterritorialisation and (eco-)cosmopolitanism, as discussed by Heise, in order to highlight ways in which Heaney's poems exemplify how a global and planetary sense of belonging can be addressed and represented. In this context concepts like identity and nationality also have some significance.

Hughes, Heaney and the environment

Hughes has expressed concerns for the environment in several ways and contexts, including poetry as well as prose. The poem "If"[39] from 1993 illustrates his concern:

> If the sky is infected
> The river has to drink it
>
> If earth has a disease which could be fatal
> The river has to drink it
>
> If you have infected the sky and the earth
> Caught its disease off you – you are the virus

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[39]   Ted Hughes, "If", *Collected Poems* (*CP*), London: Faber and Faber, 2003, 740-741.

If the sea drinks the river

And the earth drinks the sea

It is one quenching and one termination

If your blood is trying to clean itself

In the filter of your corrupted flesh

And the sores run – that is the rivers

The five rivers of Paradise

Where will you get a pure drink now?

Already – the drop has returned to the cup

Already you are your ditch, and there you drink.

This poem emphasises a view of the earth as intricately interconnected, pointing to the fact that if you pollute or "infect" one resource or area, another may become affected too, reflecting the idea of the interconnected ecosystem, similarly emphasised in, for example, *Silent Spring*. The focus on pollution, and primarily the pollution of water, reflects concerns that were expressed and debated frequently in the time leading up to the publication of this poem in the early 1990s. The poem's description of pollution is especially suggestive of acid rain, describing how "the sky is infected" by industrial emissions, which then rain down on the earth and pollute rivers and the drinking water of both people and animals. The problem of acid rain was widely recognised among scientists in the 1960s, and received significant media attention in the following decades[40]. Hughes also refers to it in an earlier poem from *Remains of Elmet*, describing

     a windowsill
Blackened with acid rain fall-out
From Manchester's rotten lung.[41]

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[40] A search for "acid rain" on Google's "Ngram Viewer" shows that the use of the term peaked in 1992, after a dramatic increase that began in the late 1970s (2012-04-25).

[41] "The Canal's Drowning Black", *CP*, 477.

The choice of the term 'fall-out' alludes to more sinister forms of pollution, from nuclear reactions. This more menacing sense is also present in "If", in the term "virus", for instance. The poem is both a literal description of the phenomenon of acid rain and a more general depiction of human recklessness and lack of regard for their environmental impact.

"If" was added to the version of *River* that was included in the 1993 collection *Three Books*, a collection of revised versions of *Remains of Elmet*, *Cave Birds* and *River*. The *River* part of this collection includes thirteen additions and nine omissions compared to the original. It also includes a section of notes explaining the background of some of the poems. The notes emphasise the connection between the health of a river and the fish that live in it, and highlight Hughes's concern for both:

> It is not easy to separate the fascination of rivers from the fascination of fish. Making dams, waterfalls, water-gardens, water-courses, is deeply absorbing play, for most of us, but the results have to be a home for something. When the water is wild, inhabitants are even more important. Streams, rivers, ponds, lakes *without fish* communicate to me one of the ultimate horrors – the poisoning of the wells, death at the source of all that is meant by water. I spent my first eight years beside the West Yorkshire River Calder – in which the only life was a teeming bankside population of brown rats. But the hillside streams and the canal held fish – including, in the canal, big but rare trout. These preoccupied me, as a lifeline might.[42]

The notes go on to record the memory of a lake being poisoned, how suddenly one day Hughes "saw all the fish in this lake bobbing their mouths at the surface; the beginning of the end":

> That same day I noticed a strange ruddy vein in the ditch water that drained from the farm buildings, two or three hundred yards away. And I registered a new smell. I traced the vein to a big stone shed,packed with sodden, dark-stained grass – reeking the new smell. It was the first silage. (184)

The revisions in the *Three Books* version of *River* further the collection's direct engagement with environmental concerns, as the addition of "If" suggests. Neil Roberts states that these poems are "more than any of Hughes's earlier poetic work, overtly engaged with ecological crisis", while Terry Gifford notes that the *Three Books* version of *River* is "more radical"[43] than the original.

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[42] Ted Hughes, *Three Books*, London: Faber and Faber, 1993, 183-184.
[43] Both quotes from Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, 57. Statement by Robert originally in Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 141.

The poem "The Black Rhino"[44] illustrates a different environmental concern. This poem by Hughes was written to support an environmental campaign to save the black rhino from extinction in Kenya:

> This is the Black Rhino, the elastic boulder, coming at a gallop.
> The boulder with a molten core, the animal missile,
> Enlarging towards you. This is him in his fame –
>
> Whose past is Behemoth, sixty million years printing the strata
> Whose present is the brain-blink behind a recoiling gunsight
> Whose future is a cheap watch shaken in your ear
>
> Listen – bedrock accompanies him, a drumbeat
> But his shadow over the crisp tangle of grass-tips hesitates, passes, hesitates, passes lightly
> As a moth at noon
>
> For this is the Black Rhino, who vanishes as he approaches
> Every second there is less and less of him
> By the time he reaches you nothing will remain, maybe, but the horn –
> an ornament for a lady's lap

This poem describes species extinction as a result of poaching and human consumerism. In *Ted Hughes*, the self-proclaimed "first 'green' biography" (Gifford 2009: 2) of Ted Hughes, Gifford states that Hughes's "work moved towards a more informed and radical engagement with environmentalism", and that "the ecological relationship between human nature and external nature is the central subject of Hughes's *oeuvre*" (139).

Whereas many analyses have discussed Hughes's poetry in relation to nature and culture, this has often been done with a limited sense of the complexity of these terms, as well as with a tendency to align the point of view of the critic with Hughes's own positions and attitudes towards these kinds of issues. This means that Hughes's depictions of nature have often been discussed from a perspective that, as Gifford points out, "combines the ecological with a notion of transcendence" (2009: 141). Gifford mentions for instance Craig Robinson's *The Shepherd of Being* (1989) and Leonard Scigaj's *Ted Hughes* (1991) as examples of this approach. Ann Skea "Regeneration in

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[44]   *CP*, 763-767.

Remains of Elmet" (1994) is another similar example.

According to Gifford, Scigaj was the first ecocritic to make a case for Hughes as an environmental writer, an 'ecopoet' as compared to just a 'nature poet'. The difference is gradual rather than categorical, but in general an ecopoet could be described as a poet with an explicit environmental and political agenda. Gary Snyder is the most obvious example of an ecopoet, as his poetry, as noted by Pite in 1996, "is almost exclusively concerned with formulating and exploring a distinctive version of deep ecology" ("How Green were the Romantics?", 359). A nature poet, on the other hand, can be described in the simplest sense as a poet writing about nature, without necessarily promoting or advocating anything.

As several critics have pointed out, Hughes was an early environmental activist and proponent, expressing concerns for the environment at least as early as the 1970s. Keith Sagar points out that in particular after he reviewed leading conservation biologist Max Nicholson's *The Environmental Revolution* in 1970, Hughes's "environmental and ecological concerns came to figure more and more centrally both in his poems and in his life, and led to his working for such organisations as the Atlantic Salmon Trust, Farms for City Children and the Sacred Earth Drama Trust (which he founded)"[45].

In the review of *The Environmental Revolution* to which Sagar refers, Hughes states:

> The story of the mind exiled from Nature is the story of Western Man. It is the story of his progressively more desperate search for mechanical and rational and symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of the Nature he has lost. The basic myth for the ideal Westerner's life is the Quest. The quest for a marriage in the soul or a physical reconquest. The lost life must be captured somehow. It is the story of spiritual romanticism and heroic technological progress. It is a story of decline. When something abandons Nature, or is abandoned by Nature, it has lost touch with its creator, and is called an evolutionary dead-end.[46]

This commentary outlines and reveals, among other things, the motivation and story line behind *Crow*, published in the same year. It also points toward Hughes's belief in an important connection between inner and outer nature, his belief that a 'mechanical' spirit will mistreat nature, while an imagination attuned to the natural world will be more spiritually harmonious. This perceived connection is also the basis for Hughes's equation of the abandonment of Nature, with a capital 'N',

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[45] Keith Sagar, "Ted Hughes", *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 28, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 643. Quote from Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, 142.

[46] Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994, 129.

with an abandonment of oneself, leading to "an evolutionary dead-end".

In *The Song of the Earth*, early ecocritic as well as Hughes scholar Jonathan Bate also notes Hughes's early concern for the environment, and the significance of his review of Nicholson's important work:

> The poetry of Hughes graphically presents a nature that is, in Tennyson's phrase, 'red in tooth and claw'. Yet whilst relishing the violence of nature's own processes, Hughes in his later years became increasingly angry about the violence wrought by man upon nature. He cared deeply about the pollution of the countryside and the decimation of Britain's wildlife population. In 1970, in the first number of a new journal called *Your Environment*, he reviewed *The Environmental Revolution* by Max Nicholson, one of the earliest books to enumerate the full extent of our ecological crisis. Here the future Poet Laureate declared his hand as a card-carrying Green. He wrote of the need to salvage 'all nature from the pressures and oversights of our runaway populations, and from the monstrous anti-Nature that we have created, the now nearly-autonomous Technosphere'.[47]

In the review, Hughes proceeds, in line with his views on the relationship between inner and outer nature, by referring to the interconnectivity of cells in the body, mice in the field, and the universe. Bate notes that while "[a] biological scientist would not be entirely happy with Hughes's spiritual claims about the mice and the cells", Hughes finds a sense of hope in the then "relatively new science of ecology" (27). Ecologists presented a model of the world in which everything is connected to everything else, and that envisions the globe as a single, fragile unit. According to Bate, "[f]or Hughes, this vision binds the ecologist to the poet" (28).

In *Stepping Stones*, a collection of interviews with Heaney conducted by Dennis O'Driscoll over a period of time, published in 2008, Heaney is asked to what extent his early awareness of environmental issues was influenced by Hughes, and their mutual friend Crooke. Heaney replies:

> Pollution, especially the pollution of rivers, was an obsession with the pair of them, and it was something I myself knew about from childhood. There was always a dread of allowing 'lint water' to get into the Moyola, since it was deadly for the fish – lint water being the water left in a flax dam after the flax had been retted. And I also remembered the sight of the first white froth floating down the Moyola after Nestlé opened their factory at Castledawson. So I was an apt pupil. (O'Driscoll, 2008: 336)

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[47]   Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, London: Picador, 2000, 27.

The river Moyola is described by Heaney in the poem "Moyulla"[48] from 2006, from *District and Circle*:

> And so what, did I hear
> somebody cry? Let them
> cry if it suits them,
> but let it be for her,
>
> her stones, her purls, her pebbles
> slicked and blurred
> with algae, as if her name
> and addressing water
>
> suffered muddying,
> her clear vowels
> a great vowel shift,
> Moyola to Moyulla.
>   ~
> Milk-fevered river.
> Froth at the mouth
> of discharge pipe,
> gidsome flotsam . . .
>
> Barefooted on the bank,
> glad-eyed, ankle-grassed,
> I saw it all
> and loved it at the time –
>
> blettings, beestings,
> creamery spillage
> on her cleanly, comely
> sally trees and alders.

Commenting on this poem, Heaney states that it "is a praise poem but it's keenly aware of 'green' issues". He also explains that he "wanted the darkening of the vowel from 'ola' to 'ulla' to suggest

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[48]   Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle*, London: Faber and Faber, 2006, 58-59.

the darkening of the ecological climate, the pollution of the river over time" (O'Driscoll, 2008: 406). This reflection of temporal development is enhanced by the fact that "Moyulla" is a rewriting of Heaney's early poem "A New Song"[49], from *Wintering Out*. In the opening of the earlier poem, the speaker recalls the beauty of the river and its immediate surroundings:

> the river's long swerve,
> A kingfisher's blue bolt at dusk
>
> And stepping stones like black molars
> Sunk in the ford, the shifty glaze
> Of the whirlpool, the Moyola
> Pleasuring beneath alder trees.

As the poem continues, the recollection of an idyllic past and place is counteracted by the speaker's memory of British presence in the area. The vowels that darken in "Moyulla" to reflect ecological degradation are in this poem juxtaposed with British consonants:

> But now our river tongues must rise
> From licking native haunts
> To flood, with vowelling embrace,
> Demesnes staked out in consonants.

Reading "Moyulla" next to "A New Song" suggests that the ecological meaning of the later poem also has political connotations. The poems offer two different counterimages to the idea of an Irish rural idyll, informed by colonial oppression and environmental degradation, respectively. Chapter 4 in this thesis will explore the relationship between these two counterimages in more detail.

The statement by Heaney quoted in the beginning of this introduction is also from *Stepping Stones* (the title of which could be taken from "A New Song"), and was made in reply to the following question posed by O'Driscoll: "*Do you think poetry can play any practical or meaningful role in changing minds and hearts on environmental issues? In the past you have conceded that no poem is strong enough to stop a a tank, so my question is: can a poem stop an SUV?*". To this question, Heaney replies:

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49   *Wintering Out*, 33.

I think that one answers itself. What has happened, however, is that environmental issues have to a large extent changed the mind of poetry. Again, it's a question of the level of awareness, the horizon of consciousness within which poet and audience can operate. There are those like Gary Snyder and Alice Oswald for whom these matters are an explicit concern, but at this stage nobody can have an uncomplicated Hopkinsian trust in the self-refreshing powers of nature. (407)

A longer ecocritical reading of Heaney has been made by Garrard as part of his doctoral thesis. Garrard examines, among other things, the theme of the "counter-pastoral" in Heaney's early poetry. According to Garrard, "[i]t is plain – and has been widely noted (Morrison, Corcoran, Andrews) – that many of Heaney's early poems belong to a counter-pastoral tradition in British poetry that has been most striking in the 20th century" (1999: 180). Hughes is also part of that tradition, and Garrard notes that with regard to Heaney's earliest collections, "[t]he influence of Hughes, and especially *Lupercal* (which Heaney read in 1962), is almost overwhelming at times" (1999: 181). An earlier observation of this counter-pastoral theme and Hughes's and Heaney's part in it is made by Gifford in *Green Voices: Understanding contemporary nature poetry* (1995). Garrard notes this earlier work, but also that while "[e]cocriticsm must concern itself with this counter-pastoral tradition", within it "only Heaney's least mature work would find a place" (1999: 182).

Apart from Garrard's analysis, it seems that little has been written about Heaney from an ecocritical perspective. Though he is often mentioned in passing, no detailed discussion of the relationship between Heaney's poetry and environmental issues and concerns at large have been carried out following Garrard's thesis and Gifford's discussion of Heaney, Hughes and a few other poets in relation to the theme of the counter-pastoral.

This thesis does not carry out an exhaustive ecocritical analysis of Heaney's or Hughes's poetic relationship with the natural world. Such an analysis would need to take a different approach from the one adopted here. The aim of this thesis is to explore individual ecocritical theories together with a selection of poems by Hughes and Heaney. Some comparative conclusions regarding Hughes's and Heaney's respective views on the relationship between nature and culture and how their work form an ecological poetics will be drawn in the last part of the thesis.

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Chapter 1:

Ecotrickster: nature and religion in Crow

Introduction

In 1967, three years before *Crow* was published, Lynn White's by now classical article about "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" appeared in the journal *Science*. In this article, White argues that modern technology and science "are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecological crisis can be expected from them alone" (1207). According to White, Christianity promotes a view of humans as essentially different from the rest of nature, with the right to dominion over the earth and its inhabitants and with the ability, ultimately, to transcend nature. As a result of those views, according to White, Christianity supports an unsustainable attitude towards the environment, and makes any improvement of the nature-human relationship difficult or impossible. White concludes that "[s]ince the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious" (1207).

According to White, the shift from paganism to Christianity signifies "the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture", and "[e]specially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" (1205). Where many other religions (pagan and most Asian religions for instance) find spirituality in nature, Christianity removes such dimensions from the earth and places them in the otherworldly, effectively separating the empirical from the spiritual.

In a study of what he calls *Dark Green Religion*, Bron Taylor notes that White's article appeared "at an auspicious cultural moment" of growing receptivity to alternative, non-Western world views:

> This period was characterized by growing receptivity to the religious beliefs and practices of indigenous and Asian peoples at the same time that many were rejecting mainstream Western religions. Fused with intensifying environmental alarm, this religion-related ferment provided fertile cultural ground for a robust debate about the relationships between people, religion, and nature.[50]

In an interview from 1980, Hughes describes views of Christianity as "just another provisional

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[50] Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 2010, 8.

myth":

> [t]here are now quite a few writers about who do not seem to belong spiritually to the Christian civilisation at all. In their world Christianity is just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit. Their world is a continuation or a re-emergence of the pre-Christian world … it is the little pagan religions and cults, the primitive religions from which of course Christianity itself grew.[51]

This chapter argues that Hughes's *Crow* is part of the late 1960s "religion-related ferment" that Taylor describes, and that the main themes of *Crow* align with White's dual criticism of Christianity and science and technology as the fundamental reasons for contemporary environmental crises. Though White's thesis sparked lively debate and his views were challenged by a number of philosophers, historians and theologians[52], reading *Crow* in relation to White's argument shows how the Crow poems can be placed on a particular side in that debate about the relationship between Western culture and the natural environment.

Through tricks and mischief, the protagonist of *Crow* reveals the separation of the physical from the spiritual as absurd. As God futilely tries to civilise Crow and teach him about the world as seen from a Christian point of view, God is repeatedly exposed as illogical, helpless and incapable. By revealing religious-based arrogance towards the natural world and its consequences, the poems counteract the Christian assumption of human superiority and divine protection. Instead, *Crow* offers an alternative, arguably more ecological, at least according to White's argument, view of humans as part of a larger, global ecosystem, ultimately exposed to indifferent and powerful forces of nature.

Crow performs this critique of Christianity and other Western world views through a trickster narrative. This chapter begins by looking at how the trickster narrative informs the *Crow* collection as a whole, and at Crow as based on a specifically Native American version of the trickster figure. Next, the main environmental narratives presented by *Crow* are highlighted. Thereafter three thematised sections examine some individual poems in more detail in order to show how and on what grounds they critique their different targets (Christianity, pastoralism, and science and technology). In a concluding section, the alternatives to Christianity that are tentatively formulated

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[51] "Ted Hughes and Crow: An Interview with Egbert Faas", reprinted in *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe*, Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980, 205.

[52] See for instance Ian Barbour, *Western Man and Environmental Ethics* (1973) or Ronald Shaiko, "Religion, Politics and Environmental Concern", *Social Science Quarterly*, 68 (1987): 244-262.

towards the end of *Crow* are discussed in relation to Taylor's definition of 'dark green religion'.

Crow the trickster

In a comprehensive study of trickster myths from 1956, Paul Radin explains the purpose and method of the trickster narrative in more detail:

> Few myths have so wide a distribution as the one, known by the name of *The Trickster*, which we are presenting here. For few can we so confidently assert that they belong to the oldest expressions of mankind. Few other myths have persisted with their fundamental content unchanged. The Trickster myth is found in clearly recognizable form among the simplest aboriginal tribes and among the complex. We encounter it among the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, the Japanese and in the Semitic world. Many of the Trickster's traits were perpetuated in the figure of the mediaeval jester, and have survived right up to the present day in the Punch-and-Judy plays and in the clown. Although repeatedly combined with other myths and frequently drastically reorganized and reinterpreted, its basic plot seems always to have succeeded in reasserting itself.[53]

The trickster itself is described by Radin as, in its most archaic, American Indian form,

> at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being. (xi)

That Hughes's Crow is such a trickster has been noted by several critics. In "*Crow*, or the Trickster Transformed", for instance, Jarold Ramsey observes:

> Who or what is Crow? In exploring his roots in world folklore, I want to insist that first and last, Crow is Ted Hughes' own astonishing invention, for his own purposes: one might say, admiringly, that he is an addition to folk-literature, not merely something borrowed from it. With this proviso in mind, we can generally identify Crow as a *Trickster*, a member in good standing of that fascinating company of beings which includes Anansi the Spider in African Literature; Loki in Norse myths; Coyote, Raven, Crow, Bluehay, Manabozho, Nanabush, and others in North American native mythology […] and somewhere more distantly, Hermes in the Greek and

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[53]   Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1956, ix.

Iblis/Satan in the Islamic and Hebraic traditions.[54]

Ramsey aslo notes that the story of *Crow* "follows very faithfully the typical incidents in a cycle of Trickster-narratives". Such typical incidents include "the wild escapades in series, causes leading to improbable effects that snowball in magnitude, maniacal pursuits, villainous transformations, the periodic Bang! that utterly destroys the protagonist, who then appears in the next scene intact, the wholesale inconsistencies between narratives – all this is standard fare in the Trickster story" (Ramsey, 176)

Though the trickster often takes the form of a specific animal, these trickster-animals are anthropomorphised creatures that while they draw on the mythology of their specific species should not, as Radin points out, be "equated with concrete animals". Rather they are figures "foreshadowing the shape of man" (x). In this way Crow is a conglomeration of trickster, crow, and man.

In "Trickster Founders of This New Earth"[55], John Gamber states that Native American tricksters "begin with the understanding that other-than-human elements comprise controlling forces over which they have, and more importantly *should* have, little power", and furthermore that the trickster "not only uses stories to con the people, but is himself a story", and as such "operates to liberate". This trickster story of liberation, according to Gamber, "counters multiple levels of confinement, internment, imprisonment, bondage, and limitation", and ultimately recreates the world: "[t]he trickster, though mischievous, is imagined to be innocent; his aim is to recreate the world, to imagine it otherwise".

In *Crow*, a study of the role of crows in different cultures and legends (not to be confused with Hughes's *Crow*), Boria Sax states that "[n]o image of an animal is simpler, more iconic, and more unmistakable"[56] than that of the crow. Part of the reason behind this striking image of the crow, according to Sax, is its reputed intelligence:

> Nature writer David Quammen has written that 'the entire clan' of corvids 'is so full of prodigious and quirky

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54 Jarold Ramsey, "*Crow*, or the Trickster Transformed", *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983, 173.

55 Paper presented at the ASLE Conference "Island Time: The Fate of Place in a Wired, Warming World", 3-6 June, 2009, Victoria, BC. The full title of the paper is "Trickster Founders of This New Earth: Excessive Nature in Vizenor's *Harold of Orange*". After the conference, I received a written but unpublished version of this paper from the author.

56 Boria Sax, *Crow*, London: Reaktion Books, 2003, 8.

behaviour that it cries out for interpretation not by an ornithologist but a psychiatrist'. His theory is that the natural intelligence of crows is far in excess of what is demanded for survival in their biological niche. The result is that they are continually bored and make up games to amuse themselves. (19)

Another reason for the frequent appearance of crows in myths and legends is its colour: Sax states that "[b]lack is the colour of earth and of the night, hence crows have often been associated with mysterious powers" (10).

Hughes, too, draws on the colour black, in lines referring to Crow flying "the black flag of himself" in "Crow Blacker Than Ever"[57], and in the very first *Crow* poem, "Two Legends"[58], which tells the story about the origins of Crow:

> Black was the without eye
> Black the within tongue
> Black was the heart
> Black the liver, black the lungs
> Unable to suck in light
> Black the blood in its loud tunnel
> Black the bowels packed in furnace
> Black too the muscles
> Striving to pull out into the light
> Black the nerves, black the brain
> With its tombed visions
> Black also the soul
> […]
> To hatch a crow, a black rainbow
> Bent in emptiness
>   over emptiness
> But flying

The anaphora of the word black emphasises its symbolic resonances, and the equivocation between that symbolism and an internal darkness creates an uncanny sense of a blackness that slips from the relative tangible reality of Crow's insides to a subjective or fantasy realm represented by the "black rainbow".

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[57] *CP*, 244.
[58] *CP*, 217.

Another of Crow's typical trickster characteristics is his appetite: Sax notes that especially in the form of a crow or raven, the Native American trickster "was notorious for his voracious appetite" (92). The indiscriminate appetite of the trickster is illustrated by the following Hopi story, summarised by Sax:

> a crow once invited his friend the hawk to dinner. Though the fastidious raptor would eat only freshly killed meat, the crow served him a greasy bullsnake that had already begun to decay. The hawk politely pretended to eat and even complimented the crow on his culinary art, while secretly plotting revenge. Soon afterwards, the hawk invited the crow to dinner, and he served a putrid dish concocted from the skin and entrails of rabbits. Instead of turning away in disgust, the crow avidly devoured the meal, leaving the hawk more infuriated than ever. (98-99)

Many of the *Crow* poems likewise refer to Crow's sometimes healthy, sometimes compulsive appetite.

Another typical trickster characteristic exhibited by Hughes's Crow is the ability to survive the most impossible situations, sometimes through luck, sometimes through metamorphosis, and sometimes even through reincarnation. This makes Crow, like other raven tricksters described by Sax, "a quintessential survivor" (96). In *Crow* this is described in lines referring to Crow as, for instance, "stronger than death", in the poem "Examination at the Womb-door"[59]:

> Who is stronger than hope? *Death*
> Who is stronger than the will? *Death*
> Stronger than love? *Death*
> Stronger than life? *Death*
>
> But who is stronger than death?
>   *Me, evidently.*
> Pass, Crow.

Sax quotes these lines in his book about crows, and states, in the section of the book that describes crows in the Twentieth century and beyond, that for Hughes the cleverness of crows is a sign of "infernal magic" (153). Sax describes Hughes's Crow as a protagonist that is "voracious and pitiless

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[59] *CP*, 218-219.

yet indestructible" (153), who, though sometimes defeated, somehow "always manages to survive" (154).

As Sax notes, even though their colour "have helped to make crows symbols of death […] few if any other birds are so lively and playful" (10). This combination of menace and playfulness, combined with what Sax refers to as crows' particular "reputation for mischief" (15) explains why crows and ravens are among the most common trickster figures, and why Hughes chose this particular figure for his purposes in *Crow*.

For Hughes, writing the songs a crow (or a trickster) would sing meant writing "songs with no music whatsoever, in a super simple and a super ugly language". Hughes explains the choice of Crow as his lead character by referring to folktales wherein

> the prince going on the adventure comes to the stable full of beautiful horses and he needs a horse for the next stage and the King's daughter advises him to take none of the beautiful horses that he'll be offered but to choose the dirty, scabby little foal. You see, I throw out the eagles and choose Crow. (Faas, 208)

With its origin in folklore and indigenous cultures, the trickster narrative is in many ways opposed to a Christian narrative and logic; the trickster figure informs a comic rather than a tragic world view, for example. Compared to Christian images of divine love and selfless acts of sacrifice and forgiveness, the trickster story is recognized, as Radin points out, by "[l]aughter, humour and irony" (x). *Crow* not only offers a critique of Christianity in the specific episodes described in the poems, but likewise through the narrative structures and devices underlying the *Crow* collection as a whole.

Crow and the environment

The underlying assumption of *Crow* is that humanity is pushing the earth towards some kind of collapse. In this sense it is an apocalyptic narrative, as seen for instance in the illustratively titled poem "A Disaster"[60]. In this poem, a 'word' comes and threatens the existence of both people and planet. The 'word' symbolises the human ability to think abstractly, making possible most primarily the development of language, but secondarily also the development of science, religion, and other ideas. The poem describes how this 'word' turns on its creator like a kind of Frankenstein's monster, causing damage both to the natural environment and to cities:

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[60] *CP*, 226-227.

There came news of a word.

Crow saw it killing men. He ate well.

He saw it bulldozing

Whole cities to rubble. Again he ate well.

He saw its excreta poisoning seas.

He became watchful.

He saw its breath burning whole lands

To dusty char.

He flew clear and peered.

At the end of the poem, the earth survives but people do not. Crow looks on while the word is

drinking out all the people

till there were none left,

all digested inside the word.

Ravenous, the word tried its great lips

on the earth's bulge, like a giant lamprey –

there it started to suck.

But its effort weakened.

It could digest nothing but people.

And so, "[i]ts era was over". The poem develops the story of the fall of man, as it describes how knowledge, in this case materialised in the form of language, represented by the word, gives rise to different ideas and developments that in time turn on the people that have created it, and destroys them. The word can be read as a representative of particular ideas or dogmas, that run their course and are then replaced by others, or it can be read as representing human intelligence in a more encompassing manner, in which case the era that is over at the end of the poem refers to the era of humanity.

In "Revenge Fable"[61], further on in the collection, both planet and people are destroyed. In this poems, 'mother' refers to mother nature and the 'person' represents people. The story tells how, in the process of trying to fight themselves free of the natural world, people lose sight of their

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[61] *CP*, 244-245.

dependence on that same earth:

> There was a person
> Could not get rid of his mother
> As if he were her topmost twig.
> So he pounded and hacked at her
> With numbers and equations and laws
> Which he invented and called truth.
> He investigated, incriminated
> And penalized her, like Tolstoy,
> Forbidding, screaming and condemning,
> Going for her with a knife,
> Obliterating her with disgusts
> Bulldozers and detergents
> Requisitions and central heating
> Rifles and whisky and bored sleep.
>
> With all her babes in her arms, in ghostly weepings,
> She died.
>
> His head fell off like a leaf.

Different from "A Disaster", in which perhaps the era of humanity ends but the earth survives, in this poem both people and planet die.

Hughes portrayal of destruction in these poems is partly influenced by William Blake, a recurring influence in Hughes's work. In *Ted Hughes and Nature*, Sagar points out that Hughes shares with Blake a view of the condition of Western man as recognised by a singularity of vision. According to Sagar, Blake saw four symptoms of this singular vision: "the deification of reason and the five senses (Locke), mechanistic science (Newton), the increasingly repressive Puritanism of the churches, and the first mills of the Industrial Revolution"[62]. These four reasons are recalled in the *Elmet* poems, as is their opposite, Blake's four-fold vision pinnacled by what Sagar describes as "a vision of the holiness of everything that lives" (2009: 53). Striving for such a vision, Hughes could be described similarly to Pite's depiction of Blake, as "a visionary celebrant of England, of field,

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[62] Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'*, Peterborough, England: Fastprint Publishing, 2009, 52.

hedgerow and county town"[63].

Both "A Disaster" and "Revenge Fable" suggest that humanity's increasing separation from the natural world will lead to their destruction. Similar images of disaster and apocalypse inform one of the most common tropes in environmentally oriented texts. Greg Garrard notes the long history of this trope:

> it seems likely that the distinctive construction of apocalyptic narratives that inflects much environmentalism today began around 1200 BCE, in the thought of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster, or Zarathustra. Notions of the world's gradual decline were widespread in ancient civilisations, but Zoroaster bequeathed to Jewish, Christian and later secular models of history a sense of urgency about the demise of the world. (2012: 93)

Further describing this trope, Garrard refers to Stephen O'Leary's characterisation of apocalyptic stories as either comic or tragic. O'Leary states that while tragedy is primarily informed by the notion of guilt, the mechanism of comedy "is recognition rather than victimage, and its plot moves not toward sacrifice but to the exposure of fallibility"[64]. Garrard adds further that while tragic time is "predetermined and epochal, always careering towards some final, catastrophic conclusion, comic time is open-ended and episodic" (2012: 95). Within the comic frames, "[h]uman agency is real but flawed", with individual characters who "are typically morally conflicted and ambiguous" (2012: 95).

This also describes the *Crow* story, in which the different poems form different episodes, humans are continually mistaken about themselves as well as about the world, and Crow, though often without a moral framework, nevertheless in some poems can be seen struggling with ethical considerations of his own behaviour (in "Crow Tyrannosaurus" for example).

Crow is thus a comic-apocalyptic narrative (in addition to its comic nature as a trickster story). While some of the individual poems, like "A Disaster" and "Revenge Fable", can be described as tragic and "careering towards some final, catastrophic conclusion", these poems are not representative of the collection as a whole, as those individual poems are contradicted by succeeding poems in which both the world and Crow appear restored.

While *Crow* adopts parts of the apocalyptic trope in its narrative structure, it also critiques that same trope based on the fact that images of apocalypse are to a significant degree informed by a

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[63] Ralph Pite, "Some Versions of Blake", *English*, XLV (1996), 176.
[64] Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millenial Rhetoric*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 68. Quote from Garrard, 2012: 95.

Christian tradition, as Garrard explains:

> Orthodox, Roman Catholic and, for the most part, Protestant Christianity has promoted comic apocalypticism. The imperatives of scriptural authority, history and popular enthusiasm have rendered the trope indispensable, but a tragic frame tends to produce either schisms or perpetual charismatic revolution, and seems unsustainable in the long term. The implications for attitudes to the natural world, moreover, seem worse in the tragic mode. We may recall Lynn White's Jr's argument that Christianity is a dangerously anthropocentric religion, and perhaps his parenthetical comment that only Zoroastrianism might be comparable to it. White draws attention to the dualistic conception of humanity and nature that the two religions share, but in addition they are both apocalyptic, which may be the key to the question of Judaeo-Christianity's contribution to environmental problems. (2012: 96)

By adopting elements of apocalypse, the *Crow* story is not always in strict opposition to the Christian narrative, but sometimes appears intertwined with it. This suggests that *Crow*, while critical of Christianity, does not succeed in freeing itself entirely from elements of Christian images. Ramsey notes this tendency when he argues that *Crow* cannot really be described as representing "a 'post-Christian view'", since even though

> the central impulse of the *Crow* poems is certainly an ingenious and unrelenting subversion of the Christian mythos, so as to reveal how it has got nearly everything wrong about Man's origins […] the violence of the subversion, the sense of overkill, in fact, indicates that for the author Christianity is still much more immediate and formidable that [sic] 'just another provisional myth'. Better to say that in these poems, Hughes tries to fight himself free of a still-prevailing Christian-humanistic frame of reference that in its omissions and distortions of human facts makes our inherently bad lot a good deal worse. (173)

Hughes's use of images of apocalypse supports Ramsey's suggestion that elements of a Christian myth still sometimes prevail in *Crow*.

In his article about the history of the ecological crisis, White estimates that the view of the earth itself as spiritual has been marginalised roughly since around the time of the middle ages. Since then humans have gradually gained knowledge about and control over the natural world, and acquired sophisticated tools with which to modify and manipulate their environment. In "Crow and Mama"[65], this development is described as humanity's imagined liberation from the earth. In this poem Crow represents humanity, while his 'mother' is the earth:

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[65] *CP*, 219-220.

When Crow cried his mother's ear
Scorched to a stump.

When he laughed she wept
Blood her breasts her palms her brow all wept blood.

He tried a step, then a step, and again a step -
Everyone scarred her face for ever

Crow moves further and further away from his mother, or at least so he thinks. He even gets into a rocket in order to get away from her, even though his "trajectory / Drilled clean through her heart". In the rocket he finally feels "cosy", due partly at least to the fact that he does "not see much": he can see only parts of the earth through portholes in the rocket, a reference perhaps to the limited or specialised view of the world represented by different disciplines of science and technology. To his shock, however, when the rocket eventually crashes on the moon, Crow finds himself crawling "out / Under his mother's buttocks".

The poem illustrates that no matter how removed humanity might think it is from the natural world, it is in fact not detached from it at all. The poem alludes to the idea of "Spaceship Earth", a term popularised by Buckminster Fuller in his book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* from 1968, just two years before *Crow* was published. The idea of "Spaceship Earth" describes a view of the planet as a limited resource on which people depend as they travel through space. In order to survive, people need to maintain stable and safe conditions, and work together with respect to the conditions set by their environment, like a crew on a spaceship. With Fuller's book, the notion of "Spaceship Earth" became a potent image of this era. Hughes's poem illustrates how, just like the idea of the spaceship suggests, humans are ultimately dependent on an isolated and limited planet: no matter how far into space humanity travels it is likely to find itself in Crow's position, crawling "out / Under his mother's buttocks".

Christianity
Like White, *Crow* argues that Christianity has contributed more than any other cultural or ideological framework to the estrangement of humanity from the natural world. The view of man as the final and finest of God's creations, superior to all other species and with the right to dominion

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over the earth results in man's view of himself as separated from rather than part of the natural world. The Christian creation story, which provides the basis for this view of man, is altered, but not beyond recognition, in the second poem in *Crow*, "Lineage"[66]. This poem draws from the genealogies in Genesis as well as from John 1.1 to set the stage for the ensuing story about the adventures of Crow:

> In the beginning was Scream
> Who begat Blood
> Who begat Eye
> Who begat Fear
> Who begat Wing
> Who begat Bone
> Who begat Granite
> Who begat Violet
> Who begat Guitar
> Who begat Sweat
> Who begat Adam
> Who begat Mary
> Who begat God
> Who begat Nothing
> Who begat Never
> Never Never Never
>
> Who begat Crow
>
> Screaming for Blood
> Grubs, crusts
>
> Anything
>
> Trembling featherless elbows in the nest's filth.

This account of creation replaces the civilised Christian 'word' with its more primal and primitive version, 'scream'. Ramsey notes that "Lineage" is a "mockery of Biblical genealogies" (178), and

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[66] *CP*, 218.

furthermore that this poem illustrates how Hughes "seems to be intent, with the help from world folklore, on re-writing portions of Creation itself so that the first story in our book of human predicaments is more consistent with the chapters in which we live" (172).

The origin of Christianity's main problem, as *Crow* sees it, is in the story about the fall from Eden. How Crow could have averted this problem is described in "A Horrible Religious Error"[67]:

> When the serpent emerged, earth-bowel brown,
> From the hatched atom
> With its alibi self twisted around it
> [...]
> God's grimace writhed, a leaf in the furnace
>
> And man's and woman's knees melted, they collapsed
> Their neck-muscles melted, their brows bumped the ground
> Their tears evacuated visibly
> They whispered 'Your will is our peace.'
>
> But Crow only peered.
>   Then took a step or two forward,
> Grabbed this creature by the slackskin nape,
>
> Beat the hell out of it, and ate it.

That the serpent emerges from a "hatched atom" rather than a hatched egg rewrites the biblical story of the tree of knowledge with references to contemporary science as well as war; the hatched atom describes nuclear fission, of nuclear bombs and radioactive decay. Like most of the other *Crow* poems, "A Horrible Religious Error" shows Crow dealing with abstract Christian issues or concepts in an exaggeratedly physical, practical and down-to-earth manner.

Further pondering the relationship between God and man, in "Crow's Theology"[68] Crow comes up with the following:

> Crow realised God loved him –

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[67] *CP*, 231.
[68] *CP*, 227.

Otherwise he would have dropped dead.
So that was proved.
Crow reclined, marvelling, on his heart-beat.

And he realised that God spoke Crow –
Just existing was his revelation.

But what
Loved the stones and spoke stone?
They seemed to exist too. –

This turn in the argument leads him to ask more radical questions:

And what spoke that strange silence
After his clamour of caws faded?

And what loved the shot pellets
That dribbled from those strung-up mummifying crows?
What spoke the silence of the lead?

He arrives at an unorthodox conclusion:

Crow realised there were two Gods –

One of them much bigger than the other
Loving his enemies
And having all the weapons.

The "much bigger" god, more powerful than the Christian God, is nature, or a 'biocentric' God. The distinction resembles the Gnostic notion that the Creator is a demiurge of quite limited power, as distinct from the true deity that exists completely aloof from, and contemptuous of, the material world. Unlike the disabled but caring Christian God, the biocentric God is mighty (it has "all the weapons") and threatening ("loving his enemies"). It does not care for humanity; for the demiurge, humans are not different from stones, lead and silence.

Throughout the *Crow* collection, several important Christian concepts are similarly questioned

and ridiculed. In "Crow's First Lesson"[69], God tries to teach Crow to say the word "love". Crow, of course, fails dramatically and excessively: instead of saying the word "love" he retches, gags, and produces first a shark and then, in quick succession, "a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito", all insects that live off humans and transmit diseases, followed by "[m]an's bodiless prodigious head" and finally "woman's vulva". The poem is a catastrophic failure on God's part: instead of cultivating Crow he is reduced to tears and cursing as he tries to separate the various body parts that have immediately begun fighting on the ground. Crow, unreformed, flies "guiltily off". The poem is a critique of theodicy, or the attempt to account for God's justice, specifically the problem of natural evil – which for Hughes includes man.

A similar failure occurs in "Crow Communes"[70]. In this poem, Crow sits on a mountain which is also God's shoulder. God, meanwhile, lies "agape, a great carcase", paralysed by Crow who has taken the form of a literal 'chip on his shoulder'. The word "agape" suggests an image of God as gaping, stupefied. The origin of the word agape, however, is "agapan", meaning love or affection, especially in the sense of a selfless and self-sacrificing Christian love. It also has a connection to early Christian love feasts, where meals were eaten in the name of Christ. "Agape", against this background, evokes God's love of humanity, as well as a more general Christian love. By pairing "agape" with "carcase", and by previous adjectives referring to God as "exhausted" and "snoring", the poem associates this meaning of "agape" with a hugely negative image of God as debilitated and selfless to the point of complete powerlessness and incapacitation.

Not surprisingly, the religious concept of agape is entirely lost on Crow, as is that of communion. Playing the part of "hierophant", meaning priest or interpreter, Crow interprets communion by simply tearing off an actual piece of God's shoulder. He eats it and confirms that "it's true, he suddenly felt much stronger". The misunderstanding, the turning of an abstract concept into physical and empirical reality, is similar to the events in "Crow's First Lesson".

In "Crow Tyrannosaurus", reflecting on Christian morality, Crow is overcome by what he suddenly perceives to be the horrors of the food chain:

> It was a cortege
> Of mourning and lament
> Crow could hear and he looked around fearfully.

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[69] *CP*, 211.
[70] *CP*, 224.

The swift's body fled past
Pulsating
With insects
And their anguish, all it had eaten.

Crow wonders if he should try to change his ways:

'Alas
Alas ought I
To stop eating
And try to become the light?'

But of course he cannot: his evolutionary predisposition outweighs his moral doubts and he is trapped by his instincts. The struggle between his instinctual and moral selves become another factor that further drives the evolution of his being, as Crow becomes all crows:

But his eye saw a grub. And his head, trapsprung, stabbed.
And he listened
And he heard
Weeping

Grubs   grubs   He stabbed   he stabbed
Weeping
Weeping

Weeping he walked and stabbed

Thus came the eye's
roundness
the ear's
deafness.

The eye's roundness evolves to spot the grubs while the ear becomes deaf in order to shut out the "mourning and lament" of the insects he eats. The moral conflict reflects, as Ramsey notes, man's

"predicament as conscious beast, human animal" (180). The contrast between Crow trying "to become the light" and the evolution of deafness so as not to hear the weeping of his prey emphasises a Darwinian over a Christian world view.

Pastoral

In relation to a Christian narrative, *Crow* also critiques a Romantic, pastoral tradition and view of nature. The pastoral tradition, perhaps especially in poetry, typically portrays nature as idyllic, pristine, and peaceful rather than violent, predatory and unpredictable. In *Crow*, this view of nature is both deceiving and dangerous, most eloquently illustrated in "Glimpse"[71]. In this poem, Crow, suddenly possessed by the spirit of Romanticism, starts to serenade the trees, with disastrous results:

> 'O leaves,' Crow sang, trembling, 'O leaves –'
>
> The touch of a leaf's edge at his throat
> Guillotined further comment.

Thus beheaded, Crow is given a lesson about the dangers of disregarding or romanticising and misinterpreting potentially deadly forces of nature.

However, even with his head cut off, Crow fails to learn his lesson, and "Glimpse" concludes with Crow continuing "to stare at the leaves / Through the god's head instantly substituted". The substitution signifies a change from one set of false beliefs to another, rather than from falsehood to truth. The poem thus critiques not only a pastoral view of nature, but the tendency to relate to nature through any sort of falsifying frame, be it pastoral, Christian or other. The glimpse in the poem's title refers to the instant between two such frames.

As a trickster figure, Crow is in himself an anti-pastoral manifestation. The poem "Crow and the Birds"[72], besides being about Crow's indiscriminate appetite, also tells a story through the change in language that occurs between the beginning and the end of the poem, suggesting a move from pastoral to anti-pastoral:

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[71] *CP*, 256.
[72] *CP*, 210.

When the eagle soared clear through a dawn distilling of emerald

When the curlew trawled in seadusk through a chime of wineglasses

When the swallow swooped through a woman's song in a cavern

And the swift flicked through the breath of a violet

[…]

Crow spraddled head-down in the beach-garbage, guzzling a dropped ice-cream.

The change from pastoral-sounding "emerald", "dawn", "seadusk" and "breath of a violet" in the first stanza to "spraddled head-down" and "guzzling" in the last line illustrates Crow's anti-pastoral character. The poem also provides Crow with a different sense of historical setting compared to the other birds: while they seem to exist in an almost timeless, perhaps mediaeval, world, Crow is always in close proximity to a human present. This setting also contributes to Crow's anti-pastoral nature.

Science and Technology

The most important subject of critique in *Crow* after Christianity (and in relation to Christianity, as suggested by White) is the field of science and technology. Where Christianity allows people to hide behind a benevolent God, science, according to *Crow*, allows people to hide behind numbers. The scientific or technological determinism criticised in *Crow* makes people slaves under their own inventions, as in the poem "Crow's Account of the Battle"[73]. This poem describes a war, suggestive of the second world war, where soldiers kill each other with increasing efficiency:

There was this terrific battle.

The noise was as much

As the limits of possible noise could take.

There were screams higher groans deeper

Than any ear could hold.

[...]

The cartridges were banging off, as planned.

The fingers were keeping things going

According to excitement and orders.

The unhurt eyes were full of deadliness.

The bullets pursued their courses

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[73] *CP*, 222-223.

Through clods of stone, earth and skin,
Through intestines, pocket-books, brains, hair, teeth
According to Universal laws.
And mouths cried 'Mamma'
From sudden traps of calculus,
Theorems wrenched men in two,
Shock-severed eyes watched blood
Squeandering from a drain pipe
Into the blanks between the stars.

The description of scientific discoveries that lead to destruction relates to the serpent emerging from "the hatched atom" in "A Horrible Religious Error", but whereas in that poem scientific destruction is merely described with biblical references, in this poem a combination of science and religion amplifies devastation:

Reality was giving its lesson,
Its mishmash of scripture and physics,
With here, brains in hands, for example,
And there, legs in a treetop.

In the end there is "no escape except into death". Once the "explosives ran out", though at first "everybody wept, / or sat, too exhausted to weep",

when the smoke cleared it became clear
This had happened too often before
And was going to happen too often in the future
And happened too easily

The story will recur because people and their memories fade too easily:

Bones were too like lath and twigs
Blood was too like water
Cries were too like silence
The most terrible grimaces too like footprints in mud

Rand Brandes notes with regard to this poem that "while there are many mini-crises throughout [*Crow*], the main ones are encapsulated in 'Crow's Account of the Battle'":

> Theorems, scripture and physics lead the self away from the instincts that make us healthy and whole. They separate us from divine creation and our natural spiritual needs. Over time and in isolation they produce a desensitized and fragmented self and society capable of unimaginable atrocities.[74]

The combination of science and technology that contributes to this development as it is portrayed in "Crow's Account of the Battle" is a relatively recent combination, according to White, who states that "[t]he emergence in widespread practice of the Baconian creed that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature can scarcely be dated before about 1850, save in the chemical industries, where it is anticipated in the 18th century" (1203). "Crow's Account of the Battle" gives a different perspective on this development, contrasting scientific objectivity with human vulnerability.

In *Crow*, the combination of science and technology not only kills humans, but also devastates the environment, as seen in poems like "Crow and Mama" and "A Disaster". White states that contemporary (late 1960s) responses to environmental problems "seem too partial, palliative, negative: ban the bomb, tear down the billboards, give the Hindus contraceptives and tell them to eat their sacred cows". Though White does not yet have a better answer, he suggests that we begin "by looking, in some historical depth, at the presuppositions that underlie modern technology and science" (1204), and proceeds to provide an overview of the origins of Western science and technology. He identifies as one pivotal moment the introduction of a new plough in the 7th century. The new plough was much more efficient than its predecessor, but it required more oxen than one household normally owned. In order to accommodate cooperation between different families fields were redistributed. According to White this meant that

> distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature. Nowhere else in the world did farmers develop any analogous agricultural implement. Is it coincidence that modern technology, with its ruthlessness toward nature, has so largely been produced by descendants of these peasants of Northern Europe? (1204)

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[74] Rand Brandes, "The anthropologist's uses of myth", *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. Terry Gifford, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 73.

White, and Hughes, would say that it is not. However, it is also worth noting in this context how the historical 'fall' of man keeps being repositioned; White mentions the 7th century, and then again the 1850s, other say the Enlightenment was critical, while Rachel Carson for instance says that the nature-human relationship is profoundly changed in the mid-20th century.

According to White the ruthlessness towards nature that was initiated in the 7th century was legitimised by the transition from paganism to Christianity. According to pagan animism, different parts of nature were guarded by different spirits, and White notes that before you cut down a tree or mined a mountain you had to placate the spirit of that particular tree or mountain. By replacing this animistic view of nature with a view that removed spirits (or saints) from the natural world to an imagined heaven, Christianity, as White puts it, "made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference" (1205).

White's argument sparked immediate debate among Judeao-Christian theologians. In 1973, in an article titled "Ecological Theology", Jack Roger's provided an overview of the twelve articles that had by then appeared in direct response to White's critique. Most responses took one of three forms: urging a different translation of the word 'dominion' in Genesis, identifying notions relevant to earth care in the Bible beyond Genesis, or emphasising the adaptability of Christian theology in response to new conditions regardless of its influence in the past. The field of eco-theology has since continued to develop. Examples of later studies include Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1992), an ambitious study that adds a feminist perspective to the analysis of the relationship between Western culture, Christianity, ecology and environmentalism, and Lionel Kochan's *Beyond the Graven Image: A Jewish View* (1998), which examines the relationship between Judaism, materiality and animism. The extent to which studies in this field oppose or agree with White varies, but they have in common the view that religious and spiritual beliefs profoundly influence our relationship with the natural environment, and therefore need to be addressed as part of the development of a more sustainable relationship between people and planet. Taylor's *Dark Green Religion*, discussed in the last section of this chapter, is another contribution to this field.

In *Crow*, the marginalisation and pushing aside of a primitive, uncivilised nature spirit by scientific and technological development is described in "Crow's Undersong"[75], which describes

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[75] *CP*, 237.

how nature (referred to as 'she') attempts but fails to enter a Western, civilised world. Unable to handle modern tools, "she cannot come all the way":

> She comes singing she cannot manage an instrument
> She comes too cold afraid of clothes
> And too slow with eyes wincing frightened
> When she looks at wheels
>
> She comes sluttish she cannot keep house
> She can just keep clean
> She cannot count she cannot last
>
> She comes dumb she cannot manage words

In spite of all these misfits and inabilities, nature is "amorous" and brings hope, as without "hope she would not have come". Without her, there would be "no crying" and "no city", as without her there would be nothing at all.

Gifford notes that "Crow's Undersong" "is Crow's attempt to envision the goddess of nature", and that the poem "is a celebration of all that remains of a raw force that is now 'under' the trappings of civilisation and conscious, rational life" (43). This "raw force" is a different expression for the spirit of nature referred to by White when he describes an animistic view of nature that has been replaced by a Christian scientific view of the world.

An alternative view on the nature-human relationship
Towards the end of *Crow*, some poems, and especially the very last poem, "Littleblood", attempt to relocate and restore the kind of animistic nature spirit described both in White's article and in "Crow's Undersong" as having been pushed aside. These poems are preceded by several poems in which Crow tries but fails to find alternatives to a Christian framework for relating to the natural environment. In "Crow and the Sea"[76], for example, Crow fails to understand or relate to the sea in any meaningful way, as the sea is just too vast for him to grasp:

> He tried ignoring the sea

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[76] *CP*, 252.

But it was bigger than death, just as it was bigger than life.

He tried talking to the sea
But his brain shuttered and his eyes winced from it as from open flame.

He tried sympathy for the sea
But it shouldered him off – as a dead thing shoulders you off.

He tried hating the sea
But instantly felt like a scrutty dry rabbit-dropping on the windy cliff.

He tried just being in the same world as the sea
But his lungs were not deep enough

And his cheery blood banged off it
Like a water-drop off a hot stove.

Finally

He turned his back and he marched away from the sea

As a crucified man cannot move.

What Crow does not realise when he turns his back and walks away from the sea is that he is inevitably walking towards a different shore. The image illustrates how the sea, and the world, is larger than Crow can apprehend. From this insight come feelings of insignificance, of his lungs being "not deep enough".

If "Crow and the Sea" illustrates the earth's incomprehensible vastness, "Crow's Nerve Fails"[77] suggests that it is nevertheless finite and vulnerable. Crow, stricken by guilt as he looks back over his own history, realises that "[h]is prison is the earth", and that his own prosperity has been at the expense of others'. As he reflects on everything he has eaten, he is, as in "Crow Tyrannosaurus", horrified:

Crow, feeling his brain slip,

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[77] *CP*, 232.

Finds his every feather the fossil of a murder.

Who murdered all these?
These living dead, that root in his nerves and his blood
Till he is visibly black?

The 'slip' signifies a sudden intrusion by a sense of morality into Crow's usually instinct-driven brain. But he also notes the inevitability of these rules of his being:

How can he fly from his feathers?
And why have they homed on him?

Is he the archive of their accusations?
Or their ghostly purpose, their pining vengeance?
Or their unforgiven prisoner?

He cannot be forgiven.
His prison is the earth. Clothed in his conviction,
Trying to remember his crimes

Heavily he flies.

Here the important Christian concept of forgiveness is contradicted; Crow cannot fly from his own feathers, the materialisation of his past crimes. The description of the feathers also demonstrates some of the many animistic (both anthropo- and zoomorphic) metaphors that are a strong presence throughout the collection: in *Crow*, everything is alive and has agency.

In "Crow Frowns"[78] the story from "Crow's Nerve Fails" is transcribed into a different kind of narrative, where Crow's adherence to the inevitable rules of his being is a source of freedom rather than guilt: in this poem, Crow's "eating is the wind", a description that puts Crow on a par with the natural elements. "Crow Frowns" concludes with a sense of wonder rather than horror at the process of evolution:

We are here, we are here.

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[78] *CP*, 234.

He is the long waiting for something
To use him for some everything
Having so carefully made him

Of nothing.

This poem suggests that Crow begins to be able to see himself as part of rather than apart from the rest of the natural world.

In "Crow Goes Hunting"[79] the word from "A Disaster" returns, this time in the form of a group of words, a hunting party ("a lovely pack"). The words are sent out by Crow to catch a fleeing hare, this poem's representative of nature. As it turns out, no matter how cunning the words and Crow are the hare is able to parry each of Crow's attacks with superior defensive tricks. The hare sets off the story as, with the pack of words on its tail, it

> converted itself to a concrete bunker.
> The words circled protesting, resounding.
>
> Crow turned the words into bombs – they blasted the bunker.
> The bits of bunker flew up – a flock of starlings.
>
> Crow turned the words into shotguns, they shot down the starlings.
> The falling starlings turned to a cloudburst.
>
> Crow turned the words into a reservoir, collecting the water.
> The water turned into an earthquake, swallowing the reservoir.
>
> The earthquake turned into a hare and leaped for the hill
> Having eaten Crow's words.
>
> Crow gazed after the bounding hare
> Speechless with admiration.

Crow enters the hunt full of confidence in his "well-trained" words with "strong teeth", dismissing his opponent with "what is a hare?" – as it turns out, the hare is indeed something, capable of

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79   *CP*, 236.

outmanoeuvring each of Crow's and his words' tricks: no human invention thought of by Crow can outmatch the forms of nature accessible to the hare as it has at its disposal all natural elements and phenomena, including rain, other animals and earthquakes. The poem recalls the story of Proteus, a sea god who can tell the future but who changes shape in order to avoid being captured and forced to do so. His name has been derived to form the adjective 'protean', meaning versatile or adaptable. The story is told by Ovid in "The Changes of Proteus" in *Metamorphoses*, a narrative of nature and animals that forms a different creation story than Genesis.

"Crow Goes Hunting" ends with Crow's defeat as the words are "eaten", reversing the outcome of "A Disaster" where the word attempts (but fails) to swallow the earth. The last line of "Crow Goes Hunting" in which Crow is "[s]peechless with admiration" evokes a sense of wonder similar to that in "Crow Frowns".

"Crow and the Sea", "Crow's Nerve Fails", "Crow Frowns" and "Crow Goes Hunting" attempt to understand nature without reference to a Christian, pastoral, or scientific deterministic framework. Instead these poems refer to other, mystical or magical views of the world, with origins other than Western. Rand Brandes observes that the trickster narrative is only one of several mythical frames that can be traced in *Crow*:

> Hughes knew from the very beginning that the vast array of myths, symbols and magical arts that he absorbed from anthropological sources from around the world would define his work and defy his audience. He enhanced these anthropological sources over time by adding a full range of materials from the occult sciences and esoteric philosophies he found in poets like W. B. Yeats and Robert Graves in addition to the depth psychology of Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade's work on comparative religion. The typically ancient and often non-Western sources that these writers mined shaped what he wrote, how he wrote and, most importantly, why he wrote. Hughes, as mythic poet, wrote to liberate and heal – the soul, the body, the mind, the community and the world. (68)

The mythical frames of reference used by Hughes can be described collectively by the term 'dark green religion', proposed by Bron Taylor. As described by Taylor, 'dark green religion' refers to a "religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care", though in Hughes's case this view of inherent worth is held in tension with a bloody version of Darwinism. Without formal texts or institutions, the 'dark green religion' described by Taylor is a view of nature that is "reinforced and spread through artistic forms that often resemble, and are sometimes explicitly designed, as religious rituals". Like *Crow*, it is a form of religion that "seeks to

destroy forms of religiosity incompatible with its own moral and spiritual perceptions" (ix).

Dark green religion has many affinities with deep ecology or ecocentrism, terms more often used in ecocritical discourse for referring to beliefs in nature's 'inherent worth'. Similar to dark green religion, Garrard points out that "[t]he notion of ecocentrism has proceeded from, and fed back into, related belief systems derived from Eastern religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism, from heterodox figures in Christianity such as St Francis of Assisi (1182-1286) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), and from modern reconstructions of American Indian, pre-Christian Wiccan, shamanistic and other 'primal' religions" (2012: 25). Garrard shares his identification of St Francis of Assisi as atypical Christian, with more in common with spiritual or animistic traditions, with White, who describes St Francis as "the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ", and as "[t]he greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history" (1206-1207). White states towards the end of his article that "Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures", that Francis's "view of nature and of man rested on a unique sort of pan-psychism of all things animate and inanimate" (1206-1207). On these grounds White proposes "Francis as a patron saint for ecologists" (1207). However, White's argument for Francis as an exception to Christianity inevitably runs up against the fact that Francis was still a Christian. On that basis, White's solution to the problem he identifies may seem inadequate, not radical enough. Hughes, in comparison, offers a solution taken entirely from outside the realm of Christianity, from a spiritual belief system based on completely different basic principles.

The difference between a 'dark green' and a simply 'green' religion is similar to the difference between a 'shallow' environmentalism as compared to a deep ecology, as described by Garrard:

> whereas 'shallow' approaches take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, deep ecology demands recognition of **intrinsic value** in nature. It identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere. (24)

Taylor notes, with similar reasoning, that 'green religion' refers to religions that have recently undertaken "internal religious reform to make their religions environmentally responsible" (12). Taylor notes that Christianity, partly in response to White's article, is one of the religions that have undertaken such green reforms. Compared to 'green religions' that attempt to be environmentally

responsible in a time of environmental crisis, 'dark green religion' refer to belief systems that are organised on a more basic level around beliefs in nature as sacred and of inherent worth.

In addition to beliefs in nature's intrinsic value, dark green religion emphasises the role of myth and ritual in formulating and mediating the relationship between man and nature. Taylor describes this spiritual approach as

> generally deep ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings. This value system is generally (1) based on a felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related; (2) accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe; and (3) reinforced by metaphysics of interconnection and the idea of interdependence (mutual influence and reciprocal dependence) found in the sciences, especially in ecology and physics. (13)

Though there is no clear cut definition that separates religion from spirituality, according to Taylor 'dark green religion' is more spiritual than religious, according to customary definitions: Taylor states that "[i]n common parlance, *religion* is often used to refer to organized and institutional religious belief and practice, while *spirituality* is held to involve one's deepest moral values and most profound religious experiences" (3). Expressed differently, spirituality in this sense can be described as having to do primarily with "personal growth and gaining a proper understanding of one's place in the cosmos, and to be intertwined with environmentalist concern and action", while "the world's predominant religions" on the other hand "are generally concerned with transcending this world or obtaining divine rescue from it" (3).

This differentiation between religion and spirituality shows that in *Crow* Hughes criticises not just Christianity but religion *per se*, as institutionalised and focused on ideas of transcendence. It also makes clear that to the extent that Crow develops a consciousness over the course of the book it is a consciousness based on a spiritual rather than a religious view of the relationship between man and nature.

Taylor further differentiates between four different types of dark green religion. Of these, *Crow* can best be described as an expression of animism, especially in the form of what Taylor calls "Naturalistic Animism". Animism in general is described by as Taylor "the perception that spiritual intelligences *or* lifeforces animate natural objects or living things". "Naturalistic Animism" puts

specific emphasis on 'lifeforces' as referring to beliefs that Taylor describes as "agnostic or skeptical of any immaterial dimension underlying the life-forms or natural forces they wish to understand and with whom they may also seek to communicate" (15). Hogan describes similar beliefs with reference to traditional Different from "Spiritual Animism", naturalistic animism is sceptical towards any supernatural realm, often favouring a Darwinian view of the history of the earth, as Taylor notes:

> Naturalistic Animism involves either skepticism or disbelief that some spiritual world runs parallel to the earth and animates nonhuman natural entities or earth herself. But those engaged in it nevertheless express, at minimum, kinship with and ethical concern for nonhuman life. Moreover, for many naturalistic animists, understanding and even communicating with nonhuman lifeforces is possible. According to the historian Donald Worster, this kind of felt kinship, and the biocentric ethics that tends to accompany it, can be grounded in evolutionary theory. […] Darwin clearly believed that a kinship ethic can be deduced from knowledge of our common ancestor and awareness that other animals suffer and face challenges, as do we. This kind of conjecture represents an emphatic form of analogical reasoning as well as an act of moral imagination – this is typical of those engaged in Naturalistic Animism. Animism understood in this way can be entirely independent of metaphysical speculation or supernaturalistic assumptions. (22-23)

The move away from Christian guilt and moral anguish, as portrayed in "Crow Tyrannosaurus" and "Crow's Nerve Fails", to a view of Crow as part of a larger context ordered according to evolutionary principles, as described in "Crow Frowns", reflects this move from a Christian to an animistic view of the natural world and of Crow's, and man's, place within it.

The animistic view of nature described by Taylor also entails the belief that "people can, *at least by conjecture and imagination*, and sometimes through ritualized action and other practices, come to some sort of understanding of these living forces and intelligences in nature and develop mutually respectful and beneficial relationships with them" (15-16). This kind of ritual practice is attempted by *Crow* as a trickster narrative in the sense that trickster figures generally, as noted by Radin in the quotation from the beginning of this chapter, are, if not themselves moral creatures, mythical devices designed to make moral values "come into being". The *Crow* poems can be read as enacting what Taylor describes as a form of spirituality "understood as a quest to deepen, renew, or tap into the most profound insights of traditional religions" (3). Such an understanding of spirituality has special resonance in relation to Hughes, who was convinced that "[t]he old method is the only one", referring to how ancient myths and rituals are used to 'tap into' and channel what

he calls "the elemental power circuit of the universe" (Faas, 200).

These animistic beliefs are best expressed in the very last poem in *Crow*, "Littleblood"[80]. In this poem the poet attempts to communicate with the spirit of nature, what Taylor calls a 'lifeforce'. This nature spirit, referred to as 'littleblood', is present everywhere in the natural world, though it is currently hiding and wounded:

> O littleblood, hiding from the mountains in the mountains
> Wounded by stars and leaking shadow
> Eating the medical earth.

These lines suggest the difference between littleblood and Christian saints, as described by White:

> It is often said that for animism the Church substituted the cult of saints. True; but the cult of saints is functionally quite different from animism. The saint is not *in* natural objects; he may have special shrines, but his citizenship is in heaven. Moreover, a saint is entirely a man; he can be approached in human terms. In addition to saints, Christianity of course also had angels and demons inherited from Judaism and perhaps, at one remove, from Zoroastrianism. But these were all as mobile as the saints themselves. The spirits *in* natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated. Man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled. (1205)

Different from the mobile saints, littleblood is confined to earth; he has nowhere to hide from the mountains other than "in the mountains". And while he has been injured by the stars, pointing to a Christian heaven, his medicine is only the earth.

The next stanza explains that littleblood is without a body of his own:

> O littleblood, little boneless little skinless
> Ploughing with a linnet's carcase
> Reaping the wind and threshing the stones.

Rather than a plough that makes him an "exploiter of nature", as put by White, littleblood ploughs with "a linnet's carcase", reaping nothing but "wind". The next stanza describes how littleblood is present in all creatures:

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[80] *CP*, 258.

> O littleblood, drumming in a cow's skull
>
> Dancing with a gnat's feet
>
> With an elephant's nose with a crocodile's tail.

The last lines refer to littleblood as part of a nature that is both creative and destructive, where death and violence are necessary parts of life:

> Grown so wise grown so terrible
>
> Sucking deaths mouldy tits.

In the essay "Poetry and Violence" in *Winter Pollen*, Hughes reflects on positive and negative meanings of the word 'violence'. He notes that "the word obviously covers a great range of different degrees of seriousness […] in the way of moral and spiritual consequences"[81]. At one extreme, there are acts of violence of the most serious and negative kind, such as war, while at the other end there are the least serious and positive meanings, in descriptions such as a 'violent passion', for instance. At all its different stages of seriousness, Hughes suggests, the word can have either positive or negative meanings.

The kind of violence that Hughes portrays can be defined on this scale as serious but positive. It is a violence that is necessary to create new life, prompted by instincts evolved by natural selection and visible, for example, in "predators killing to eat" (Hughes, 1994: 256). For Hughes, the kind of violence that propels evolution is sacred because it shows "the operation of divine law in the created things of the natural world" (1994: 259). In this sense the natural world, including its violent aspects, is sacred for Hughes. It is violence of this strong positive kind that is indicated in the last stanza of "Littleblood", juxtaposing destruction and creation.

The spirit of this sacred, natural world is for Hughes intimately connected to the spirit of poetry as a creative act, and it is this spirit of natural and divine creation that is beckoned to come and sing in the poet's ear in the very last line of "Littleblood":

> Sit on my finger, sing in my ear, O littleblood.

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[81] Ted Hughes, "Poetry and Violence", *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994, 253.

These last lines of *Crow* demonstrate a move away from the assertive tone and negative violence of poems like "Revenge Fable", with "[f]orbidding, screaming and condemning" humans, towards a quieter and more attentive tone, trying to listen to the spirit of the sacred, natural world rather than to a civilized and Christian human voice.

Chapter 2:

Postmodern nature in Heaney's bog poems

Introduction

Heaney first began to explore the bogs in Ireland together with the Irish painter T. P. Flanagan in the late 1960s. In an interview with Michael Parker, Flanagan states that "[b]ored with the holiday brochure stereotype of the green Ireland, he delighted in the 'visual surprise' of the bogland", especially "its changing patterns of purple, yellow and ochre in different seasons". A sense of the bog's "ancient life" also gave Flanagan a feeling of "connectedness with a pre-Christian primeval past"[82].

In 1967, Flanagan painted "Boglands", and dedicated the painting to Heaney. The gesture was returned two years later, when Heaney dedicated the poem similarly titled "Bogland" to Flanagan. Flanagan's painting is dominated by dark colours, primarily black, grey, and dark green or brown, and evokes a sense of something both mysterious and ominous. Circular patterns suggest wells or whirlpools that you might fall or be drawn into, while strokes of orange add intensity, suggesting an element of danger. This depiction of the bog as dangerous and something you may fall into recalls images of the bog from Heaney's childhood. Heaney notes this in a comment regarding the origin of the imagery in his poem "Bogland":

> What generated the poem about memory was something lying beneath the very floor of memory, something I only connected with the poem months after it was written, which was a warning that older people would give us about going into the bog. They were afraid we might fall into the pools in the old workings so they put it about (and we believed them) that *there was no bottom* in the bog-holes.[83]

If examined closely, the shape of a face may be discerned in Flanagan's painting, perhaps suggesting the presence of the bog people in the depths of the bog that would later come to the surface in Heaney's poems.

Flanagan's paintings of boglands gave Heaney a provisional artistic perspective on the bog, to which he could later add, as Parker notes, his own "politico-historico interest in it as an image"

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[82] Michael Parker, *Seamus Heaney: The Making of the Poet*, London: Macmillan, 1993, 87.
[83] Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978* , New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980 (first published by Faber and Faber), 56.

(88). This image is most fully developed in what has become known as the 'bog poems', most of which are found as parts of a series of poems in the mid-section of the collection *North. North* was published in 1975, conditioned and influenced by the Troubles in Northern Ireland which had broken out in the late 1960s.

In the bog poems, the history and ecology of the bogs provide symbols, metaphors, parallels and, to some extent, even explanations for the contemporary political violence in Northern Ireland. Archaeological findings from the bogs, especially the so called bog people, lead Heaney to identify what he calls "an archetypal pattern" tying together "the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles" (*Preoccupations*, 57-58). This archetypal pattern is based on recurring images of religious rites and sacrifices made in the name of the land or earth, as several of the bog bodies discovered in Ireland as well as in Denmark are believed to have been sacrificed as part of pagan religious fertility rites. In the bog poems, Heaney connects these ancient practices to contemporary events in Northern Ireland.

For Heaney, the ability to preserve nearly intact bodies and other artefacts from thousands of years ago makes the bogs representatives of history and memory. The stable conditions in the depths of the bog, where time appears to stand still, counteract the changing cultural patterns played out on the surface of the bog and provide a perspective on human behaviour that goes beyond the point of view of the single individual or generation, or even specific society or culture. With evidence from as far back as the Iron Ages, the bogs in *North* are wells of historical information that can provide insights and perspectives on contemporary cultural behaviour.

Three main conceptions questioned by the bog poems are addressed here. First, the bogs' ability to preserve the past challenges our perceptions of time; of the past in relation to the present, and of history in relation to memory. Second, the human artefacts and bodies from thousands of years ago that come to the surface from the depths of this apparent (relative) wilderness question our perception of nature and culture as separate realms. Third, while the bog poems reflect on human violence and culture they also reflect, on a meta-level, on their own ability to address these issues, questioning the relationship between aesthetic representation and reality.

This chapter highlights these three themes in the bog poems, relating to time, the nature-culture divide, and the relationship between art and the real world, using a postmodern ecocritical approach. Some postmodern scholars, such as Serpil Oppermann, argue that ecocriticism needs to be more theoretically advanced and alert, especially with regard to the issue of representation, and

thus stands to benefit from input from an, as they see it, more sophisticated postmodern tradition. Many traditional ecocritics, on the other hand, argue that postmodernism undermines the relationship between the sign and its referent to the point of invalidating what Buell calls "literature's referential dimension" (1995: 86). This chapter will read Heaney's bog poems in relation to Serpil Oppermann's proposal of a postmodern ecocriticism, presented in "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice". The reading of the bog poems as postmodern is also informed by Thomas Docherty's analysis of "The Grauballe Man" in "Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney", in which Docherty argues that "The Grauballe Man" signifies a postmodern "event" (206). The relationship between the physical landscape of the bog and its representation in Heaney's poems is also discussed by Diane Meredith, whose work also provides an important stepping stone for the analysis in this chapter, especially her article about "Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney's Bogs".

Heaney's 'bog poems' usually refers primarily to the set of poems placed in the middle of *North* that describe in detail several well-preserved bodies recovered from bogs: "Come to the Bower", "Bog Queen", "The Grauballe Man", "Punishment", "Strange Fruit" and "Kinship"[84]. Of these, this chapter focuses mainly on "The Grauballe Man" and "Kinship". In addition, two earlier poems by Heaney that refer to the bogs are also discussed: "Bogland"[85], the closing poem of *Door into the Dark* (1969) and "The Tollund Man"[86], from *Wintering Out*. To further introduce the discussion of the poems, a short description of the bogs will provide some contextual information about these special environments.

The bogs

Bogs began to form in Ireland about 6000 years ago as a result of a combination of deforestation and climate change: a general increase in rainfall coincided with people beginning to clear woodlands in order to make room for agricultural fields. Under certain conditions (with a lot of rain and not too high temperatures, as typical of Ireland), when the rate of plant decomposition is lower than that of plant growth, an accumulation of peat, or dead plant material, occurs. This layer of peat can sometimes become up to 12 metres deep, under the cover of a thin surface layer of living plants. The peat consists of up to 98 per cent water, most of which is held in dead fragments of sphagnum

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[84] Seamus Heaney, *North*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1975, 31-45.
[85] Seamus Heaney, *Door into the Dark*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1969, 41-42.
[86] *Wintering Out*, 47-48.

moss, also referred to as "bog builder". The accumulation of peat to form a deep layer can take thousands of years, but once developed the conditions in the peat, protected by the thin surface layer, are very stable.

In Europe, bogs are threatened environments, and many European boglands have disappeared recently as a result of drainage and cutting of peat to be used as an energy source. Peat was the first widely used fossil fuel, depended on by the Dutch empire: John MacNeill has shown how in the seventeenth century peat "helped underpin the geopolitical assertion of the Dutch on the world stage"[87]. According to the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC), peatland currently covers about 5-8% of the world's surface, and in Europe specifically

> [p]eatlands cover an area of approximately 956,949 km². European peatlands are most extensive in Finland,
> Sweden and Norway where almost 75% of the remaining area occurs. Much of the European peat resource has
> vanished as technology and development have advanced. All natural peatlands in the Netherlands have been lost,
> Switzerland and Germany each have only 500 ha remaining. The UK has seen a 90% loss of blanket bog and a
> 98% loss of raised bog. Ireland has only 18% of its original peatland area left.[88]

The IPCC also states that Ireland contains some of the most important remaining bog habitats in Europe, but while conservation campaigns have been successful in some areas, pressure on the bogs "continues unabated and without public knowledge"[89].

In addition to the up to 350 individual species of moss referred to collectively as Sphagnum moss, the bogs support an extensive number of plants and animals specially adapted to the acidic, nutrient-poor environment in and on the bogs. In a single bog pool one scientist counted 32,000 different microscopic animals[90]. In addition to hosting various kinds of moss, the bogs form specific habitats for many kinds of liverworts and lichens. As carbon sinks, the bogs could also be important for countering anthropogenic climate change, though this remains uncertain. With regard to the bogs' historical and cultural capacity, the IPCC finally notes that in addition to being valuable natural environments the bogs can "expand our understanding of people, culture, economy and climate far back into prehistory"[91]. This description is in line with Heaney's depiction of the bogs,

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[87] John R. MacNeill, "Diamond in the Rough: Is There a Genuine Environmental Threat to Security?: A Review Essay", *International Security*, 30.1 (2005), 193.
[88] Information from IPPC's webiste: www.ipcc.ie (http://www.ipcc.ie/wpeurope.html, accessed 2012-03-13).
[89] (http://www.ipcc.ie/inforaisedbogfs.html, accessed 2012-03-13.)
[90] (http://www.ipcc.ie/infosphagnum.html, accessed 2012-03-13.)
[91] (http://www.ipcc.ie/bogsimportant.html, accessed 2012-03-13.)

which contradicts conventional and pre-existing ideas about bogs as something negative, as evident from expressions such as "bog Irish" or "bogged down". In this respect, the word 'bog' is very different compared for instance to the more recent term 'wetland', which has much more positive connotations of environmental value. Heaney's sense and appreciation of the bogs is of the same kind as Thoreau's:

> When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest woods the thickest and most indeterminable and, to the citizen, most dismal, swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place, – a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature.[92]

This quote is also found in *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology*, by Rod Giblett. This book is part of a series on Postmodern Theory, edited by Thomas Docherty, whose work is important in this chapter. In the very last section of *Postmodern Wetlands*, Giblett addresses Heaney's poems about bogs, and notes that "[f]rom the earliest of his published poetry Seamus Heaney has celebrated the centrality of the bog to the Irish landscape, to Irish history and to Irish cultural identity"[93]. As Giblett points out, Heaney's poems provide new associations for the word 'bog' that give these landscapes a higher value, from environmental as well as cultural perspectives, and that contribute to reclaiming the more positive connotations of 'wetland' from the more dire associations of 'swamp' for these areas.

Landscape into mindscape:"Bogland"

Heaney's first poem about bogs is "Bogland"[94], which appears in his second volume of poetry, *Door into the Dark* (1969). "Bogland" equates bog with Ireland:

>   Our unfenced country
>   Is bog that keeps crusting
>   Between the sights of the sun.

The poem proceeds to describe various findings that have been retrieved from the depths of the bog, noting the bog's astonishing ability to preserve elements and evidence of history:

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[92] Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*, Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2007 (first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* 1862), 30.
[93] Rod Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, 245.
[94] Seamus Heaney, "Bogland", *Door into the Dark*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1969, 41-42.

They've taken the skeleton
Of the Great Irish Elk
Out of the peat, set it up
An astounding crate full of air.

Butter sunk under
More than a hundred years
Was recovered salty and white.

The poem balances cultural and natural history, mixing human culinary history (the butter) with animal relics (the elk). It also aligns descriptions of retrieved "waterlogged trunks / of great firs" with uncovered layers "camped on before" by humans:

They'll never dig coal here,

Only the water-logged trunks
Of great firs, soft as pulp.
Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards,

Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before.

This mix of nature and culture helps to create an image of the bog that reflects how it has been formed by both human and non-human agencies.

In "Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney's Bogs" geographer Dianne Meredith examines Heaney's "poetical descriptions of bogs in comparison to how closely the imagery fits the empirical reality of the landscape"[95]. Meredith explains her point of view from what she calls "literary geography":

Literary geography (as opposed to literary criticism) would examine these poetical descriptions of bogs in comparison to how closely the imagery fits the empirical reality of the landscape, offering alternative approaches

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[95] Dianne Meredith, "Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney's Bogs", *Irish Geography*, 32.2 (1999), 126.

to geographical understanding. While objective studies in geomorphology and ecological succession may help to explain the origin and development of bogs, literary geography considers place-creation to be also subjective, based on landscape perceptions which take into account humanistic responses as well as purely environmental factors. Landscape and territories can be appropriated as living entities, creating 'geographies of the mind' which are then reflected in the structuring of space […] In particular, literary geography considers environmental definitions to be subjective, based on a writer's relationship to the land as well as the land itself. Poetic license may stretch description of a regional landscape beyond the confines of objective reality, bringing to light a stronger objectivity, inclusive not only of the physical environment, but also of the social, psychological, and the historical climate. In this sense, 'false' or fictive geographies may in fact reveal central themes of the environment, beyond those articulated by purely scientific investigation (126-127)

According to Meredith, connections to and perceptions of a particular landscape informed and shaped by the imagination can help to create a sense of "territorial identity [that is] based on symbolic links to a landscape or a past in which meaning is obtained rather than intrinsic" (127). From this perspective, Meredith considers the relationship between the actual Irish boglands and the bogs as represented in Heaney's poems, with the hypothesis that "a comparison between the objective and subjective geography may reveal a stronger reality, structured somewhere in the borderland between the two" (131).

Asking why Heaney choose the "bogs as a landscape icon for Ireland", Meredith notes Flanagan's influence in giving Heaney a sense of the bog as countering "the romanticised tourist vision of an Ireland with rolling green hills, rippling brooks and lush vegetation":

Heaney began to arrive at the metaphorical significance of the bog landscape in company with landscape artist T. P. Flanagan, in their bonding of artistic impulses in the bogs near Donegal. They spent many hours together gathering ideas for writing and painting and in doing so, discovered their affinity for the bog. Flanagan romantically described the bog as "the fundamental Irish landscape" which had "primeval connection" with a pagan past. (127)

This description suggests a basis for Heaney's later development of the image of the bog as keeper of an ancient past from which explanations or a context for contemporary events could be retrieved.

Meredith notes that in "Bogland" factual statements are accompanied by more fictive statements, as the reference to the retrieved butter leads to a description of the bog itself as butter:

Butter sunk under

> More than a hundred years
> Was recovered salty and white.
> The ground itself is kind, black butter

> Melting and opening underfoot,
> Missing its last definition
> By millions of years.

The last three lines here suggest that the bog is actually "bottomless", and that water from the Atlantic may seep up from the depths:

> The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage,
> The wet centre is bottomless.

The description of the bog as "bottomless" is a reference to how the bog was described to Heaney as a child, as noted in the beginning of this chapter. Meredith reads this description as a reference also to the bog as a repository of historical information:

> As Heaney contemplated the investigations of the bog as historical repositories, he concluded that they were bottomless. As one digs back into history – or down in the case of bogs – the past merges with the present so that each layer is stripped, it seems already camped on. Therefore, digging back into origins both uncovers and creates a sense of place (130)

Though it appears to be a factual description, "bottomless" may thus be a description of the bog that refers to its significance in a human, cultural context. This vacillation between nature and culture and fact and fiction in "Bogland" signifies, according to Meredith, Heaney's discovery of "an image for the unconscious past of Ireland through a natural feature of the landscape where history reposed and was revealed"[96].

Meredith remarks that despite the reference in "Bogland" to the bog as "[m]issing its last definition / by millions of years" the bogs are not actually very old. Neither are the bogs reminiscent of a pre-human time, as noted in the section about the bogs above. Meredith states that

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[96] In drawing this conclusion, Meredith refers to Thomas Foster's *Seamus Heaney* (1989) and D. B. King's "I Step Through Origins", in Bloom's (ed.) *Modern Critical Views: Seamus Heaney* (1986).

[[t]oday the bogs are perceived as one of the last Irish wilderness areas but in fact, when humans first colonised Ireland, there was very little bog. The first farmers cleared woodland, not bogland. This woodland clearance is believed to be one of the chief causes for the development of bogs, along with the change in climate from drier to wetter conditions. As the bogs expanded, farming was forced to retreat. The bog had free rein to become wild, uninhabitable land. (132)

This is the main discrepancy that Meredith finds between the actual bogs and Heaney's "Bogland". Granting Heaney the right to "poetic licence" (132), Meredith concludes that "Bogland" and the other bog poems transforms the landscape of the bogs into a mindscape that "provides Heaney with an effective metaphor to communicate a sense of a living landscape, continually in process, responding to topography, changing climate, and human influence" (133). This transformation, which begins in "Bogland", is developed into darker nuances in the later bog poems, beginning with "The Tollund Man" in *Wintering Out*, the collection immediately following *Door into the Dark* in which "Bogland" appeared.

"The Tollund Man"

In the acidic and anaerobic conditions in the peat, organic material can be preserved for long periods of time. Human bodies have been found with their clothes, facial features and even finger prints intact after several thousand years. These human finds are commonly referred to as 'bog bodies' or 'bog people'. The first bog body referred to by Heaney in a poem is the Tollund man, the subject of the poem "The Tollund Man".

The Tollund man is an unusually well-preserved bog body recovered from bogs in Jutland in Denmark. The body was found in 1950, and is believed to be from the 4th century BC. Heaney's poem begins with the speaker imagining himself going to Denmark to see the Tollund man for himself (Aarhus is a town in Denmark near the museum where the Tollund man is displayed):

> Some day I will go to Aarhus
> To see his peat-brown head,
> The mild pods of his eye-lids,
> His pointed skin cap.

Heaney had learned about bog bodies from archaeologist P.V. Glob's book *The Bog People*, a description of the retrieval, analysis and historical context of bog bodies. Glob's book added another

dimension to Heaney's already existing sense of the bogs' relation to cultural history and a pagan past inspired by Flanagan. Glob's book proposes that a significant number of the bog bodies were sacrificed as part of fertility rites. This might be true for some, but others may have been murder victims. The Tollund man might indeed have been a ritual sacrifice, as he was found with a noose around his neck. This detail is included in Heaney's poem, which accurately describes the body as "[n]aked except for / The cap, noose and girdle".

The poem proceeds by descriptions of the Tollund man as a sacrifice to an earth goddess:

> Bridegroom to the goddess,
>
> She tightened her torc on him
> And opened her fen,
> Those dark juices working
> Him to a saint's kept body

These lines introduce a religious context that is not present in "Bogland". This religious dimension is emphasised in the first stanza of the second part of "The Tollund Man", which contains words like "blasphemy", "consecrate", "holy" and "pray". These words set the scene for the following lines, which seem to be the most crucial in the poem and in which the speaker's attention shifts from Aarhus and the Tollund man to victims of sectarian violence in Ireland in the 1920s. The speaker prays that the ancient bog body described in the poem's first part, sacrificed to ensure the fertility of the earth, would have the ability to make the deaths of the more recent victims meaningful in some similar way:

> I could risk blasphemy,
> Consecrate the cauldron bog
> Our holy ground and pray
> Him to make germinate
>
> The scattered, ambushed
> Flesh of labourers,
> Stockinged corpses
> Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines.

According to Edna Longley, these lines summon the Tollund man as "scapegoat, privileged victim and ultimately Christ-surrogate", using his "death and bizarre resurrection"[97] in an attempt to salvage more recent victims of Irish religious violence.

The third part of the poem turns again from Ireland and back to Denmark, referring to the Tollund man's "sad freedom" on his way to being sacrificed. Relating to the meaning that the speaker asks for amidst the violence in the poem's second part, perhaps the idea of a "sad freedom" suggests that in some way the Tollund man was aware of his own death as meaningful in the sense that it would secure the fertility of his people's land, that it would make something "germinate". The speaker wishes for a similar kind of meaning to help him make sense of the violent deaths in Northern Ireland:

Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbril
Should come to me, driving,
Saying the names

Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard[98]

The word "tumbril" can be associated with the French Revolution, during which tumbrils were used to transport prisoners to the guillotine. This reference adds another context of an in some sense meaningful violence.

The final stanzas of "The Tollund Man" concludes on the parallel between ancient Denmark and contemporary Northern Ireland:

Out here in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes

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[97] Edna Longley, "'Inner Emigré' or 'Artful Voyeur'? Seamus Heaney's *North*", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen, London: Macmillan, 1997, 42.

[98] Nebelgard is also a Danish place name, a bog not far from Grauballe.

> I will feel lost,
> Unhappy and at home.

The descriptions of the bogs and the bog people in "The Tollund Man" and the other later bog poems transform diverse references and contexts into a unified theme or image. Though there are contradictory and diverse references within this theme, the image as such remains intact throughout the poems. On one level, the image is self-conscious and self-reflexive, as the poems struggle with the question of representation, especially with regard to the representation of ongoing violence. On this meta-level, the poems are concerned with objectification, beautification and idealisation, reflecting on the relationship between actual violence and its aesthetic representation.

This image culminates in *North*, Heaney's next volume of poetry, and the collection that most directly and extensively reflect on the events taking place in Northern Ireland. Heaney attributes the increasing complexity of the image of the bog in these poems to a commitment he had started to feel towards something deeper than the political. This feeling, he states in an interview, began to develop with the writing of "The Tollund Man":

> When I wrote that poem I had a sense of crossing a line really, that my whole being was involved in the sense of – the root sense – of religion, being bonded to something. I felt it a vow; I felt my whole being caught in this. And that was a moment of commitment not in the political sense but in the deeper sense of your life, committing yourself to something. I think that brought me to a new possibility of seriousness in the poetic enterprise"[99].

There is an irony in how ancient victims of cultural violence in these poems become iconic representations of that same culture, providing for Heaney a key to understanding our own contemporary political and religious cultures. This new territory is further explored in *North*.

"The Grauballe Man" and "Kinship"
The Grauballe man is another bog body recovered in 1952 from the same area in Denmark as the Tollund man. Like the Tollund man, the Grauballe man is believed to have lived during the early Iron Age. Discovered with his throat cut, the Grauballe man seems, also like the Tollund man, to have suffered a violent death inflicted by other humans.

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[99]   Quote from Parker, 91.

The speaker in "The Grauballe Man"[100] immediately appears much closer to his subject than does the speaker in "The Tollund Man", suggesting perhaps the clarity and confidence that Heaney now felt in this imagery: no longer is it a question of introducing the poem with a reference to "some day I will", as in "The Tollund Man". The speaker in this poem cuts straight to a line-up of observations regarding the body in front of him:

> As if he had been poured
> in tar, he lies
> on a pillow of turf
> and seems to weep
>
> the black river of himself.
> The grain of his wrists
> is like bog oak,
> the ball of his heel
>
> like a basalt egg.
> His instep has shrunk
> cold as a swan's foot
> or a wet swamp root.
>
> His hips are the ridge
> and purse of a mussel,
> his spine an eel arrested
> under a glisten of mud.

So far, the descriptions use natural and passive similes. In the fifth stanza, however, something else happens as the man's "head lifts", his chin suddenly "a visor". The word "visor" is both reminiscent of the Tollund man's "cap" and a suggestion of armour. Especially in the latter sense it signifies a break with the natural similes from the previous stanzas and introduces a new set of associations, amplified in the following line that refers to the man's "slashed throat". Following the plaintive, musing descriptions of the body as almost a part of nature, the sudden and dramatic intrusion of the careless and unexpected "slashed" invalidates that kind of description of the body by placing it

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[100] Seamus Heaney, "The Grauballe Man", *North*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1975, 35-36.

within a violent, human context.

Once this connection to human violence has been made the speaker retreats and returns to the natural similes, noting, in the next stanza, that the "slashed throat" has "tanned and toughened", so that now

> The cured wound
> opens inwards to a dark
> elderberry place.

The next stanza suggests the vivid image that the bog body presents to the speaker, asking:

> Who will say 'corpse'
> to his vivid cast?
> Who will say 'body'
> to his opaque repose?

Longley comments briefly on these lines that "[p]ossibly someone should" (44), referring to a crucial difference between this poem and "The Tollund Man", namely that while the body in the earlier poem is an "urgent presence", in "The Grauballe Man" the bog body has been processed by the imagination. Longley compares the difference to "that between Christ on the Cross and a holy picture" (44). She also notes that "what was hypothetical in 'The Tollund Man' – the consecration of 'the cauldron bog'", can be seen to have "hardened into accepted doctrine" in *North*.

The idea of the bog body as a vivid and pregnant image in the speaker's mind is developed further in the following two stanzas, which compare the bog body to an infant:

> his rusted hair,
> a mat unlikely
> as a foetus's.
> I first saw his twisted face
>
> in a photograph,
> a head and shoulder
> out of the peat,
> bruised like a forceps baby.

The description of "a forceps baby" refers both to the actual retrieval of the Grauballe man from the bog, a precarious process, and to the violent background that informs the image in the poet's mind: the image of the bog people is not likely to have resonated with Heaney as it does in these poems had it not been for the Ulster Troubles: Heaney at this time was looking for "images and symbols adequate to our predicament" (*Preoccupations*, 56).

In the next stanza, the Grauballe man appears "perfected" in the speaker's mind, stating that "now he lies / perfected in my memory". In the next, and last, two stanzas, this image becomes a dual image comprising both "beauty" and "atrocity":

> hung in the scales
> with beauty and atrocity:
> with the Dying Gaul
> too strictly compassed
>
> on his shield,
> with the actual weight
> of each hooded victim,
> slashed and dumped.

The last three lines describe contemporary victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The way in which these contemporary events are introduced into the poem, with a few, precise words, such as "actual", "slashed" and "dumped", is similar to how related references are made in "Punishment"[101], one of other bog poems in *North*. In "Punishment", the speaker observes another, this time female, bog body, and states that:

> I who have stood dumb
> when your betraying sisters,
> cauled in tar,
> wept by the railings,
>
> who would connive
> in civilised outrage

---

[101] *North*, 37-38.

yet understand the exact

and tribal, intimate revenge.

Conor Cruise O'Brien comments on these lines that "[i]t is the word 'exact' that hurts the most: Seamus Heaney has so greatly earned the right to use this word that to see him use it as he does here opens up a sort of chasm"[102]. He adds that in the bog poems "hope succumbs": "I have read many pessimistic analyses of 'Northern Ireland', but none that has the bleak conclusiveness of these poems" (26).

The reason these poems are so bleak and pessimistic is that they do not point to any mitigating circumstances surrounding the violence in Northern Ireland, nor to any resolution of the conflict. Neither do they take a clear side, arguing that one part is right and the other wrong. Instead they say that this is what humans are like: cruel and callous, slaves under religions that demand brutal sacrifices to appease the earth.

The "Dying Gaul" referred to in the penultimate stanza of "The Grauballe Man" is a Hellenistic sculpture of a dying Celtic warrior from the third century BC, around the same time when the Grauballe man is believed to have lived. This reference to violence as idealised and represented aesthetically is countered by the brutality of "slashed and dumped" in the last stanza, and it is these two sides that are "hung in the scales / with beauty and atrocity". The word "slashed" from the earlier description of the Grauballe man's throat is reused, underlining the alignment of the different contexts and victims.

In an essay with the title "Ana-; or Postmodernism, Landscape, Seamus Heaney", Thomas Docherty argues that "The Grauballe Man" signifies a postmodern 'event', as opposed to a static Modern 'work'. A postmodern reading, according to Docherty, brings out the poems anachronistic elements and counteracts what he calls "the 'punctuality' of the Modern, which is concerned to map two points in time as if they were two stable points in space" (206). Docherty means that "[a] philosophy of postmodernism will raise the stakes of the poem, disabling the conventional reading of it as a neo-Modernist exercise in myth-making and replacing the usual banal reading of its politics with something literally more compelling" (206). Docherty's postmodern reading of "The Grauballe Man" creates a distance between the poem and its immediate relevance for the events in Northern Ireland. Instead it focuses on how the poem treats and destabilises concepts of time,

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[102] Conor Cruise O'Brien, "A Slow North-east Wind: Review of *North*", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen, London: Macmillan, 1997, 26.

including history, memory, and the relationship between past and present.

According to Docherty, the bog in "The Grauballe Man" not only represents but is an actual "repository of history and continuity across time" (207). Adding to the history that is actually present in the bog, Heaney then associates the landscape with multifarious historical, geographical and political dimensions that although in the poem relate specifically to Northern Ireland are not immediately present in the primary image of the bog. These added dimensions, according to Docherty, are informed by a sense of Ireland and Northern Ireland as critical spaces in a slightly different sense, as "Ireland itself is, of course, a 'critical space', a space built upon a 'critical difference' called 'the border' between North and South" (207). The idea of the geographical border as critical and unstable relates to the other similarly unstable critical borders addressed by the bog poems between past and present, nature and culture, and reality and aesthetics.

Docherty states that within the neo-Romantic and Modernist traditions with which Heaney is usually associated, "'imagination' forges a link between the Subject of consciousness and History as its Object" (208). With his postmodern reading of "The Grauballe Man", Docherty wants to challenge the legitimacy of this link. "Heaney's problem", according to Docherty, is that both aesthetically and politically the neo-Romantic/Modernist subject has been rendered unavailable to him by a postmodern destabilisation of the relationship between the subject and its history, or between the real and its representation:

> The 'ground' for [Heaney's] poetry, history itself in the Irish context, has disappeared, gone underground. As a result, a series of reversals takes place in 'The Grauballe Man': what seemed a tomb is a womb; what seemed a man gives a kind of birth while also being the baby itself; to dig is to discover not the past at all (history) but rather 'the presence of the past' (anamnesis). When Heaney wrote the poem, he was deeply aware of the presence of the past, not just in terms of his search for 'images and symbols adequate to our predicament', but, rather, in terms of the very historicity of the present, his present as a moment of flux, his spatial present as a moment bifurcated, divided, a moment when space has gone critical, differential, historical rather than antiquarian. (208-209)

It is from this premise that the question in "The Grauballe Man" is asked regarding:

> Who will say 'corpse'
> to his vivid cast?
> Who will say 'body'

to his opaque repose?

Docherty argues that "[t]his stanza asks: is history dead, a thing of the past; or is it alive, vivid, a presence of the past?", and further that "[i]t is the very posing of the question which opens up the text to a postmodernism" (209). Materialised in the physical appearance of the bog body, the question seems to be posed not only by the poet, but by the landscape itself: the unearthed corpse, several thousand years old but with hair, fingerprints and even facial features intact indeed seems to cast doubt on whether the past is really in the past.

According to Docherty's postmodern perspective, the significant discovery made by Heaney in "The Grauballe Man" is not of "an archaeological remnant of the past", but of "the flow and movement of history, history as 'becoming' even as he writes" (210). This flow of history is not linear, it 'becomes' even as Heaney writes in the sense that the past intrudes on the present, as demonstrated by the discovery and unearthing of the bog body, and by its associations with current events. Docherty explains this as by stating that "The Grauballe Man" "delineates not the past but the presence of the past as a living present and the mutability of that present, its fluidity or flux" (211). The fluidity and flux of the present that Docherty describes is actualised by Heaney in the associations of bog people with present conflict, as well as by the act of literally bringing the ancient bodies into the present by digging them out of the bog. These complicating notions of past and present make the bog poems, and "The Grauballe Man" in particular, into what Docherty calls postmodern events.

The illusion of the past as nearly present informs what Docherty calls an "anamnesis of history" (212). Docherty uses this concept to refer to history as an imaginative recreation of the past, a creation of the past in the present. Docherty argues that such an "actualisation of the virtual" (212) takes place in "The Grauballe Man". The process of actualisation, of bringing the past into the present, takes place as images of the body as passive ("poured / in tar", lying "on a pillow of turf") change into descriptions of the body as active (its "head lifts", the old wound is "cured"). Following the refusal in the seventh stanza to refer to the body as a corpse, images of progression and life are introduced by the images that compare the body to a baby rather than, as previously, to oak and rock. At this stage of the poem, the bog body is "perfected" in the speaker's memory, following what Docherty refers to as "[t]he poem's crucial point" (209) in the seventh stanza (asking "[w]ho will say 'corpse' / to his vivid cast?"). The 'perfection' of the Grauballe man in the speaker's memory

indicates "the presence of the past". This process is also indicated by Meredith, who states that when digging down into the bog, "the past merges with the present". The completion of the imaginative process that transforms the Grauballe man from passive historical artefact to active presence, described by Docherty as "anamnesis", is a preparation for the "actual weight" of the contemporary victims that enters the poem in the last stanza.

Docherty notes that this process is described by Heaney in the poem "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces"[103], also in *North*, in which the speaker refers to himself as Hamlet, "skull-handler" and "parabalist", only capable of

> coming to consciousness
> by jumping in graves
> dithering, blathering

and requiring the help of "ghosts / and affections" in order to recognise his "worm of thought" and be able to follow it "into the mud".

The delineation of the past and the present is the first of three postmodern elements that Docherty identifies in "The Grauballe Man". The second is referred to by Docherty as "a kind of montage", also described as "a kind of dialectical process" (211). This process is created by a "collision" of images from "Jutland and Ireland, the Iron Age and the IRA", seen most clearly in the last lines of the poem in which the image of the "Dying Gaul" 'collides' with the image of "the actual weight / of each hooded victim". The Dying Gaul has been written about by a number of other poets, for example by Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The image is thus surrounded by several layers of aestheticisation – not only is it itself an aesthetic representation of violence, but the additional intertextual layers refer to a tradition of such representation so that the image when it occurs in Heaney's poem is removed by several layers of meaning from the initial act of violence, represented in Heaney's poem by "the actual weight". These additional references that are associated with the Dying Gaul adds to the number and complexity of the colliding images that Docherty describes. The layering of historical and cultural references surrounding the Dying Gaul also links in with the archaeological layering of the physical finds in the poem.

The collision of images raises what Docherty calls "the issue of justice which dominates the latter half of the poem" (211). The issue of justice is the third postmodern element in the poem

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[103] *North*, 21-24.

according to Docherty's reading. These elements in "The Grauballe Man" that Docherty characterises as postmodern are present in the other bog poems in *North* as well, as they combine to form the basic premise of the logic of the bog poems as a series: the delineation of past and present, a collision of images from Iron Age Denmark and 20th century Northern Ireland, and the issue of justice.

The last and longest in the series of bog poems in *North* is "Kinship"[104]. This poem, like "Bogland" but unlike "The Tollund Man" and "The Grauballe Man", deals specifically with Irish bogs. The opening lines literally turns nature into culture in the reference to "hieroglyphic / Peat":

> Kinned by hieroglyphic
> Peat on a spreadfield
> To the strangled victim,
> The love-nest in the bracken,
>
> I step through origins
> Like a dog turning
> Its memories of wilderness
> On the kitchen mat:
>
> The bog floor shakes
> Water cheeps and lisps
> As I walk down
> Rushes and Heather.

The intertwining of natural and cultural references is similarly present in the lines describing how the speaker moves physically as well as imaginatively "through origins", and in the presence of "memories of wilderness / On the kitchen mat", and in the water that "lisps".

In "Kinship", the speaker eventually finds himself standing "at the edge of centuries / Facing a goddess". According to Michael Parker, the primary subject of the bog poems is "the Republican tradition, and how the cruelties inflicted upon 'dark-bowered queen', Mother Ireland, Kathleen ni Houlihan, Shan van Vocht, have brutalised her sons, engendering a love of territory and ancestry that can carry them to appalling extremes" (134). The tension and contrast between appreciation of

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[104] *North*, 40-45.

the land and the "appalling extremes" that the attachment to the same land can lead to are reflected in "Kinship" by a contrast between celebrations of the bog and descriptions of the bog as marked by suffering, The former is expressed by lines like these from the poem's first part:

> I love this turf-face,
> Its black incisions,
> The cooped secrets
> Of process and ritual;
>
> I love the spring
> Off the ground,
> Each bank a gallows drop,
> Each open pool
>
> The unstopped mouth
> Of an urn, a moon-drinker,
> Not to be sounded
> By the naked eye.

And in the second part:

> *bog*
> meaning soft,
> the fall of windless rain,
> pupil of amber.
>
> Ruminant ground,
> digestion of mollusc
> and seed-pod,
> deep pollen bin.

But the following stanzas suggest a darker image of the bog:

> Earth-pantry, bone vault,
> sun-bank, embalmer
> of votive goods

and sabred fugitives.

Insatiable bride.
Sword-swallower,
Casket, midden,
Floe of history.

Ground that will strip
Its dark side,
Nesting ground,
Outback of my mind.

This forensic see-sawing between appreciation and "appalling extremes" suggests, according to Parker, Heaney's "determination to retrieve some shards of hope and beauty to weigh in the scales against 'atrocity'" (135).

The fourth part of "Kinship" states that "[t]his centre holds", responding to Yeats's phrase "the centre cannot hold" from "The Second Coming", perhaps a reference to how the land perseveres while the cultural centre indicated by Yeats fades, a reflection of the changing cultures on the surface of the bog compared to the stable conditions in the peat underneath:

This centre holds
And spreads,
Sump and seedbed,
A bag of waters

And a melting grave.
The mothers of autumn
Sour and sink,
Ferments of husk and leaf

Deepen their ochres.
Mosses come to a head
heather unseeds,
brackens deposit

their bronze.

This is the vowel of earth
dreaming its root
in flowers and snow,

mutation of weathers
and seasons,
a windfall composing
the floor it rots into.

These references to natural processes are complemented by descriptions in the third and fifth parts of the poem relating to the speaker's own memories of the relationship between people and bog, of turf-carts and wagons, and of the man who rode the wagon.

The sixth and last part of "Kinship" evokes images of the "appalling extremes" that have been carried out in the name of this land:

And you, Tacitus,
Observe how I make my grove
on an old crannog
piled by the fearful dead:

a desolate peace.
Our mother ground
is sour with the blood
of her faithful,

they lie gargling
in her sacred heart
as the legions stare
from the ramparts.

Come back to this
'island of the ocean'
where nothing will suffice.
Read the inhumed faces

Of casualty of victim;

> Report us fairly
> How we slaughter
> For the common good
>
> And shave the heads
> Of the notorious,
> How the goddess swallows
> Our love and terror.

If "The Grauballe Man" moves between the past and the present, "Kinship" moves from celebration to horror, from "*bog* / meaning soft", like "the fall of windless rain", to a bog "sour with the blood / of her faithful", where victims, past and present, "lie gargling", sacrificed to a goddess who swallows, indiscriminately, "our love and terror".

A postmodern nature

Digging into the bogs, Heaney, unsurprisingly, finds no remedy for current events. Instead he finds evidence of the historical and geographical persistence of similar behaviours, especially in religious contexts. The only bog poem that presents a landscape uncontaminated by human violence is "Bogland", the first of the bog poems, and this poem, read from a post-*North* perspective, seems almost naïve. In the later bog poems, appreciation of what is perceived to be a natural landscape is, on closer examination, repeatedly turned into records of the "appalling extremes" carried out for the sake of that same land. This move from a natural to a cultural is seen both in "The Grauballe Man", where the carefully formulated natural similes in the first stanzas are vitiated by the sudden intrusion of the brute and careless "slashed" in the fifth stanza, and in "Kinship", where "bog / meaning soft" turns into a "mother ground" that "is sour with the blood / of her faithful".

The continuity created by the bog poems between past and present and between nature and culture relates to both Docherty's and Meredith's observations regarding these poems' relation to unstable borders. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Meredith states that a comparison between an objective and subjective geography of the bogs "may reveal a stronger reality, structured somewhere in the borderland between the two", while Docherty describes in detail how "The Grauballe Man" destabilises the separation of the border between the past and the present.

The failure to uphold a border between nature and culture is seen both in the poems, as natural descriptions are overtaken by cultural references, and in the actual landscape to which the poems

refer, in which "each layer" that is revealed "[s]eems camped on before". By showing that what is initially perceived to be non-human nature is actually permeated by human presence, the bog poems question the perception of nature and culture as opposite realms. By showing a nature conditioned by culture the bog poems illustrate the difficulty or even impossibility of representing nature as "other".

In "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice", Serpil Oppermann attempts to develop a specifically postmodern approach to ecocriticism. In this article, Oppermann argues that "postmodernism emphatically dismantles disjunctive opposites", such as in the bog poems between past and present, nature and culture, and reality and representation. By so doing, postmodernism according to Oppermann "opens space for mutually constitutive relationships between culture and nature", creating a system in which "nature is no longer perceived to be the Other" (116).

According to Oppermann, ecocriticism in its current form is limited by its lack of a coherent, defining methodology:

> since its very beginnings in the 1990s, a basic problem has decidedly threatened the expansion of ecocriticism on theoretical grounds. It is a crisis closely associated with the ecological crisis itself, namely the crisis of the realist epistemology. Being largely confined to the theoretically discredited parameters of literary realism, ecocriticism today finds itself struggling with hermeneutical closure as well as facing an ambivalent openness in its interpretive approach. (103)

To rectify this, Oppermann wants to rethink "the ecocritical field of inquiry with the purpose of situating it within the broader perspective of a reconstructive postmodern theory" in order further to "conflate ecocriticism with an ecocentric postmodern theory for the purpose of developing a postmodern ecocritical approach which will help expand the ecocritical practice beyond its present limits" (104).

Oppermann argues that "no interpretative theory can be conceived of without language occupying its center" (103). This viewpoint is reflected by Meredith's suggestion that Heaney's poetic representations of the bogs actually may present a "stronger objectivity" than "objective reality" alone. Meredith argues that:

> Language itself plays an important yet often overlooked part in environmental perception, weaving visible

environmental components into the less visible (or invisible) features of the landscape, strengthening regional identity through bonding of the two (Tuan 1991). In general, human behaviour which is related to visible aspects of the land is frequently determined by values which transcend the landscape itself, and this is often effectively revealed through myth (including culture autobiography), novels, poems, and other fictive works of the imagination. (127)[105]

Oppermann argues that ecocritics do not pay enough attention to the interpretative role of language, and argues that "[i]t is precisely because of ecocritical underestimation of this fact that much work in this promising field of eco-literary studies does not go beyond simplistic contextual analyses of both literary and environmental texts" (103-104). As an example of this kind of limited analysis, Oppermann refers to William Rueckert's reading of Barry Lopez's *River Notes*, which states that:

> More than anything else, this book tries to destroy the human tendency to reduce nature or to transform it into something that it is not, especially abstractions, symbols, or formulae. Nature is. Birds are. Herons are herons. Stone is stone.[106]

The view of nature provided by the bog poems is the opposite of this kind of realist epistemological view, as the bog poems in fact undermine the relationship between nature's appearance and what it actually signifies, demonstrating that what seems to be just nature is really a combination of nature culture, undermining the idea that nature simply "is".

A transformation of nature into "something that it is not" as stated by Rueckert is realised for instance in "Kinship", in which nature is initially described as "[q]uagmire, swampland, morass" but eventually becomes a "bone vault", "embalmer / of votive gods", "insatiable bride", and even the "[o]utback" of the speaker's mind. Though some of these descriptions are factually correct, such as "bone vault" for instance, the religious terminology used to describe the bogs nevertheless signifies something essentially different from Rueckert's reference to representations of a nature that simply "is".

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[105] The text Meredith refers to in this quote is Y. F. Tuan, "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81.4 (1991), 684-696. Tuan is a significant theorist of place whose ideas have been widely contested; his emphasis tends to lie towards something that resembles Heideggerian dwelling so that Meredith's use of him as a point of reference for Heaney implies a particular understanding of Heaney's sense of human's best relation with the natural environment. More explicit Heideggerian readings of Heaney have been done by Garrard, in the second part of "Ecological Literary Criticism: Two Case Studies" and in "Heaney, Heidegger and the Problem of Dwelling", in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*.

[106] Rueckert on Lopez. Quote from Meredith, 110.

Rueckert's reading of Lopez demonstrates Oppermann's complaint that ecocritics simplify the relationship between the text and its referent. According to Oppermann, "[p]erhaps the gap between the poststructuralist emphasis on pure textuality and ecocritical focus on nature as a pure referent can be bridged by considering the possibility of another characteristic of ecocentric postmodernism: a dialogic interaction of texts and contexts" (118). Such an interdependent interaction between text and context can also be seen in the bog poems as they, like an "ecologically oriented postmodernism" as outlined by Oppermann, draw "attention to the linguistic manipulations behind the discursive constitution of nature" (118).

This discursive constitution can be addressed by a postmodern ecocriticism appropriate for addressing what Oppermann calls "postmodern fictions within which nature may not appear of primary concern but may nevertheless function as a literary device to affect the signification process" (119). In the bog poems, although the natural landscape does indeed "function as a literary device", the relationship between the bog and the cultural context they signify is complicated by the fact that the cultural context signified by the bogs is also present in (though not limited to) the physical realm of the bogs. Through this function of the bog as literary device on the one hand, and physical presence that contains that which it signifies on the other, the bogs seem to create a version of the kind of dialogic between text and context referred to by Oppermann. By avoiding what Oppermann refers to as a common ecocritical misconception of postmodernism as "a meaningless celebration of the play of language which disregards everything that is outside it" (113), the bog poems could provide a bridge between a postmodern emphasis on the textuality of nature and a more traditional ecocritical emphasis on the text's referential dimension.

Oppermann adds that at the bottom of "the discursive constitution of nature […] lies human oppression of the nonhuman world resulting in the environmental degradation" (117). Though the bog poems are not explicitly concerned with environmental degradation, the references to pagan rituals and sacrifices to an earth goddess nevertheless touch upon if not oppression then issues of domination in relation to nature and culture. This theme is reflected in the contemporary context in which, though under different premises, people are still 'sacrificed' in the name of the land or the earth, as suggested by Parker's reading of "Kinship" as a commentary on "how the cruelties inflicted upon 'dark-bowered queen', Mother Ireland, Kathleen ni Houlihan, Shan van Vocht, have brutalised her sons, engendering a love of territory and ancestry that can carry them to appalling extremes" (134). In the case of both the ancient pagan rituals and the contemporary context, humans

are sacrificed for the sake of the earth rather than the other way around, as Heaney observes, with reference to Glob's book about the *The Bog People*:

> P. V. Glob argues convincingly that a number of [the bog people], and in particular the Tollund man, whose head is now preserved near Aarhus in the museum Silkeburg, were ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess, the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the bog, to ensure the renewal and fertility of the territory in the spring. Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for that cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan, this is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. (*Preoccupations*, 57)

This pattern appears to reverse the pattern of human oppression and domination of nature leading to environmental degradation that Oppermann has in mind, suggesting another dismantling of opposites that takes place in the bog poems. Here, however, humans sacrifice other humans to the earth. This is the human agency that is the main theme and object of the bog poems as a whole. The very inextricability of the natural from the cultural in the poem complicates Oppermann's comments on the "discursive constitution of nature".

The repeated replacement of nature by culture is reflected in a statement by Neil Corcoran referring to the bog poems' sense of claustrophobia. The alignment of references to incidents from various historical times and places refer to the recurring behaviour that Heaney describes above as "an archetypal pattern". According to Corcoran, the bog poems' discovery of "an interconnectedness between contemporary sectarian atrocity in the North of Ireland, the behaviour of Viking invaders, and the ritual murders of Iron Age Jutland"[107] creates a feeling of walking in circles. This leads Corcoran to describe the bog poems as "claustrophobically obsessive and intimate" (62). A recurring pattern is seen not only in the behaviour to which the poems refer, but also in the structure of the poems themselves, as each poem begins with positive references to nature yet arrives at a place defined by human violence. This repetition of patterns creates a self-referential context that contributes to the claustrophobic feeling described by Corcoran, who notes that "[t]he effect of this risky procedure is to make a certain monotony part of the poems' effect; they seem introverted, almost incestuously self-generated" (62).

The bog poems show a nature that is, in Oppermann's words, "'written' by the human agency, culture, history and politics, and thus unable to intervene in these forces, because it is already

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[107] Neil Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study*, London: Faber and Faber, 1998, 25.

determined as such" (123). This image of nature as culture that the bog poems illustrate, and to some extent create, responds to several of Oppermann's complaints regarding ecocriticism's too extensive focus on realist epistemology and failure to complicate the relationship between the text and its referent. At the same time, by depending so extensively and explicitly on the physical presence and aspects of the bogs, manifested especially in the bog people and demonstrated by the careful observations of the archaeological findings in "The Tollund Man" and "The Grauballe Man", Heaney's poems resist a postmodern marginalisation or invalidation of the natural referent, avoiding what Oppermann refers to as imprisoning "nature and practically all reality within an endlessly differentiating play of signifiers" (114). By thus concurrently questioning and depending on a natural referent the bog poems can be seen to illustrate a postmodern view of nature.

Chapter 3:

Technology and landscape: counter and recovery poems in Elmet

Introduction

This chapter examines how Hughes's *Elmet* poems portray the relationship between landscape and technology. It argues that the *Elmet* poems can be classified as counter and recovery narratives, as identified and described by David Nye. The poems are counter narratives in that they illustrate people's vulnerability and exposure to forces of nature, even in places where humans appear to be in charge, such as in an industrial setting. They are recovery poems in so far as they describe people and their impact on the environment as ultimately non-lasting, imagining a time-scale on which anthropogenic ecological damage will eventually be repaired by natural processes.

Nye has developed a theoretical framework for identifying different narrative responses to technological change and the relationship between technology and nature. These theories will form the basis for this chapter's analysis of Hughes's poems. The most important source is Nye's book length study from 2003 (references are to the paperback edition from 2004), *America as Second Creation*. Some reference will also be made to Nye's latest book, *When the Lights Went Out*, from 2010[108].

In *America as Second Creation,* Nye establishes a structural framework according to which he identifies different narrative responses to technological developments. His theories are developed from a North American perspective, and refer primarily to industrialisation in the United States between the 18th and 20th centuries. It is argued here that his theories are also applicable, with a few reservations, to the *Elmet* poems. The technologies involved are mostly the same (mills, canals and railways), as are concerns for the effects on local environments as well as on the labour force. Even if the differences were more pronounced, Nye's framework could still be helpful for analysing any text that involves interactions between technology, culture and the natural environment.

A few things, however, should be kept in mind. For instance, Nye takes as his primary examples stories that formed contemporaneously with the technological developments that they describe. The *Elmet* poems, meanwhile, were written after both the rise and fall of industrialisation in the Calder area, and thus with a different, retrospective, perspective. However, as Nye also points out, the

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[108] David E. Nye, *When the Lights Went Out: A History of Blackouts in America*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.

various types of stories he identifies continue to be written and re-written, with definitive outcome less relevant than continuous re-framing and re-examination.

Remains of Elmet was published in 1979. In 1994, a second revised edition followed, entitled simply *Elmet*. The later edition excludes some poems from the first version, and includes a few new ones. This chapter will make references to poems from both editions.

The Upper Calder Valley

Elmet was a Celtic kingdom in the north of England between the 5th and the early 7th century. The area is now part of West Yorkshire and includes the Upper Calder Valley. The valley is situated on the southeastern slopes of the Pennines, a low-rising mountain range stretching through northern England to the south of Scotland. The valley takes its name from the river Calder, which runs through it. One of five smallish towns scattered along the banks of the river in the valley is Mytholmroyd, where Hughes was born.

The Upper Calder Valley was transformed by the industrial revolution. Major demographic changes took place as farmers abandoned the hills in order to take up work in mills and factories on the valley floor. By the latter half of the 19th century, the terraces surrounding the valley were more or less abandoned, and cultivated fields reverted to moorland. Down in the valley, the railway and canal were built and roads were improved in order to facilitate better transportation. Dams and other constructions designed to manipulate and secure the supply of water from the Calder river were built. Later on as mills were powered by steam rather than water, the burning of coal had other, more subtle effects on the local environment, such as covering most town buildings with a thin layer of soot.

With the decline of the textile industry in the first half of the 20th century, the valley suffered. Again, demographic changes took place as people moved to nearby cities such as Leeds and Manchester. In Todmorden, one of the small towns in the valley, the population halved. By the 1960s and 70s, mills were being closed on a weekly basis[109].

In an attempt to address post-industrial stagnation and migration, the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR) was launched in January 2003 by Yorkshire Forward, a regional development agency. The project aims to spark and accommodate "regeneration on all levels" of life in the valley, and create "a connected, creative, and sustainable" environment in the towns as well as on

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[109] See the Upper Calder Valley Renaissance website: www.ucvr.org.uk (http://www.ucvr.org.uk/page.php?ID=4, accessed 31 May 2010).

the surrounding moors. Since its launch, a number of projects have been undertaken and completed, and the initiative is still ongoing.

The foundation narrative

In *America as Second Creation*, Nye develops a theoretical framework according to which he defines various types of narratives that emerged in response to technological progress in North America between the 18th and 20th centuries. The narratives Nye is interested in describe new inventions such as mills, canals, railways, dams and irrigation systems. Different types of narratives tell different stories; some are celebrations of human ingenuity, while others focus on exploitation of workers or environmental hazards.

The first type of story that Nye identifies is the foundation narrative, also referred to as master narrative or second-creation story. Foundation narratives provide new inventions with a cultural framework, a place or function in society. Nye describes a typical foundation story accordingly:

- A group (or an individual) enters an undeveloped region.
- They have one or more new technologies.
- Using the new technologies, they transform a part of the region.
- The new settlement prospers, and more settlers arrive.
- Land values increase, and some settlers become wealthy.
- The original landscape disappears and is replaced by a second creation largely shaped by the new technology.
- The process begins again as some members of the community depart for another undeveloped region.

(2004: 13)

This description corresponds well to the process of industrialisation in the Calder valley. Notably, the focus of the *Elmet* poems remain on one location, and thus describes what happens after the initial period of prosperity rather than the development of a new area, as referred to by Nye's last point here.

Generally, foundation stories embrace new technologies, and are characterised by a pioneering spirit and a will to conquer. They describe how new technologies found new communities and towns, often in areas that could formerly be referred to as wilderness. Usually, they view technology as improving both non-human nature and the quality of people's lives. According to Nye, such "narratives naturalized the technological transformation of the United States so that it seemed an inevitable and harmonious process leading to a second-creation that was implicit in the

structure of the world" (2004: 6). Foundation narratives, in summary, entertain a strong focus on positive developments that occur spontaneously and naturally and that benefit everyone involved.

Nye emphasises that this type of story was especially prevalent in America, where people to a further extent than in Europe viewed nature as something waiting to be improved by human designs. Unlike in England, for example, where John Greenleaf Whittier states that "[w]hen the rail-cars came thundering through his lake country, Wordsworth attempted to exorcise them by a sonnet"[110], in America people did not object in the same way to the formation of an industrial landscape. Nye suggests that the belief that nature was "created not to be picturesque but to be useful" (2004: 10) was more common in America than in England. This view was supported by writers like Emerson, for instance, who Nye argues was among those who believed that "the land exists for a purpose" (2004: 10).

According to Nye, the type of narrative that this view of nature informed portrayed human exploitation of natural resources as being in harmony with the order of the natural world:

> The persistent desire to assimilate nature to a second technological creation was the central feature of technological foundation stories. In each case, popular narratives explained how Americans were using new tools and machines to assimilate nature. These stories described the creation of new social worlds, ranging from frontier settlements to communities based on irrigation. In each case, a new form of society based on successful exploitation of a new technology became possible. The stories were central to the new nation's perception of history and geography, which is to say its perception of time and space. (2004: 11)

The foundation story not only assumes but also promotes human dominion over nature. It argues that development equals progress, and that progress is positive.

The counter narrative
The counter narrative opposes the foundation story. It criticises the technology that the foundation narrative embraces, and brings to attention negative effects that the new invention may have on humans or on the environment. For instance, rather than describe the prosperity that a new mill brings to a small town, the counter narrative might tell a story of poor working conditions inside the mill.

Nye defines counter-narratives as texts that "resist or reimagine technological change and seek to

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[110] Quotes from Nye, 2004: 9.

ground identity not in machines but in other cultural artifacts and values" (2004: 14). Constructed by "Native Americans, farmers, fishermen, striking workers, and environmentalists", counter-narratives, according to Nye,

> emphasized conflict rather than the harmonious unfolding of events. Whereas second-creation stories treat the land as empty space, ignoring the original inhabitants, the counter-narratives are told from the viewpoint of the indigenous community and/or emphasize the ecological effects of technological change. The ways in which the foundation narrative can be recoded are many and can be extremely complex. Though it has no ideal form, the following inversion of the earlier example suggests how a dominant story might be challenged:
> - Outsiders enter an existing biotic and/or human community.
> - They acquire its land and assets by force or legal trickery.
> - They possess powerful new technologies.
> - They begin to use these technologies to transform the landscape, undermining the existing community's way of life.
> - The existing community and the new one come into conflict.
> - The new community wins.
> - Additional settlers arrive and complete the transformation of the landscape.
> - The original community loses population and goes into decline.
> - Its people become marginal and disappear and move away.
> (2004: 15)

The story told by the *Elmet* poems looks more like this outline than like that of the foundation narrative. In Hughes's story, the farmers on the slopes of the Calder valley represent the old, pre-industrialised community. The new community arrived with the businessmen who built the factories, mills, and railway. Because the *Elmet* poems are written in retrospect, the last two points on Nye's list also apply to the community that was left after the mills closed and workers were forced to move elsewhere. This is interesting, as in the *Elmet* story it is then not only the old community that eventually withers and disappears, but likewise the new community, with and in spite of its "powerful new technologies".

Further defining the characteristics of the counter-narrative, Nye states that it "is often a tragic tale of struggle and defeat that begins with treaty violations or other illegalities" (2004: 15) and proceeds to "reconstruct familiar events, sometimes by emphasizing a different ideological orientation or a fundamentally different epistemology" (2004: 16). Environmentalism is one such alternative ideology. Many counter-narratives promote the preservation of wilderness areas,

sustainable development, animal rights, and so on. The most famous environmental counter narrative is arguably Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* from 1962.

Nye states that counter narratives that emphasise harmful effects of technological developments

> saw new technologies not as tools used to make second creation but as weapons used to destroy the existing habitat. If Thoreau focused on the initial act of destroying the trees, and if Marsh focused on pollution, flooding, and other environmental effects, many later critics examined the rest of the mill narrative. How did the mill affect the society? Did it bring prosperity? Was the landscape of this second creation desirable? Most important, what were the effects on workers? These concerns gradually became predominant. (2004: 121)

By changing perspectives and emphases, the counter narrative thus identifies aspects of a development that the foundation story failed to recognise or acknowledge, or implied was unimportant. In this way, a dialogue is created between different framings or aspects of a new technology.

Most of the *Elmet* poems can be read as counter narratives. "The Trance of Light"[111], for example, focuses on how the onset of industrialisation, rather than improving people's lives, put non-human nature to sleep:

> The upturned face of this land
> The mad singing in the hills
> The prophetic mouth of the rain
>
> […] fell asleep
>
> Under migraine headscarves and clatter
> Of clog-irons and looms

This poem expresses a deep ecological perspective on the relationship between man and nature as severed by industrialisation. As Ralph Pite points out in "How Green were the Romantics?", in the view of deep ecologists "the ecological crisis derives from the western understanding of man's place in the world"; from the perception of a "false division of man from nature" (361). This perceived division enables and legitimates the exploitation of nature as something separate from the human

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[111] *CP*, 459.

realm. In the view deep ecology, as Pite also notes, the same perception "grounds the scientific method" (361). This corresponds to Hughes's and White's understanding of the relationship between science and technology and Christianity, as likewise based on a view of humans and nature as fundamentally separated. In different ways, Hughes and White express the belief of deep ecologists that, as described by Pite, "[s]o long indeed as we continue to think of ourselves as separate from nature we will continue to destroy both", and that the way to rectify this situation is by returning "to the wisdom of ancient peoples" (361). "The Trance of Light", by describing industrialisation as putting the natural world to sleep, in this way supports a deep ecological perspective of humans and nature. The *Elmet* collections in general support this view by describing technological progress as leading to ecological degradation.

Moving from an ecological to a sociological perspective, "Hill-Stone was Content"[112] describes a scene in which factories reduce workers to anonymous and interchangeable bodies dominated by machines, rather than the other way around:

> And inside the mills mankind
> With bodies that came and went
> Stayed in position, fixed, like the stones
> Trembling in the song of the looms.

Soon people even begin to look like the mills: they become "four-cornered, stony", standing immovable in "the guerrilla patience / Of the soft hill-water".

To illustrate, Nye uses the example of the axe, which gave rise to some typical examples of foundation stories and related counter-narratives. The improved American axe apparently inspired numerous settlement stories (a type of foundation narrative) that typically describe a single male pioneer venturing into the wilderness, where he clears the forest and builds a cabin. The cabin eventually develops into an entire farm, forming the beginning of a new and prosperous town. Nye points out that this narrative provides the basis for, among other things, the symbolic image of the log cabin, especially powerful in America where it continues to be an important political symbol of an idealised rural past. This type of settler story emphasises man's ability to conquer a nature that is provided by God for the benefit of the people. They frame deforestation and the transformation of wilderness into farmland as improving the landscape. Counter narratives oppose that frame, and

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[112] *CP*, 463.

argue that the massive deforestation of North America that took place in the early 19th century signified thoughtless exploitation and recklessness rather than progress.

Foundation stories about the axe went through several distinctive phases. Nye notes that the initial foundation story was given full expression by Walt Whitman, while responding counter-narratives were composed by Cooper, Thoreau and others. Nye also notes that eventually stories about the axe became nostalgic, using the axe as "a representation of a simple life that had slipped away" (2004: 90).

Nye also points out that none of these framings, the foundation, counter and nostalgic narratives, signify a final statement. Rather, "[a]ll these variants continue to circulate in American culture" (2004: 90).

Nye's second example is the mill narrative. Different from stories about the axe that typically centred on one individual, Nye notes that "the classic foundation narrative of the mill was widely accepted as a description of the formation and growth of communities" (2004: 97). According to Nye, foundation mill narratives justify the formation of towns "as natural outgrowths of unexploited rivers and streams", often to the extent that the mills signify the completion of "the work begun by the Almighty" (2004: 109). Furthermore:

> The antebellum mill narrative was the story of a partnership with nature. It was at once a fable of origins, explaining how towns and cities emerged from the landscape, as Americans developed its potentialities, and a counter-narrative to British developments. The foundation narrative gained force through a series of contrasts: not the "artificial power" of steam but the "natural power" of water, not vast factories but small mills, not smoky cities but pastoral towns, not an anonymous crowd of workers but women and children from a tightly knit community working for a short time in factory, not European landlords but American freeholders. (2004: 115)

Notably, the *Elmet* poems fulfill all the 'nots' of this paragraph.

Interesting is also Nye's comment regarding how these narratives relate to different conditions in the US compared to the UK: "The primary meaning of this American foundational story lay in its inversion of the story of British industrial oppression" (2004: 116). Nye also notes that focusing on differences between England and America "distracted attention from the complaints of environmentalists and the protests of workers" (2004: 116).

Nevertheless, counter narratives also emerged and argued that mills exploited both human and natural resources. Such stories developed simultaneously with the foundation narratives, and

quickly grew in number. Compared to foundation stories which saw the mills as materialisations of a successful partnership between man and nature, environmental counter narratives portrayed the mills as destructive, worsening rather than improving human lives and destroying ecosystems. The counter narratives did not describe the mills as fulfilling the hidden potential of rivers, but rather as obstructing the natural course of the water, causing fish and other forms of life in the rivers to die.

Other counter narratives focused on sociological conditions, and argued that the mills exploited the work force. As seen in "The Trance of Light" and "Hillstone was Content", Hughes's depiction of technology and change in the Upper Calder Valley addresses both sociological and ecological hazards. Generally, the *Elmet* poems describe industrialisation as an evil force that entered the valley and drained it of both physical and mental energy, leaving the land eroded and the people exhausted.

The rise and fall of the textile industry in the Calder valley as told by some particular *Elmet* poems can be compared to some stories about the building, prosperity and decline of mills in America, where a mill would sometimes give rise to a town or community which only existed briefly as a direct result of the mill. In such cases, the mill was the centre not of a growing, developing community but of a space without value or meaning independent of the mill. When the mill closed, Nye notes, it left behind "desolate rubble presiding over the ravaged stumps and eroded land" (2004: 121). An English version of that story is told by Hughes in "Mill Ruins"[113]:

> One morning
> The shuttle's spirit failed to come back
> (Japan had trapped it
> In a reconstructed loom
> Cribbed from smiling fools in Todmorden).
>
> Cloth rotted, in spite of the nursing.
> Its great humming abbeys became tombs.
>
> And the children
> Of rock and water and a draughty absence
> Of everything else
> Roaming for leftovers

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[113] *CP*, 464.

Smashed all that would smash

What would not smash they burned

What would not burn

They levered loose and toppled down hillsides.

Then trailed away homeward aimlessly

Like the earliest

Homeless Norsemen.

These lines describe the end of industrial prosperity in the Calder valley, as the manufacturing factories move to Asia. The mills become silent "tombs", and the whole valley becomes characterised by an absence rather than a presence. Children and other remaining inhabitants are left with nothing to do.

Unlike foundation stories about the axe, foundation narratives about mills eventually became rare, mainly because it was recognised that working conditions in the factories were indeed often unsatisfactory. Nye states that "[i]f the foundation narrative presented the mill as the automatic source of prosperity and community development, the radical rewriting of that story presented it as the site of inevitable class conflict" (2004: 136). This outcome was seen in numerous novels and other texts narrating strikes and other forms of protests against working conditions in the mills. Nye concludes that the mill came to be seen more or less exclusively as a symbol of "the willful exploitation of human labor" (2004: 128): a source of poverty rather than prosperity, of cruelty rather than progression, and of pollution, corruption and other evils. Consequently, most mill stories were outnumbered by counter-narratives. In this aspect, they differ from narratives about the axe, in which case foundation stories continued to develop alongside counter narratives and still play an important role in American ideology and rhetorics.

The third foundation story discussed by Nye refers to infrastructure, especially canals and railways. The development of such means for transport, according to Nye, signified the "conquest of space" (2004: 147): "Whereas the narrative of the axe concerned solitary individuals, and the narrative of the mill described the emergence of towns, the foundation narratives of the canal and railroad projected new cities and massive growth for entire regions" (2004: 148).

The railways were of considerable importance regarding the emergence, as well as of later

stagnation, of numerous towns in North America. Towns that emerged as a direct result of the building of a mill, according to Nye, were more likely than other towns to stagnate after an initial decade of rapid growth, supposedly due to poor social structures that did not match the new infrastructure (2004: 167). Nonetheless, foundation stories celebrated the railway as bringer of economic prosperity to formerly remote and cut-off areas. Corresponding counter-narratives focused on social inequality as the result of monopolies, or on negative effects of the railways on the environment.

These and related issues were dealt with by writers like Emerson, Thoreau, and, later, Leo Marx, who wrote different kinds of counter narratives. According to Nye, these writers provoked doubt as to whether technology really signified progress, as in their stories "the power of nature to heal industrial wounds seemed less certain with each passing year" (2004: 177). However, Emerson and Thoreau did not necessarily oppose new technology as such, but feared, according to Nye, "the subordination of imagination to materiality" (2004: 176). This is precisely also Hughes's concern, as expressed, for instance, in the short poem "Wild Rock"[114]:

> Tamed rock.
> Millstone-grit – a soul-grinding sandstone.
>
> Roof-of-the-world-ridge wind
> And rain, and rain.
>
> Heaven – the face of a quarry.
> Oak-leaves of hammered copper, as in Cranach.
> Grass greening on acid.
>
> Wind. Cold. A permanent weight
> To be braced under. And rain.
>
> A people fixed
> Staring at fleeces, blown like blown flames.
>
> A people converting their stony ideas
> To woollen weave, thick worsteds, dense fustians

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[114] *CP*, 464-465.

Between their bones and the four trembling quarters.

"Wild Rock" is one of several mill counter narratives in *Elmet*, and portrays environmental as well as industrial hardship: "Tamed rock" describes how humans 'constrict' nature, while the "soul-grinding sandstone" and "[a] permanent weight" conveys the monotonous and often physically taxing work in the factories. The relationship between damages to the environment and human misery which Hughes depicts in the *Elmet* collections is especially poignant in this poem in the reference to how within the stone building of the mill people's ideas also become "stony", and is also reflected in the description of how the sky above the valley becomes like "the face of a quarry".

"Remains of Elmet" and "Top Withens"

"Remains of Elmet"[115], the title poem of the first edition, summarises the most significant events in the history of the Upper Calder Valley: its creation by the end of the last ice age, cultivation by farmers, industrial transformation, and post-industrial decline. The poem is not a foundation story. If it had been, it would have celebrated the foundation of towns and settlements in the previously uninhabited valley, affirming human progress and the conquest of land. Instead, the poem focuses on how, in spite of all the efforts, everything comes to nothing in the end, and only scraps remain of past endeavours:

> Death-struggle of the glacier
> Enlarged the long gullet of Calder
> Down which its corpse vanished.

> Farms came, stony masticators
> Of generations that ate each other
> To nothing inside them.

> The sunk mill-towns were cemeteries
> Digesting utterly
> All with whom they swelled.

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[115] *CP*, 468-469.

Now, coil behind coil,

A wind-parched ache,

An absence, famished and staring,

Admits tourists

To pick among the crumbling, loose molars

And empty sockets.

While the absence in "Mill Ruins" described the immediate absence of industry, the "absence" in the penultimate stanza of this poem refers to a void left by people, caused both by migration as a result of lack of work but also by the many men from this area that were killed in the two world wars (commenting on the effects of the wars on the valley, Hughes states in the introduction to the later *Elmet* that "a single bad ten minutes in no man's land would wipe out a street or a village"[116]). "Remains of Elmet" is a dark and gloomy poem, defined by grim words like "death-struggle", "corpse" and "cemeteries", and similarly negative words like "vanished", "nothing", "sunk", "digesting", "wind-parched", "crumbling", "empty" and, as mentioned, "absence". The finishing note is equally off-putting, suggesting tourists rummaging among human remains. No source of hope is provided. "Remains of Elmet" was not included in the later revised *Elmet*, perhaps due to this overwhelming sense of dismay.

"Top Withens"[117] states explicitly that which is only suggested in "Remains of Elmet", namely that "it is all over". The valley, once surrounded by "hills full of savage promise", has finally arrived "at the dead end of a wrong direction". What used to be the "dream's fort", despite being accompanied by "dogged purpose", cannot keep the wind and the sky from "swabbing the human shape from the freed stones". This last line signifies the difference from "Remains of Elmet", in precisely the adjective "freed". By arguing that the stones are "freed", the poem suggests that in spite of the general hardship of human life in the valley, some form of life continues, even if it is not human. The freed stones point forward rather than backward and suggest hope of renewal and regeneration, if not for humans than at least from a deep ecology perspective. "Top Withens" also refers to other texts; it is both the setting of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and the topic

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[116] Quote from Gifford, 2009: 50.

[117] *CP*, 486-487.

of a poem with the same title by Sylvia Plath[118], inspired by a visit to Top Withens together with Hughes.

Both "Remains of Elmet" and "Top Withens" propose that humans are incapable of leaving a lasting impression on the landscape, as suggested by the line referring to the human shape being swabbed from the stones. This might make them environmentally encouraging from a deep ecology perspective, as they imagine that the natural environment will eventually recover from damage inflicted upon it by humans. From a human point of view they read more like cautionary tales, suggesting that humans cannot compete with or contain forces of nature. This makes them counter narratives, advocating humility and caution with regard to the natural environment.

Recovery narratives and anti-landscapes

Nye suggests the term "anti-landscape" for describing a certain type of damaged environment. He defines the anti-landscape as "a man-modified space that once served as infrastructure for collective existence but that has ceased to do so, whether temporarily or long-term" (2010: 131). A typical example referred to by Nye is abandoned mining sites. Polluted by toxic waste, such sites can become more or less uninhabitable, leaving big, visible wounds in the landscape. Nye is interested in how such abandoned and polluted sites are translated into narrative. One narrative option for addressing the anti-landscape is the third type of story identified by Nye in *America as Second Creation*, namely the recovery narrative.

Recovery narratives form in response to damaged environments in general, and to counter narratives in particular. Nye states that a recovery narrative is "[e]ssentially about remaking a despoiled landscape", and therefore, unlike a foundation story, "begins not with empty space but with a place corrupted and degraded by human misuse" (2004: 294). A typical recovery narrative, according to Nye, may describe a site where

> the free market has unleashed selfish individuals who have exploited the land for short-term gain. To restore natural beauty and environmental harmony, a countervailing social force enters the area in the form of a nonprofit organization or government agency. After taking control away from short-sighted private interests, this institution redevelops the area. It cleans up pollution, halts erosion, plants new trees and shrubs, restocks rivers and lakes with native species, protects wildlife, and gives back to the public a restored version of the natural world. (2004: 294)

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[118] In *Crossing the Water*, (1971).

Nye mentions Yosemite and Yellowstone national parks as examples of places where such processes have taken place (2004: 295), thanks in part to writer and environmentalist John Muir, whose work continues to inspire activists in America and elsewhere.

Recovery narratives are often meant to promote and inspire a process of social and ecological regeneration and restoration of the areas to which they refer. Unlike for the foundation stories, Nye points out, the starting point for the recovery narrative is the recognition of a problem, environmental or other. Contrary to counter narratives, the recovery story then aims to overcome, rather than just identify, that problem. According to Nye, the recovery narrative has dominated the 20th century. Presumably, it will continue to prevail in the 21st century as environmental crises continue to develop.

The most extreme anti-landscapes are uninhabitable spaces. The Upper Calder Valley of Hughes's *Elmet* poems, though not uninhabited, still exhibits some of the characteristics of the anti-landscape. As a result of its industrial history, the area is affected by pollution, as suggested for example by Hughes's reference to "the poisonous Calder" ("Sunstruck"[119]) and as seen from the blackened buildings[120]. Many inhabitants also had to leave the valley in order to find work as jobs disappeared when mills and factories were closed. On grounds of both sociological and ecological conditions then, the Upper Calder Valley may be described as a type of anti-landscape, susceptible to a recovery narrative.

"Regeneration"

Ann Skea has written about "Regeneration in *Remains of Elmet*" (1994). In this essay, Skea states that

> [t]hroughout his creative life, Ted Hughes has used his poetry to tap the universal energies and to channel their healing powers towards the sterility and the divisions which he sees in our world. All his major sequences of poetry work towards this end, and *Remains of Elmet* represents an important step in Hughes's ability to achieve wholeness and harmony through the imaginative, healing processes of his art.[121]

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[119] *CP*, 475-476.
[120] Many of these conditions have improved since the writing of *Remains of Elmet* in the 1970s.
[121] Ann Skea, "Regeneration in *Remains of Elmet*", *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar, New York: St Martin's Press, 1994, 116.

According to Skea, *Remains of Elmet* illustrates the fate of a society that tries to dominate rather than co-operate with nature, creating a "masterful demonstration of Nature's supremacy over humankind" (117). Though Skea recognises that Hughes's idea about poetic regeneration and "the imaginative, healing processes of his art" is "superstitious", she still seems to accept this view, as seen from the quote above and other normative statements, such as that Hughes "is skilled at using the rhythms and the rituals of poetry for this purpose" (116). She makes several similar statements, for example:

> Unlike [Hughes's] earlier sequences, the focus of *Remains of Elmet* is on the real world, peopled by real people, not a world of imaginative fantasy through which symbolic figures journey. The world of Elmet existed and exists, and Hughes's poems recreate it vividly in such a way that we may perceive the human errors which have desecrated it and the enduring, everpresent forces of Nature which survive. (117)

Though she has a point in that the *Elmet* poems are about the real world in a sense that a book like *Crow* is not, when she states that Hughes "recreates" a world that "existed and exists", Skea fails to recognise or at least make explicit the extent to which Hughes chooses to frame this world in a certain way. By treating the world depicted by Hughes in the poems as a matter of fact, Skea misses the point made by Nye when he emphasises the different ways in which narratives respond to and frame technological change. This is not to argue that Skea's analysis of the poems is itself beside the point. On the contrary, the two main themes that Skea identifies, the destructive and simultaneously creative powers of nature corresponds to the argument of the counter and recovery narratives made here. However, Skea's analysis arguably makes too many value-laden statements to be convincing. Another example:

> The reader is aware of the beauty and the unity of the poetry and of its emotional impact, whilst the deeper thematic aspects of the sequence work on the subconscious mind and may never be consciously formulated. In addition to this, the beautiful integration of the poetry with Fay Godwin's dramatic and evocative photographs, and the great personal significance which this area and its people clearly have for Hughes, seem to provide all the reason we need to explain this work's creation. (117)

Skea proceeds to demonstrate in more detail what she is referring to by turning to the last poem in

Remains of Elmet, "The Angel"[122]. The angel in the poem, as Skea points out, signifies what may be referred to at different times as mother nature, earth goddess or a creative spirit. The angel also refers back to the first poem in the collection, "Where the Mothers", as the 'mothers' also signify something like 'mother nature'.

The poem describes a dream of "something monstrous":

> It was an angel made of smoking snow.
> Her long dress fluttered about her ankles,
> Her bare feet just cleared the moor beneath her
> Which glowed like the night-cloud over Sheffield.

The angel represents a spiritual dimension of the physical landscape, and is described as simultaneously terrifying and beautiful. According to Skea, it "is a symbol through which [Hughes] invokes the elemental forces of the universe to redress the natural balance which has been disturbed" (122). From having appeared amidst flames in the beginnings of the poem, in the end, the angel/goddess disappears "[u]nder the moor". Skea points out that

> there are resemblances between Hughes' angel and the Apocalyptic messengers of several major religious texts. They, too, appear amidst fiery disturbances to bring a warning to the human race. They too, serve an omnipotent power which threatens death and destruction for human misdeeds. And they, too, offer the hope of blessing and spiritual rebirth. Through such links as these, Hughes channels the invoked energies of his angelic symbol towards creative rather than destructive ends. At the same time, he indicates the spiritual aspect of the regeneration he seeks to effect in *Remains of Elmet*. (119)

This is a relevant interpretation with reference to the two themes of counter and recovery narratives in the *Elmet* poems: the "warning to the human race" relates to the idea of the environmental counter narrative, while the spiritual regeneration is a variant of the recovery narrative. While several statements in Skea's analysis of this collection refer too generally to the 'healing powers of Nature', her main argument regarding Hughes's wish in these poems to evoke a spiritual dimension of the landscape that is both destructive and creative corresponds to the definitions of the counter and recovery narratives.

Commenting further on environmental concerns expressed in poems like "Remains of Elmet"

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[122] *CP*, 492-493.

and "Top Withens", Keith Sagar states that *Remains of Elmet*

> is entirely about the crime against nature, which here takes the form of the enslavement of a people conscripted into the mills, the chapels, the trenches, conscripted also into the human attempt to conscript in turn the mothers, the sustaining elements of earth, air, fire and water, to degraded spiritless purposes.[123]

The crime committed against nature, according to Sagar, is the attempt to confine, contain and suppress "the mothers", signifying, as Skea also points out, nature. In the *Elmet* poems, any attempt at modifying or "sustaining" forces of nature has a correspondingly degrading effect on the people in the same environment, and appears to sign them up to "degraded spiritless purposes", as Sagar puts it.

Terry Gifford shifts the emphasis somewhat away from "the crime against nature" when he states that the poems in *Remains of Elmet* "celebrate the landscape and its elemental process as the dominant force to which human culture must adjust and thus be shaped by" (2009: 48). Borrowing the same expression from Hughes which also lends itself to the title of Sagar's book length study, "the laughter of foxes"[124], Gifford concludes that "[u]ltimately, Elmet is the kingdom of foxes and their laughter appears to be mocking the human presumption that it could be a home for industry, farming or religion" (2009: 51). If Sagar emphasises Hughes's depiction of environmental damage inflicted upon the landscape, in Gifford's view the *Elmet* poems are primarily about the ultimate temporal localisation of that impact. These two points of view also correspond to counter and recovery narratives, respectively.

Recycling: "Dead farms, dead leaves"
A different way of reading the *Elmet* poems as a recovery narrative is by focusing on recycling rather than regeneration. Throughout the collection, emphasis is put on recycling and organic renewal, on old factories falling into the earth. Gifford notes this and states that in these poems "Hughes observes the temporary nature of the waves of human uses of the landscape", especially the insignificance of "the road, railway and canal in the fullness of [the valley's] own geological timescale" (2009: 48).

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[123] Keith Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes*, 2nd ed., Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006, 153.
[124] From the poem "Chinese History of Calden Water", included in the collection *Elmet*. *CP*, 738-739.

Gifford exemplifies his statement by referring to the poem "Shackleton Hill"[125], originally titled "Dead Farms, Dead Leaves" in the first version of *Remains of Elmet*, and argues that this poem narrates the interconnectedness between the human and the natural world, as

> Dead farms, dead leaves
> Cling to the long
> Branch of the world

while

> Stars sway the tree
> Whose roots
> Tighten on an atom

The tree is the tree of the world, holding together the vast universe, represented by the stars, and its smallest components, the atoms, reflecting the notion that everything is connected.

According to Gifford, "Shackleton Hill" argues that "the failed human projects in this landscape can be understood as an organic part of the processes at work in this land" (2009: 49). Farms and industries are simply different generations or branches on the same tree. While animals, people and factories "[v]isit // And vanish", the tree continues to sway in the wind, one of few constants. Gifford argues that "Dead Farms, Dead Leaves" establishes a context in which sociological and ecological factors eventually become interchangeable, and symptoms of the same causes, thus intermingling culture and nature. Based on this "interchangeability of images", according to Gifford, "dead farms *are* the dead leaves of the culture of Elmet" (2009: 136), forming a linguistic pattern which persists throughout the poems.

The interconnectedness between the human and the non-human also helps to explain "Lumb Chimneys"[126] which, Gifford points out, "provides an organic image for industrial decay" (2009: 49). The poem states that "[t]he huge labour of leaf is simply thrown away" and that "[g]reat yesterdays are left lying", while, put into the same category of passing incidentals, "[b]rave dreams and their mortgaged walls are let rot in the rain". Meanwhile, the "spirit does what it can to save itself alone". In summary, "[n]othing really cares. But soil deepens". This is more encouraging than

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[125] *CP*, 469-470.
[126] *CP*, 456-457.

at first it may sound, as it is in the deepening soil that new life will grow. Accordingly, the poem ends by stating that "[b]efore these chimneys can flower again / They must fall into the only future, into earth".

Such processes of regeneration or recycling in the landscape are mirrored by changes inside the people who live in the same landscape. The poems suggest that by trying to contain or suppress forces of nature, the human spirit is equally constrained. In "Gods of Mud: Hughes and Post-pastoral"[127], Gifford notes that

> In Hughes's notion of Nature the outer processes echo the inner processes so that they are part of a whole. The organic tensions in external Nature are enacted in human nature. Processes at work in landscapes are at work in the human complex of energies. This is what 'The knight' recognises in *Cave Birds*, and Lumb in his identification with the tree from which his changeling self is made (*Gaudete*). In *Remains of Elmet* external natural processes are shown to be reflected not just in individuals but in both a farming and an industrial culture. Hence the poem title 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves', for example, or the poem about 'Lumb Chimneys' 'flowering' like trees and 'falling into the future, into earth'. (1994: 136)

Hughes claims, thus, that the ecological recovery of the industrialised valley depends on the imaginative reawakening of its local population. As Skea emphasises in her analysis, the *Elmet* poems are an attempt to inspire such an awakening.

The *Elmet* collections also claim that spiritual reawakening is encouraged by the idea of ecological regeneration. The idea of death as a prerequisite for new life persists throughout the poems. "Long Screams"[128], for instance, describes a terrible scene where

> Unending bleeding.
> Deaths left over.
> The dead piled in cairns
> Over the dead.
> Everywhere dead things for monuments
> Of the dead.

However, by the end of the poem the mood is suddenly transformed as the

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[127] Terry Gifford, "Gods of Mud: Hughes and Post-pastoral", *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar, New York: St Martin's Press, 1994, 129-141.
[128] *CP*, 460.

> whole scene, like a mother,
> Lifts a cry
> Right to the source of it all.
>
> She has made a curlew

"She" is again mother nature, and the curlew signifies the continuation and making of new life.

Recovery narratives ideally, according to Nye's definition, incorporate aspects from corresponding foundation and counter narratives and use those to look forward. This ambition sets it apart from a fourth type of narrative mentioned by Nye, namely the nostalgic narrative, which idealises the past rather than looks towards the future. There are *Elmet* poems that exhibit this nostalgic tendency by romanticising pre-industrial life as lived in unison and harmony with nature. However, poems like "Long Screams" that focus on nature as something ever present, even if temporarily suppressed, rather than as something that has been lost mean that as a whole, the *Elmet* poems are better characterised as counter and recovery than nostalgic narratives.

Conclusion

The first of the *Elmet* poems' two accomplishments referred to in the introduction to this chapter, the illustration of people's exposure to the elements, is achieved through illustrations of the striking contrasts between life on the valley floor and conditions on the surrounding high moors. From the perspective from up on the moors, people and their ambitions appear small and futile. While changes (technological and other) take place down in the valley, wind and rain and other natural elements prevail on the moors. This is described in "Wind"[129], for example. In this poem, the elements suddenly reach down into the valley, interrupting people and reminding them of their vulnerability. The wind threatens to break into the houses:

> deep
>
> In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
> Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,
> Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,

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[129] Originally published in *The Hawk in the Rain*, later included in *Elmet*. *CP*, 36-37.

And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,

Seeing the window tremble to come in,

Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

In order to illustrate the smallness of human endeavours compared to the history and ecology of the earth, Hughes describes, as vividly as he can, the powers and beauty of the non-human world. The *Elmet* poems aim to inspire a sense of respect, awe and humility with regard to the natural environment. The result is the opposite of a foundation narrative, as foundation stories support and endorse the will and ability of people to master their surroundings, to accommodate and utilise forces of nature according to their needs. Rather than a foundation story, the *Elmet* poems form a counter narrative meant to caution the conquering spirit of industrialisation and to suggest that unless heeded to, natural forces will strike back and, as stated in "Top Withens", swab "the human shape from the freed stones".

The second achievement relates to the fact that humans are, after all, part of the natural world. Taking that fact as its starting point, the poems form a recovery narrative according to which the rise and fall of the textile industry becomes part of the wider ecosystem of the valley and the surrounding moors. According to this story, time and nature (referred to as the spirit of the earth, or earth goddess, or mother nature) will eventually heal the ecological wounds inflicted by industrial exploitation and pollution. As Gifford points out, in this way the *Elmet* poems attempt to erase the line between nature and culture. This attempt is especially interesting in light of recent research that suggests that the Elmet region is man-made to a further extent than previously appreciated; in a study of the history of the rural English landscape, David Hey notes that new discoveries of the influence of human activity on the production of open moorland during the Bronze Age "has played an important part in the modern recognition of the huge scale of the prehistoric contribution to the development of the English rural landscape"[130]. The relation between nature and culture in the *Elmet* poems can thus be developed in two directions, suggesting that cultural impacts can be viewed as part of more far-reaching natural processes, but also that the cultural heritage of this region is an integrated part of the history of the landscape.

"Hardcastle Crags"[131] is another description of this recovery process. In this poem, polluting the

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[130] David Hey, "Moorlands", *Rural England: An Illustrated History of the Landscape*, ed. Joan Thirsk, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 192.

[131] *CP*, 456.

environment is described as silencing the voice of nature. The poem begins by referring to a different type of silence, however, quoting a Taoist proverb: "Think often of the silent valley, for the god lives there". For Hughes, as noted by Leonard Scigaj, Taoism represents an antithesis to both Protestantism and mechanical science[132]. The silence referred to in this opening line is thus not really silence at all, but a silence that contains the voice of the natural world, also known as the voice of the White Goddess (or earth goddess, or mother nature). This goddess is signified by the god mentioned in the proverb.

Following the first line, "Hardcastle Crags" details how this silence, the voice of the natural world, is mixed up with a different sort of silence, namely that left by the abandoned textile industry:

> here the leaf-loam silence
> Is old siftings of sewing machines and shuttles,
> And the silence of ant-warfare on pine-needles
> Is like the silence of clogs over cobbles

As factories are abandoned and the natural environment begins to recover, the silence of post-industrialisation gradually melts into the underlying silence of the valley, expressed in the line referring to how "the beech-tree solemnities / Muffle much cordite".

The comparison of the silence of "ant-warfare" to "the silence of clogs over cobbles", which of course is quite noisy, suggests that ant-warfare is not really silent at all, only that its pitch or level is on a different scale than human industrial sounds. The next stanza further emphasises that the silence of the valley is really a conglomeration of voices, past and present and from different representatives of the natural environment:

> In a deep gorge under palaeolithic moorland
> Meditation of conifers, a hide-out of elation,
> Is a grave of echoes.
> Name-lists of cenotaphs tangle here to mystify
> The voice of the dilapidated river
> And picnickers who paddle in the fringes of fear.

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[132] Leonard Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Form and imagination*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986, 235. However, John Gray has demonstrated in *Straw Dogs* (2007) that Taoism may not be friendly to environmentalism at all.

The reference to the picnickers suggests the vulnerability of humans that are taken out of their industrial setting and exposed to forces of nature. In the final stanza, "beech-roots repair a population / Of fox and badger" while the wind contains "[t]he love-murmurs of a generation of slaves / Whose bones melted in Asia Minor". The description of "love-murmurs" among the slaves alludes to hope and creativity, carried into the future by the wind.

Other *Elmet* poems likewise celebrate the creation and continuity of life, human and other, in spite of what appears to be harsh conditions. In "Football at Slack"[133], for instance, a football game is carried out up on the moors in spite of the fact that both players and ball are tossed about by the wind. Similarly, in "Wadsworth Moor"[134] the "harebell and heather" signify "a euphoria" in the midst of a landscape where "the millstone of sky" has ground "the skin off earth" until the moor is

> A land naked now as a wound
> That the sun swabs and dabs
>
> Where the miles of agony are numbness

A similar emphasis on continuity, interconnectivity and new life can be found in most of the *Elmet* poems. Other examples include "The Big Animal of Rock"[135], which describes plants as the "offspring" of inorganic material (the rock), which in turn is amongst its own "ancestors". The "singing" rock

> Is kneeling
> In the cemetery of its ancestors.
>
> In its home
> Among its pious offspring
> Of root and leaf.

"Heather"[136] describes how even

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[133] *CP*, 474-475.
[134] *CP*, 474.
[135] *CP*, 466.
[136] *CP*, 467-468.

out of a mica sterility
     That nobody else wants
     Thickens a nectar
     Keen as adder venom

while the

     Heather is listening
     Past hikers, gunshots, picnickers
     For the star-drift
     Of the returning ice.

The heather is not interested or threatened by minor events such as wars or tourists, but rather worries about the next ice age. (It may be noted, however, that in "[t]he upper millstone heaven" of the actual Calder valley, heather does not "only toughen", as stated in this poem's first stanza. On the contrary, "pollution from the industrial revolution lowered the pH of the peat in the South Pennines to such an extent that, once lost, heather can still not re-vegetate naturally as the pH remains too low"[137].)

   As seen from these examples, in an attempt to redeem ecological and sociological degradation in the Upper Calder Valley, the *Elmet* poems focus on the enduring powers of the non-human environment. Through this focus, Hughes is able to express a sense of faith in nature's ability to renew itself and repair anthropogenic damages. In this sense, the poems form a type of recovery narrative, at least from a deep ecology perspective. This perspective means that the *Elmet* poems can state explicitly that as remains of the past, including old factories, mills and remains of the canal, fall into the earth, they fall into the future. As they fall into the earth they become part of the soil from which new life will eventually spring, thus overcoming the "dead end" where, at least according to "Top Withens", the valley has arrived.

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[137] Private email from Ann Blackburn, involved in managing agri-environment agreements on some of the Calderdale moors.

Chapter 4:

Colonised nature: Heaney and postcolonial ecocriticism

Introduction

Reflecting on his collection *Field Work* (1979), Heaney refers to a "bay tree that grows half-symbolically in a couple of the poems"[138]. He is thinking about poems such as "Elegy"[139]:

> you found the child in me
> when you took farewell
> under the full bay tree
> by the gate in Glanmore

or section IX of the "Glanmore Sonnets"[140]:

> We have our burnished bay tree at the gate,
> Classical, hung with the reek of silage
> From the next farm, tart-leafed as inwit.
> Blood on a pitch-fork, blood on chaff and hay,
> Rats speared in the sweat and dust of threshing –
> What is my apology for poetry?

That this bay tree is only half-symbolical, as Heaney states, suggests that it is also half-real. This chapter argues that Heaney's use of the prefix "half-" indicates precisely an acknowledgement of the 'actual' bay tree that makes up the non-symbolical half of the tree referred to in the poems.

Taking a double theoretical perspective, ecocritical and postcolonial, this chapter analyses the dual meaning of the natural referent, echoing the duality of themes in Heaney's poetry itself. Early poems from *Wintering Out* are at the centre of the discussion and analysis, complemented by some poems from Heaney's most recent collection, *Human Chain* (2010).

Beyond the idea of a 'half-symbolical' meaning complemented by a 'half-real' reference, this

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[138] Seamus Heaney, *The Poetry Book Society Bulletin* 102 (1979), noted by and quote from Neil Corcoran, "Seamus Heaney and the Art of the Exemplary", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 17, Special Issue on British Poetry since 1945 (1987): 119.

[139] Seamus Heaney, *Field Work*, London: Faber and Faber, 1979, 32.

[140] *Field Work*, 41.

chapter will argue that the meaning of the natural referent in Heaney's poems cannot actually be described as two separate halves. Rather the meaning of each is implied by and dependent on the presence of the other, like the sides of a coin. In this way, the relationship between the real and the symbolical in these poems resists allegory and suggests a complex relationship between nature and politics in Northern Ireland.

Postcolonialism and ecocriticism

The two theories addressed in this chapter are postcolonialism and ecocriticism, or, in a merged version, postcolonial ecocriticism. These theories, too, work together at two sides of the same coin. They are motivated by a similar ethical ambition to defend the rights of the oppressed. Like ecocriticism, postcolonialism is a political and prescriptive mode of criticism. Postcolonial scholars argue for the rights of, for example, indigenous peoples in a way similar to how some ecocritics argue for the 'rights' of nature. Robert Young highlights this ethical aspect in an introduction to postcolonial studies:

> Postcolonialism, with its fundamental sympathies for the subaltern, for the peasantry, for the poor, for outcasts of all kinds, eschews the high culture of the elite and espouses subaltern cultures and knowledges which have historically been considered to be of little value but which it regards as rich repositories of culture and counter-knowledge. The sympathies and interests of postcolonialism are thus focused on those at the margins of society, those whose cultural identity has been dislocated or left uncertain by the forces of global capitalism – refugees, migrants who have moved from the countryside to the impoverished edges of the city, migrants who struggle in the first world for a better life while working at the lowest levels of those societies. At all times, postcolonialism stands for a transformational politics, for a politics dedicated to the removal of inequality – from the different degrees of wealth of the different states in the world system, to the class, ethnic, and other social hierarchies within individual states, to the gendered hierarchies that operate at every level of social and cultural relations. Postcolonialism combines and draws on elements from radical socialism, feminism, and environmentalism.[141]

As the last reference in this quote indicates, the idea that a postcolonial perspective could be fruitfully combined with an ecocritical approach is in some ways obvious, based in its widest sense on the relation between politics and the natural environment. Symptomatic of this in many ways intuitive combination is also Buell's indication of a colonial perspective already in the introduction

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[141] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, 114.

to his first book on ecocriticism, from 1995, which Buell states that "[i]n my version of the history of the Western hemisphere, the ecological colonization of the Americas by disease and invasive plant forms is as crucial as the subjugation of their indigenous peoples by political and military means", and that "William Bartram's botanical conquest of Florida is as notable an event of the American Revolutionary era as Patriot resistance to Britain" (1995: 6). Buell adds in this context that "[a]lthough I broadly agree (while differing on specifics) with the many other Americanists who have seen pastoral ideology as central to American cultural self-understanding, I argue that American cultural distinctiveness in this respect must be understood in light of parallels to the conditions of other former colonies remote from Europe, whence Anglophone pastoral emanated" (1995: 6).

More recently, two book length studies have appeared that attempt to explore postcolonial ecocriticism in more detail, both from 2010: Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, and an edited anthology entitled *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. The edited volume is organised geographically, including "Asia and the South Pacific", "Africa", "North America", and "South America and the Caribbean", but not Ireland or Northern Ireland, or any other part the Old World. In an afterword to this volume titled "Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Question of Literature", Ursula Heise writes in some general terms about postcolonialism and ecocriticism, and notes that:

> Increasingly, ecocritics have come to emphasize that environmental problems cannot be solved without addressing issues of wealth and poverty, over-consumption, underdevelopment, and resource scarcity, while postcolonial critics have highlighted the ways in which historical struggles over colonial and neocolonial power structures as well as contemporary conflicts over economic globalization have involved and continue to revolve around fundamental environmental questions of, for example, land ownership, energy needs, uses of natural resources, agricultural production systems, pollution, exposure to risk, and local and global patterns of consumption. This intertwining of concerns over social justice and environmental conservation has led scholars to speak of "a productive overlap" and "opportunities for a fruitful alliance between two critical/theoretical schools"[142]

The two quotes at the end here are from the other book about postcolonial ecocriticism, entitled just

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[142] Ursula Heise, "Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Question of Literature" (Afterword), *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, ed. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010, 251-251.

that, from the same year, by Huggan and Tiffin. In this book, Huggan and Tiffin address not just the affiliations between ecocritical and postcolonial scholars, but also highlight some of the issues that divide the two fields, noting that "[i]f the conjunction of postcolonialism and ecocriticism has begun to prove mutually illuminating in terms of, say, colonial genesis and continuing human inequalities and environmental abuses, the two areas have often been in conflict" (17). For instance, where these is competition between "conservationist ideals" and prospects for human development, Huggan and Tiffin state that "ecocriticism has tended as a whole to prioritise extra-human concerns over the interests of disadvantaged human groups, while postcolonialism has been routinely, and at times unthinkingly, anthropocentric" (17).

Huggan and Tiffin also mention the two fields' different disciplinary backgrounds, noting that while ecocriticism developed mainly out of literary studies, postcolonial studies has traditionally built to a further extent on fields like religious studies, philosophy and zoology.

In an earlier essay from 2009 Huggan attempts to assess in more historical terms "the emerging alliance between postcolonial criticism and ecocriticism", tracing what he refers to as the "continuing debates on "Green Romanticism""[143]. In this text, Huggan begins by identifying several fields of postcolonial studies, including for instance theories that are "motivated primarily by the ongoing struggle for social justice in the (neo-)colonial contexts of dispossession and exploitation" as well as less anthropocentric theories that incorporate "a phenomenologically wider but, at the same time, more geographically and culturally restricted variety of non-human as well as human considerations and concerns" (2009: 6). Though at first glance these fields may "seem quite far apart in their objectives", Huggan notes, as Heise does, that they are in fact not that different:

> Both are invested, for example, in the situated critique of current globalizing practices that use capitalist ideologies of development to justify corporate expansionism and technological managerialism; and both are equally concerned with critically analysing the representational mechanisms that lend legitimacy to these practices, demonstrating the power of culture to (re)shape the word, and, through it, the world. Both, indeed, are "worldly" concerns in the sense that their interpretations are often cast, however indirectly, as interventions, following on from the obvious truism that the significance and effectiveness of literary and other cultural texts "are matters having to do with ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force" (Said, *Culture* 48). Both, finally, are deeply ethical in their commitment to ideals of social transformation and improvement, and to bettering the conditions, in particular, of the impoverished, exploited and oppressed. (2009: 6)

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[143] Graham Huggan, "Postcolonial ecocriticism and the limits of Green Romanticism", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45.1 (2009), 3.

On this basis of shared motifs, Huggan notes that the combination of postcolonial and ecocritical theory is not unexpected. Critical exploration of what such a combination might imply indicates an attempt at a clearer formulation of a field rather than an entirely new idea.

Huggan also notes that postcolonialism is "a field which, much like ecocriticism, is racked by its own internal conflicts and which, also like ecocriticism, has been haunted by its almost congenital inability to determine its own parameters or even provide a convincing explanation of itself" (4). These difficulties have something to do, according to Huggan, with the fields' "respective practioners' heightened – some might say suffocating – awareness of the provenance of their own critical and theoretical vocabularies" (2009: 6). These difficulties are recognised with personal reference in several of Heaney's poems, as Heaney reflects on his own role as a poet, both in relation to Irish and English traditions and with regard to the relationship between aesthetics and politics in times of violent conflicts. The former is testified to in the poem "Midnight"[144], for example, in which, at the end of the poem, the speaker's tongue is "[l]eashed in [his] throat".

How has Heaney, as a Northern Irish poet, approached the colonial question? Neil Corcoran states that "Heaney's painstakingly articulate self-consciousness about his 'confidants and mentors' is impelled by the fact that, as a Northern Catholic, a poet who considers himself Irish, Heaney lies at an oblique angle to the English poetic tradition, and must labour to create his own personally sustaining 'tradition' of sought-out exemplars" (1987: 120). Christopher Malone states further regarding Irish poets and their search for a cultural tradition and history:

> While Romantic Ireland is lost for Yeats, for poets who follow him the mythos of place continues to shape conceptions of national community. Northern Irish poets in particular have struggled in its absence to find authority to inscribe the space of home, responding to cultural pressures associated with Yeats's legacy. Certain questions recur for these poets: What does it mean to adhere to tradition in Ireland's radically changing present? Or to mythologize, when romantic conceptions of identity and place have serious consequences in modern Irish history?[145]

In light of this search, Malone states, Heaney "has come to assume Yeats's place as national poet and to typify, for many critics, a Northern Irish poetics" (1084).

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[144] *Wintering Out*, 45-46.
[145] Christopher T. Malone, "Writing Home: Spatial Allegories in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon", *ELH* 67.4 (2000), 1083.

Looking further into Heaney's role as a Northern Irish exemplar, Michael Allen states in the introduction to a casebook on Heaney that one of Heaney's main themes addresses how "Britain and Ireland engage with their postcolonial legacy as the intercommunal conflicts endemic to the latter island break out, flourish and subside across the disputed territory where Heaney and other 'Northern' poets have their roots"[146]. In one of the essays in the same casebook, Edna Longley states that already some of the early poems in *Wintering Out*

> give Heaney a valid 'political' role within his profession of poet. An aesthetic brand of revolutionary action, perhaps more linguistic reclamation than decolonisation, takes on the English language itself, with mixed declarations of love and war: (36)

and here Longley quotes from the poem "A New Song"[147], which states that:

> But now our river tongues must rise
> From licking deep in native haunts
> To flood, with vowelling embrace,
> Demesnes staked out in consonants.

The 'political' role of the poet intensified with Heaney's next collection, *North* (1975). Harold Bloom notes that this volume

> garnered both positive and negative responses, due in part to aroused sensitivities as a result of pervasive violence in Northern Ireland that had intensified since 1969. Indeed, Heaney's work had shifted in focus in this book. Now it attempted to take his personal past as well as his country's and provide perspective on its current state, one that seemed at times in danger of being radically oversimplified. In contrast, most of Heaney's earlier work had been pastoral and personal.[148]

After this focused political perspective of *North*, with poems like "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing", "Kinship" and "Funeral Rites", Bloom notes that "[t]he problem for Heaney as a poet henceforward is how not to drown in this blood-dimmed tide" (11). This chapter argues that one of

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[146] Michael Allen, "Introduction", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen, New Casebooks series, London: Macmillan Press, 1997, 1.
[147] *Wintering Out*, 33.
[148] Harold Bloom, "Introduction", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, 21.

the ways in which Heaney avoids such drowning is by maintaining and developing a focus on politics' relationship to nature and ecology, suggested already in *Wintering Out* and developed further in the later poems.

Neil Corcoran notes that one of the central tropes of *Field Work*, the collection immediately succeeding *North*, is "a reciprocal relationship with Nature" (125). Corcoran is pointing towards Heaney as not simply an observer of nature, but as critically reflecting on the relationship between nature and culture. Nature for Heaney is political, and the relationship between ecology and colonialism is an important theme not just in *Field Work* but in much of Heaney's later poetry as well, all the way up to and including his most recent collection, *Human Chain*. This chapter attempts to show how Heaney politicises nature by intertwining natural and political references. Heaney has described some aspects of this process himself, referring to how the "language and place-names in *Wintering Out*, like "Broagh" and "Anahorish" […] politicize the terrain"[149].

The relationship between nature and politics that this chapter attempts to describe is not allegorical. To describe it as such would be to over-simplify and, essentially, to miss the point. An aspect of this kind of simplification is underlined by Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey in "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism":

> we want to suggest that too heavy a reliance upon constructing parallels between postcolonialism and ecocriticism can lead to an unproblematized division between people (on the postcolonial side) and nature (on the ecocritical one). To some extent, this parallelism between "excluded, exploited, and oppressed" nature renders the two equivalent, thus dehistoricizing through natural and universal metaphors.[150]

Rather, this chapter demonstrates how Heaney moves beyond such and related parallelisms towards forms of representation that reflect some of the intricacies of colonial and ecological concerns in Northern Ireland.

Wintering Out

Heaney's poem "The Backward Look"[151] describes the flight and sounds of a snipe, intertwined

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[149] Heaney in James Randall, "An Interview with Seamus Heaney", *Ploughshares*, 5.3 (1979). Available on http://www.pshares.org (http://www.pshares.org/read/article-detail.cfm?intArticleID=9476 accessed 2012-02-24).
[150] Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism", *ISLE*, 14.1 (2007), 75.
[151] *Wintering Out*, 29-30.

with references to the Irish language. The poem balances the literal with the symbolical:

> A stagger in air
> as if a language
> failed, a sleight
> of wing.

These lines establish the combined bird/language theme: the phrase "stagger in air" might be read as a description of a snipe's interrupted flight, or as a reference to the sound of spoken words. In both cases, the word "stagger" suggests that something is amiss. Taken as a reference to language, supported by the second and third lines, staggering refers to a "language / failed", suggesting a language that is spoken without fluidity or confidence, disappearing into local dialect. Alternatively, if read as a description of the flight of a bird, "stagger" is complimented by the description "sleight / of wing" at the end of the stanza. In this case, "stagger" indicates an interrupted flight, perhaps of an injured bird. Read in this way, the single snipe in Heaney's poem represents not only itself but the snipe as a threatened species in modern Ireland[152].

The phrase "sleight / of wing" also complicates the nature culture-relationship in this poem, as the word "sleight" is usually used in a human context, to describe a "sleight of hand". Though animals can also have dialect, both language and dialect are primarily used when talking about humans. The words sleight, language and dialect as used in this poem with reference to the bird combines to describe the bird in human terms, and gives the bird a kind of 'personhood'. In the sense that birds have dialect, the description of this particular bird's dialect acknowledges the relationship between species and place, and of an individual's relationship with place as something not limited to humans.

Greg Garrard has pointed out that the relationship between bird and language in this poem is not simply allegorical (1999: 193): in the following two stanzas, as the snipe makes its own sound, the two possible readings of the first stanza merge:

> A snipe's bleat is fleeing

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[152] *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*, ed. David T. Parkin and Alan G. Knox, London: A&C Black 2010 (electronic edition), 161. According to Brian Caffrey at Birdwatch Ireland, current data that is being gathered for 2007-2011 suggest that as much as a 20-30% decline in the species may be expected during this period (www.birdwatchireland.ie).

its nesting ground
into dialect,
into variants,

transliterations whirr
on the nature reserves -
little goat of the air,
of the evening,

little goat of the frost.

That the "snipe's bleat" is "fleeing its nesting ground" could be a good thing, suggesting simply that the speaker can hear the snipe. However, in this context it more likely suggests that the bird is being driven out of its natural habitat, which indeed seems to be the case with the snipe in Ireland.

In the second half of the second stanza, the zoomorphic bleat disappears "into dialects, / into variants". This shift from descriptions of the bird to a focus on language is important, as it makes it impossible to read the poem merely literally, as without the reference to language the mentioning of dialect does not makes sense. Comparing the sound of the bird to local dialects also furthers the suggestion that the bird is being forced to leave its original nesting ground and move into obscure or remote realms. These lines complicate the relationship between bird and language, as here the two themes inform each other in a direct, non-allegorical fashion. The three italicised lines refer to Irish names for the snipe, such as "little goat of the frost" (the snipe, surprisingly, can sound like a goat, as is explained in lines 14-15). If the snipe disappears completely from Ireland, these names, and thus parts of the Irish language, are likely to disappear too. These lines establish an interactive relationship between the declining snipe population and the marginalisation of Irish which makes it impossible, as noted by Garrard, to separate the bird theme from the language theme in this poem.

The next stanza explains that the bleating sound actually comes from the bird beating its tail. The theme of extinction is then enforced by the reference to the bleat as "elegies" accompanying the bird's gradual disappearance from sight:

It is his tail-feathers
drumming elegies
in the slipstream

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of wild goose
and yellow bittern
as he corkscrews away
into the vaults

that we live off, his flight
through the sniper's eyrie,
over twilit earthworks
and wall-steads,

disappearing among
gleanings and leavings
in the combs
of a fieldworker's archive.

"[L]ive off" in the third stanza, referring to the sky ("vaults"), points simultaneously to how we depend on the sky in the sense that we "live off" our physical environment, and to the fact that we live on the ground as opposed to in the sky. In the latter sense, the phrase describes the bird's flight into a realm that is inaccessible to us. The last stanza proceeds to describe how the bird disappears from view, as in fact it disappears altogether, into the similarly ambiguous "gleanings and leavings" of both ecologists and linguists, taking into account the dual bird/language theme of the poem.

Discussing the intricate relationship between bird, threat and language in this poem, Garrard argues that allegorical readings have distracted critics from the poem's literal referents. While the language theme is discussed in several analyses, the snipe itself, according to Garrard, is "not mentioned despite the brilliant infolded isomorphism of the fates of the snipe's own 'language', the names it has in the Irish language, and the Irish language itself" (1999: 193). Garrard notes that

> The bird's 'flight / through the sniper's eyrie' links it with the contemporary Troubles, whilst also emphasising the very threatened liminality that make it an appropriate symbol of Gaelic: a 'sniper' is originally one who shoots snipe! Vehicle and tenor, nature and language, are so imbricated with each other here that the automatic and exclusive prioritisation of the latter would seem an obvious example of the perverse eco-blindness works such as *Romantic Ecology* and Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* set out to challenge. (1999: 193)

The word sniper was originally coined by British soldiers in India in the early 19th century, and

referred originally to a gunman skilled enough to shoot a snipe. In Heaney's poem, the word sniper is paired with the word "eyrie", which refers to the nest of a bird of prey. The word "eyrie" also suggests *Éire*, the Irish name for Ireland, which makes particular sense in the phrase of the snipe's "flight / through the sniper's eyrie", transcribed as the snipe's flight through a colonised (Northern) Ireland, with the snipe representing itself, its species, and the Irish language all at once, while the sniper represents imperial Britain, perched high. The theme of colonisation, associated with conflict and violence, is further supported by the words "earthworks" and "wall-steads", suggesting military fortifications or hiding places. The conflict remains unresolved however, as by the end of the poem, rather than being hit the bird gradually disappears from view, while leaving behind the ambiguous, carefully balanced "gleanings and leavings" from the previous line.

The tendency among literary critics towards "eco-blindness" as argued by Garrard is evident in several analyses of this particular poem. In an essay on Seamus Heaney, nationality and language[153], Michael Molino examines a number of poems in *Wintering Out*. According to Molino, "The Backward Look" "describes the deterioration of the Irish language as the flight of a snipe fleeing a hunter" (19), using, notably, "as" rather than "and", which could have indicated a different reading. Failing to notice the etymological, colonial and ecological circumstances particular to both the snipe as a species and the word 'snipe', Molino states that the bird's gradual disappearance into the "gleanings and leavings / in the combs / of a fieldworker's archive" in some sense seems "to invoke a pastoral vision, a coveted connection with or continuation of the true Irish tongue through those rural farmers who still speak Irish as their primary language" (19). However, he proceeds to note that the fieldworker in this case refers to "an archaeologist, a linguist, or poet whose archive is the "English" language, with all its dialects and variants, through which the snipe's flight might still be traced" (19). This might be true, but it is also probable that "fieldworker" refers to a biologist or ecologist collecting evidence of the actual snipe. Notably, "fieldworker's archive" could also refer to an archive about workers in the field who used to collect "gleanings and leavings" left by the first harvesters.

The poem "Midnight", also from *Wintering Out* (35), is discussed by Garrard in similar terms. "Midnight" remembers the Irish wolf, extinct for about 200 years. The poem begins:

> Since the professional wars -

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[153] Michael Molino, "Flying by the Nets of Language and Nationality: Seamus Heaney, the "English" Language, and Ulster's Troubles", *Modern Philology*, 91.2 (1993): 180-201.

Corpse and carrion
Paling in rain -
The wolf has died out

In Ireland. The packs
Scoured parkland and moor
Till a Quaker buck and his dogs
Killed the last one

In some scraggy waste of Kildare.

The extinction of the animal is linked here, as in "The Backward Look", to war and colonialism. However, in this poem the relationship between species and colonisation appears to be at least partly inverted. Garrard notes that in the case of the wolf "[n]ot war but peace – in particular the habitat destruction that followed repressions of rebellions in 1601 and 1798 – killed off the Irish wolf" (1999: 193-194). Garrard refers to comments made by Patrick Sleeman concerning the relationship between wolves and Irish politics, arguing that "[s]ince the impenetrable woods provided refuge for Irish rebels, priests and outlaws, as well as for wolves, their destruction, under the pretext of civilizing the country, made economic and political sense from the government's and colonist's point of view"[154]. This process of deforestation is mentioned in the third stanza in the line referring to "[f]orests coopered to wine casks" (12). The destruction of Irish forests by the English is similarly referred to in "Ocean's Love to Ireland"[155] (in *North*), a poem that describes the physical intrusion of the English as a wave sweeping in over the Irish land. The third and final part of this poem states:

The ruined maid complains in Irish,
Ocean has scattered her dreams of fleets,
The Spanish prince has spilled his gold.

And failed her. Iambic drums
Of English beat the woods where her poets
Sink like Onan. Rush-light, mushroom-flesh,

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[154] Patrick Sleeman, *Nature in Ireland*. Quote from Garrard, 1999: 194.
[155] *North*, 46-47.

She fades from their somnolent clasp

Into ringlet-breath and dew,

The ground possessed and repossessed.

Like "Midnight", "Ocean's Love to Ireland" describes the effects of colonisation on both human and non-human nature.

Building on Sleeman's statement, Garrard notes what he argues is "a fairly close correlation between Acts of Union and the extermination of wolves: Wales was incorporated in 1536, and the last wolf sighting was in 1743; Ireland joined in 1801, and the 'Quaker buck and his dogs' finished off the Irish wolf at about the same time" (1999: 195). With reference to a war-peace dichotomy, the correlation between conflict and species extinction from "The Backward Look" may be seen as inverted in "Midnight", as suggested by Garrard. However, if regarded from the point of view of the effects of British intrusion on non-human Irish nature, the points made in the two poems seem to be similar.

The next two stanzas of "Midnight" seemingly laments the disappearance of the wolves:

Rain on the roof to-night

Sogs turf-banks and heather,

Sets glinting outcrops

Of basalt and granite,

Drips to the moss of bare boughs.

The old dens are soaking.

The pads are lost or

Retrieved by small vermin

That glisten and scut.

These lines describe the deforested land as deserted, eroded, and unprotected. The wolves' dens have been overtaken by vermin that, apparently, "scut". The word scut seems to be strangely used, as it does not usually appear as a verb but as a noun, in which case it primarily refers to the small tail of an animal such as a hare. In this context, it could be a neologism, adapted from "scuttle". The word "vermin" complicates the idea of the wolf as 'vermin' has also been used to refer to wolves as

a kind of pest. 'Vermin' is thus an anti-pastoral suggestion counteracting the elegiac descriptions of the wolf in the rest of the poem.

In the last stanza, the wolf's absence is linked to language, similarly to in "The Backward Look":

> Nothing is panting, lolling,
> Vapouring. The tongue's
> Leashed in my throat.

Garrard notes that "the powerful non-presence of the wolf is linked to the 'leash' of the oppressor's language – the language of the poem itself, of course" (1999: 195). A similar reference may be present in the word vapour. Associated with speech and exhalation, lack of vapour may suggest lack of speech, suggesting a parallel between the wolves ceasing to exhale and a silencing of the Irish language. By the end of the poem the speaker's own tongue is "[l]eashed in [his] throat", suggesting that he is like a tamed wolf "crossed / With inferior strains" as he writes his poem in the language of the intruders. "Midnight" thus complements "The Backward Look" in so far as it suggests the extinction of a species as an effect of the extinction, or at least suppression, of a language, while the latter rather suggests the extinction of a language (or at least certain parts of a language) as a result of the extinction of a species.

Garrard notes a third poem that belongs to the same category, namely "Serenades"[156], also from *Wintering Out*. "Serenades" features the corncrake, which, as Garrard points out, has been discussed at some length by Jonathan Allison. According to Allison:

> The corncrake is a bird that winters in Africa and until quite recently was a familiar summer bird in Ireland, nesting in rough dead grass, bog meadows, and cornfields. Although it can be found in England (indeed in much of Europe) and is featured in D. H. Lawrence's story, "The Overtone," it is most common in Ireland and western Scotland. It is an ungainly flier, dangling its feet behind as it moves, has a distinctive harsh call, often rendered as "crex crex" (which is also the Latin name for the bird), and is elusive and secretive.[157]

Possibly as a nostalgic response to the recent gradual decline in its number (due primarily to developments in modern agriculture), the corncrake, according to Allison, "has proven especially

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[156] *Wintering Out*, 62.
[157] Jonathan Allison, "Seamus Heaney's Anti-transcendental Corncrake", *Seamus Heaney: The Shaping Spirit*, ed. Catharine Malloy and Phyllis Carey, Newark: Unversity of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1996, 71.

interesting to Irish poets" (71).

The speaker in "Serenades" states that his voice has been that of the corncrake, among other birds:

> My serenades have been
> The broken voice of a crow
> In a draught or a dream,
> The wheeze of bats
>
> Or the ack-ack
> Of the tramp corncrake

Allison describes the corncrake's sound as "hoarse", and states that it may be seen as simultaneously representing a "guttural muse" and "the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition", and that "as such it represents a blend of both English literary tradition and native Irish experience" (74). Allison argues further that "the crake might also be considered a symbol of Ulster's Catholics, marginalized and intimidated by Unionist hegemony, or of the poet himself" (77). In this statement Allison points to how the corncrake symbolically incorporates many opposites and paradoxes that in some respects are applicable to Heaney himself, referring to contrasting pairs such as Irish/British, rural/urban, and so on, a position that is perhaps allegorically comparable to the actual corncrake's entrapment between "combines and chemicals". The corncrake in the poem is able to contain and represent this tension between opposites: according to Garrard, Allison "makes a strong case for seeing the bird as a complex, persistent figure in Heaney's poetry, which unites a sense of the threatened, marginalised Northern Catholic population with a contradictory linguistic register, whilst maintaining an interest in the species itself" (1999: 195-196). Allison refers to several poems by Heaney that mention the corncrake, and states that:

> In "Serenades," [Heaney] expressed an ecological consciousness of the bird as victim of modern agricultural techniques, marginalized in an anti-pastoral landscape of "combines and chemicals," while also constructing the crake as an emblem of the poet's "guttural muse," rooted in the Ulster landscape but also alluding to the "alliterative tradition" in its repetitive call. The bird's crepuscular call is closest to conventional idyllic pastoral in "Glanmore Sonnets," but in "Casting and Gathering" the call is mediated through the mechanism of the reel and has become an integral part of the poet's dialectical voice. (79)

The "hoarse and ugly call" (Allison 72) of the corncrake is also referred to in "Serenades" ("the ack-ack"), a potential reference to elements of Irish sounds and dialects in Heaney's poetry. Allison also notes that the call of the corncrake is crepuscular, which means that it sings at dusk, at twilight. The corncrake lives not only on a geographical margin, between wild country and agricultural field, and literally on the borders between farmland, but also in a temporal margin, between day and night.

The corncrake in this poem and the snipe from "The Backward Look" also exist in the borderland between nature and culture: as real birds in the ecosystem outside the poems, and as linguistic construction or presence within the poems. As Laurence Coupe has pointed out, these two forms of existence are not completely independent of each other, or at least the latter is not easily separable from the former. Coupe describes in relation to ecocriticism's defence of the validity of the referent:

> Suppose one is reading John Clare's 'bird' poems: 'The Sky Lark', 'The Yellowhammer's Nest', 'Hedge Sparrow', and so on. Or suppose one is listening to Ralph Vaughan Williams's orchestral work, *The Lark Ascending*. The semiotic fallacy declares the existence of the creature evoked to be incidental; these words, these sounds, have nothing finally to do with actual, existing birds. That being the case, there is no reason to be disturbed when one subsequently reads the following statistics: in Britain, between 1972 and 1999 the population of skylarks fell by 60 per cent, the populations of yellowhammers also fell by 60 per cent, and the population of tree sparrows fell by 87 per cent. But is it so naïve to ask whether Clare's poetry or Vaughan Williams's music will have the same significance when the cereal monoculture of intensive agriculture (aided by inappropriate housing developments) have finally destroyed all the habitats of these creatures, and there is nowhere for them to live? Does the devastation of bird populations not matter because they are, after all, only referents? If critical theory answers in the negative, then it surely colludes with 'agribusiness' and its remorseless suppression of biodiversity. (3)

In this sense also, the 'real' bird that is the referent of Heaney's poems and the linguistic expressions that make up the poems are intertwined. Heaney's poems demonstrate Coupe's argument that text and referent are inseparable, and that while a text about a particular bird species (for instance) may be about many different things, it is crucially also about that bird.

As both Allison and Garrard notes, "Serenades" intertwines linguistic with ecological frames of reference, combining them in the complex figure of the corncrake. The corncrake acts both as a symbol and as a literal referent, in a way that, like the snipe in "The Backward Look" and the wolf in "Midnight", resists allegory. The penultimate stanza in "Serenades", describing the song of the

corncrake as "lost" between "combines and chemicals", is a literal reference pointing to the fact that the corncrake suffers from habitat reduction due to agricultural development. However, the same lines are also a figurative reference pointing, as do "The Backward Look" and "Midnight", to the Irish language and even to Heaney himself as an English-speaking Irish poet. The different references of "Serenades", including ecological, political, national and personal contexts, are reflected in the actual sound of the corncrake which, according to Garrard, refers to both Ireland and the UK, "mimicking the 'consonantal staccato' of Ulster speech as well as the Anglo-Saxon 'alliterative tradition'" (1999: 196).

In light of his discussions of "The Backward Look", "Midnight" and "Serenades", Garrard formulates an argument regarding Heaney's poetry "against the peremptory subordination of environmental issues to the linguistic and political ones that dominate critical discourse", emphasising that "Heaney seems to hear profound resonances that ought not to be reduced to monotony" (1999: 196). Instead, Garrard argues for a criticism informed by Lawrence Buell's argument in *The Environmental Imagination*, which stresses the importance of avoiding "opposite reductionisms", calling instead for analyses that attempt to balance the aesthetic and symbolical with the literal. Buell defines "opposite reductionisms" as:

> reductionism as the level of formal representation such as compel us to believe either that the text replicates the object-world or that it creates an entirely distinct linguistic world; and reductionism at the ideational level, such as to require us to believe that the environment ought to be considered either the major subject of concern or merely a mystification of some other interest. (1995: 13)

"Eco-blindness", suggested by Garrard in the lengthier quotation above, is a specific kind of reductionism, referring to a tendency to ignore or marginalise environmental concerns in favour of other cultural references and associations. Critics of Heaney seem particularly subject to this kind of eco-blindness, focusing more readily on colonial concerns. This kind of reductionism not only fails to appreciate the ecological themes of the poems discussed in this section, but may also limit and simplify the colonial references of the same poems.

Human Chain
As in *Wintering Out*, references to the Irish language inform Heaney's most recent volume of

poetry, *Human Chain*. "An Old Refrain"[158] continues the connection between language, ecology and colonialism suggested in the earlier poems. It begins:

> Robin-run-the-hedge
> We called the vetch –
> A fading straggle
>
> Of Lincoln green
> English stitchwork
> Unravelling
>
> With a hey-nonny-no
> Along the Wood Road.

The first stanza establishes a "we", by association perhaps also implicating a "them". This opposition between us and them, in light of the following lines, could already suggest a colonial theme. "We" is then defined by the name of a certain plant, in this case a common vetch referred to by the name robin-run-the-hedge, a weed commonly found on hedges and the like, forming what is here referred to as a "straggle". Using a plant to define the poem's "we" creates a link between the colonial theme and the natural environment. The description of the straggle as resembling a "Lincoln green / English stitchwork" introduces a link between the weed and the British, introducing a more particular dichotomy between Ireland and Britain: "Lincoln green" is a specific kind of dye used in England in the Middle Ages (specifically in the town Lincoln, hence the name), and is particularly associated with the colour of the clothes worn by Robin Hood. The link between the vetch and the legend of Robin Hood is supported by the word "robin" in the name of the vetch in the poem's opening line. The combination of weed-English-Robin Hood seems difficult to decipher. Perhaps the reference to Robin Hood simply strengthens the association of the vetch to an English tradition, or perhaps it is meant to complicate the English/Irish relationship, as Robin Hood is traditionally associated with good deeds.

"Unravelling", which closes the second stanza, suggests that something is coming undone, especially when paired with "fading" from the end of the first stanza. These two adjectives could reflect the progress of the peace process in Northern Ireland, and an increasing independence in

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[158] Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain*, London: Faber and Faber, 2010, 20-21.

relation to the rest of the UK. This interpretation is supported further on in the poems second half.

"*With a hey-nonny-no*" is the first of five italicised words or phrases in the poem. This expression appears in at least two plays by Shakespeare: in *As You Like It* it forms part of a song about two young lovers :"*With a hey, and a ho, and a hey-nonny-no, / These pretty country folks would lie*" (v:iii), while in *Much Ado About Nothing* it appears in a song that encourages women to let go of deceitful men, and convert all their "*sounds of woe / Into Hey, nonny nonny*" (ii.iii). In Heaney's poem this phrase, like the association to Robin Hood, suggests an English cultural and literary tradition. Other readings of Ireland as female and the UK as male (seen especially in *North*, in poems like "Act of Union" and in several of the bog poems) make it possible to read this line as referring to the relationship between UK and Ireland in terms of a male/female relationship. This ambiguous line might also be the "old refrain" in the poem's title.

The line following "*hey-nonny-no*" refers to "the Wood Road", which is the name of an actual road in the area where Heaney grew up. It is also the name of the next poem in *Human Chain*, "The Wood Road"[159], which is a much darker poem about political violence in Northern Ireland. This poem describes how the Wood Road

> Resurfaced, never widened,
> The verges grassy as when
> Bill Pickering lay with his gun
> Under the summer hedge
> Nightwatching, in uniform –
>
> Special militiaman.

"[H]edge" in this poem's fourth line refers back to "An Old Refrain", reminding the reader of the "Robin-run-the-hedge". However, this poem is more explicit in its references to the violent history of Northern Ireland. The speaker walking the Wood Road in the present remembers its past:

> that August day I walked it
> To the hunger striker's wake,
> Across a silent yard,
> In past a watching crowd
> To where the guarded corpse

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159 *Human Chain*, 22-23.

> And a guard of honour stared.
>
> Or the stain at the end of the lane
> Where the child on her bike was hit
> By a speed-merchant from nowhere
> Hard-rounding the corner,
> A back wheel spinning in sunshine,
>
> A head lamp in smithereens.

Yet in its last line this poem nevertheless subscribes to the same idea of "unravelling" as suggested in "An Old Refrain":

> Film it in sepia,
> Drip-paint it in blood,
> The Wood Road as is and was,
> Resurfaced, never widened,
> The milk-churn deck and the sign
>
> For the bus-stop overgrown.

"The Wood Road" refers both to memory and to the loss of memories. The references to film and painting suggest art as a form of remembering. This is a creative form of remembering, that turns the past into an idea of the past. These processes of remembering, forgetting, and recreating memories suggest a sense of both time and timelessness, underlined by the description of the road as it "is and was". The reference to the milk-churn could be read as a reference to how time keeps turning, yet remains unchanged. Importantly, however, the very last reference to the overgrown (or unnecessary, since everyone knows where the bus stops) bus-stop sign suggests that it is forgetfulness that eventually wins out, and ends the poem on a note of leaving the past in the past. Notably, the specific reference to "overgrown" suggests this idea by a natural signifier, reminiscent of the unravelling and overgrowing weed in "An Old Refrain".

"The Wood Road"[160] is also a short poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay that Heaney could have

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[160] Edna St. Vincent Millay, *The Harp Weaver and other poems*, first published 1923, Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004, 8.

been familiar with. This poem describes nature as a source of strength in times of grief:

> If I were to walk this way
>   Hand in hand with Grief,
> I should mark that maple-spray
>   Coming into leaf.
> I should note how the old burrs
>   Rot upon the ground.
> Yes, though Grief should know me hers
>   While the world goes round,
> It could not if truth be said
>   This was lost on me:
> A rock-maple showing red,
>   Burrs beneath a tree.

It may be noted that the twice-named "burrs" connect the maple tree in this poem to the vetch in Heaney's poem, as the vetch produces similar burrs (a sticky kind of fruit). More generally, Millay's poem suggests the natural environment as a source of continuity, strength and comfort.

The vetch, or robin-run-the-hedge, is notorious for its ability to cling or stick to things (partly thanks to the burrs just mentioned), including other plants as well as feathers and fabric, by virtue of fine, hooked bristles which cover all parts of the plant, making it sticky like velcro. This ability has earned the vetch nicknames such as stickyweed, stickyleaf, catchweed and other similar names[161]. This characteristic may also make it a symbol for colonialism, as suggested in the second (and last) sentence of the poem's first part:

> Sticky entangling
>
> Berry and thread
> Summering in
> On the tousled verge.

"Berry and thread" suggests a plant/cloth reciprocity hinted at previously by the reference to the vetch as "A fading straggle / Of Lincoln green / English stitchwork". "[V]erge" is another name for

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[161] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galium_aparine.

an area of particular jurisdiction[162], and coupled with "tousled", meaning dishevelled or disorderly, (in addition to just tangled, like the vetch), it denotes Northern Ireland.

"Summering in" is the opposite of "wintering out", the title of Heaney's earlier collection. The phrase 'wintering out' comes, Heaney recognises, in *Stepping Stones*,

> from memories of cattle in winter fields. Beasts standing under a hedge, plastered in wet, looking at you with big patient eyes. Just taking what came until something else came along. Times were bleak, the political climate was deteriorating. The year the book was published was the year of Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday. (O'Driscoll, 2008: 121)

So "[s]ummering in / On the tousled verge" could become a reference to holding out in the midst of the Troubles, rather than moving out of the area. The phrase conveys a sense of threat, sounding like something descending on something else. The reading of these lines as suggesting a sense of threat is supported by the Latin name for this particular type of vetch, *Galium aparine*, of which the species name comes from the Greek word aparo, meaning "to seize".

A different interpretation is possible if "summering in" is read as the opposite of "wintering out" in a different sense, as a reference not to waiting for better times but to those better times having arrived. This reading reflects that "An Old Refrain" were written in times of an improving political situation, compared to *Wintering Out*.

This development is described elsewhere by Heaney if the poem "The Tollund Man", also from *Wintering Out*, is read in relation to the later poem entitled simply "Tollund"[163], the second to last poem in *The Spirit Level* from 1996. In the later poem, the speaker is once again in Jutland, where he has been before to see the actual Tollund Man. However, this time, instead of the rich, dark symbolism of the former poem the poet now finds, as he stands in the "Jutland fields", something that "could have been a still out of the bright / 'Townland of Peace'", a place where "[t]hings had moved on":

> it was user-friendly outback
> Where we stood footloose, at home beyond the tribe,

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[162] www.oed.com
(http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50276338?query_type=word&queryword=verge&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=cV3K-xmogOj-1816&hilite=50276338, accessed 2010-11-01).

[163] Seamus Heaney, *The Spirit Level*, London: Faber and Faber, 1996, 69.

to make a new beginning

And make a go of it, alive and sinning,

Ourselves again, free-willed again, not bad.

The "user-friendly outback" and "at home beyond the tribe" contrast with descriptions in the earlier poem where

Out there in Jutland

In the old man-killing parishes

I will feel lost,

Unhappy and at home.

The brightness and hopefulness of "Tollund" was occasioned by several specific and significant events coinciding in the real world, as Heaney's explanation of the background of this poem suggests:

> The coincidence was extraordinary. The IRA announced the ceasefire on a Wednesday, the last Wednesday in August, if I'm not mistaken, and I was asked to write about it for the next weekend's *Sunday Tribune*. That same weekend I was also bound for Denmark, to do a reading in Copenhagen University, and inevitably I was remembering the visit I'd made to Jutland twenty-one years earlier, to see the Tollund Man. What happened, at any rate, was an unexpected trip to the actual bog in Tollund where the body had been found in the 1950s. […] It was like a world restored, the world of the second chance (O'Driscoll, 2008: 350-351)

In light of these lines, the reference in "An Old Refrain" to "[s]ummering in", as opposed to "wintering out", could suggest a sense of hope for such a restored world in Northern Ireland.

The symbolical meanings of these different references are counteracted by the second part of "An Old Refrain", which focuses on the physical aspects of things, their "thingness", and especially on the relationship between this "thingness" and the name of the thing. This part of the poem is structured around four italicised, partly phonolexic[164] words:

In *seggins*

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[164] The term "phonolexis" is suggested by Phil Roberts in his book about *How Poetry Works*: "There is no generally agreed name for this effect – meaning conveyed through phonemic connotation limited to the speakers of a particular language. So I shall call it *phonolexis* (from the Greek words from 'sound' and 'vocabulary')". Phil Roberts, *How Poetry Works*, London: Penguin Books, 2000, 2nd ed. (1st ed. by Pelican Books in 1986), 54.

Hear the wind
Among the sedge,

In *boortee*
The elderberry's
Dank indulgence,

In *benweed*
Ragwort's
Singular unbending,

In *easing*
Drips of night rain
From the eaves.

The burrs implicit in the poem's first part are likewise indicated in this second part, this time by the word "seggins", which is another name for the common sedge *Sparganium ramosum*, also called burr reed. Adding to the Shakespearean references, there is a line in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which Lysander states: "Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! vile thing, let loose, / Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!" (iii:ii), also pointing to the stickiness of the burrs. Burr is also an Irish accent, by association suggesting a stickiness of language. The idea of such a lingual stickiness makes the literal and symbolical meanings of the word "burr" as complex and inverted as those of the word "snipe" in "The Backward Look", intertwining references to ecology, language and colonialism.

In the sixth stanza, "*boortree*" is Ulster dialect for the elder tree (*Sambucus nigra*). Analysing "Broagh"[165] in *Wintering Out*, in which the same word appears, Molino notes that "boortree" (also spelled "bourtree") is "a word with a complex history in English and other languages" (192), probably with its origin in the Scottish pronunciation of "bower tree". The word also occurs in the first line of the fifth of the "Glanmore Sonnets"[166] in *Field Work*, where it is already connected to the adjective "dank", just as it is here in "An Old Refrain". The sonnet also establishes a link between the elderberry and violence, first in the description of the boortree's "green young shoots, its rods like freckled solder" through the orthographical similarity between "solder" and "soldier",

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[165] *Wintering Out*, 27.
[166] *Field Work*, 37.

and secondly by the line referring to "[i]ts berries a swart caviar of shot". The second reference establishes according to David Lloyd a "double metaphor" used by Heaney to juxtapose "an image of delicate and rare caviar with the image of solid black shotgun pellets"[167].

Lloyd comments further on this section of the "Glanmore Sonnets" that

> Heaney's use of densely textured language is a method of embodying the dense texture of the natural world to make the reader come into more complete contact with it. It is not until the end of the sonnet that Heaney shifts his focus to bring in, briefly and playfully, the idea of human contact and interaction when he remembers a game he once played in the very bower the poem celebrates: "Boortree is bower tree, where I played 'touching tongues' / And felt another's texture quick on mine." The poem moves easily from the poet's memory of intense contact with the natural world as a child to his memory of intimate contact with a girl while surrounded by elements of the natural world. This progression reflects an assertion which is important in the corpus of Heaney's work : that as we heighten the quality of our interaction with and awareness of the natural world, we also heighten the quality of our human relationships. (6)

All of these associations are brought to the surface when the word "boortree" is reused in "An Old Refrain", and reinforce the later poem's complex set of references to colonisation, nature, and language.

The use of the word boortree in the poem "Broagh" is also discussed by David-Antoine Williams, who states that "boortree" is a dialect word not from Gaelic but from Ulster Scots, relating to the Lowlands, Borders and northern England. Williams notes further that "the name 'boortree' is connected with a kind of toy gun which is made from the wood of the tree"[168], further establishing the suggestion of violence. Floyd Collins comments in relation to the same poem that "[t]he return to nature, to personal and etymological origins, provides an awakening almost spiritual in its intensity", but that in order "to discover a self-regarding identity uniquely his own, the poet must retrace his connection to nature through language"[169]. This is similar to the process traced in "An Old Refrain".

"[B]enweed", the subject of the next-to-last stanza, is a translation of the Irish name for ragwort, buachalán buí, also referred to as ragweed or bunweed. The ragwort is a poisonous wild flower or, less appreciatively, weed, common in both Ireland and Britain. In 2007, it was the subject of an

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[167] David Lloyd, "Seamus Heaney's "Field work"", review in *Ariel*, 12.2 (1981): 87-92.
[168] David-Antoine Williams, *Defending Poetry: Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney and Geoffrey Hill*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 113.
[169] Floyd Collins, *The Crisis of Identity*, Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2003, 128.

article entitled "Ragwort: The toxic weed spreading through our countryside"[170]. It is similar to the vetch in abundance and tenacity, and classified as a noxious weed in the Republic of Ireland. More importantly, the word benweed in this poem notes the Irish word for a plant more commonly referred to by its English name, adding to a theme of reinforcing Irish names for Irish nature, even weeds. Molino notes that Heaney's use of Irish words is important, among other reasons because "many Irish dialect terms exist in various local forms that are unknown to most people, even some Irish citizens, because there is no dictionary of Irish English"[171], and, therefore, inserting Irish words "into a poem written in English at once celebrates the oral tradition of Irish literature, broadens the scope of Anglo-Irish literature, and underscores the dynamics of Ireland's history and literature" (192-193). In this sense, the second part of "An Old Refrain" is a tribute to multiple linguistic traditions in a sense that is, as Molino states, "inclusive rather than exclusive" (193). However, it could also be argued that the elevation of Irish English also signifies a sense of defeat in that Irish English comes to replace actual Irish.

Etymologically referenced, the word "easing" in the final stanza is a shorter version of "eavesing", which in turn is another word for "eaves", the poem's last word. Eaves are the projecting corners of a roof that carries off rainwater (less commonly, it may also refer to the edge of a forest). Derived from "eaves", the word "eavesdrip", which may be created combining "eaves" with "[d]rips" in the preceding line, literally denotes drops of rainwater dispelled from the eaves. The eavesdrip is also the area around a building which is subjected to the water falling from the eaves. There is an ancient English "law of Eavesdrip" according to which it was forbidden to construct a building in such a way that the water discharged from the eaves would injure the neighbouring property[172]. The phrase is also reminiscent of "eave drops" from Coleridge's poem "Frost at Midnight". Placed at the very end of the poem, "easing" supports a reading of the poem that suggests a general easing, unravelling and improvement of the political climate in Northern Ireland.

The italicised words of the second part draw attention to the characteristics of both the words themselves and their referents, pointing to a typically Heaneyesque fascination with the "quiddity"

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[170] Graham Harvey, 5 Aug 2007. Available online at www.dailymail.co.uk (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-473409/Ragwort-The-toxic-weed-spreading-countryside.html), accessed 2010-11-03.

[171] By 1998, five years after Molino wrote this, an Irish English dictionary had actually been created.

[172] www.oed.com (http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50071737?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=eavesdrip&first=1&max_to_show=10), accessed 2010-11-02.

or "thingness" of things. In a review of *District and Circle* (2006) entitled "The Dominion of the Physical: Reading Heaney", John Wilson Foster, also editor of *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History* (1997), refers to how Heaney's "reader senses only a comforting assurance of the quiddity of the world, his poetry functioning as a kind of fodder, for the soul as well as the senses"[173]. This sense of quiddity is an important theme throughout Heaney's poetry, and is another way of resisting allegory by insisting on the things themselves. Corcoran notes a similar dimension of Heaney's poetry when he states with reference to part I of *Station Island* that "the inanimate world insists a caustic, disciplinary presence; things become examples"[174].

In "An Old Refrain", the idea of quiddity is combined with words with specifically Irish connotations, suggesting a strengthening of the relationship between the things themselves and their Irish names. This amounts to a kind of restoration of the referential rights of Irish dialects, made possible by an improved political situation and signifying something along the lines of a lingual reclaiming of both land and language.

A similar point can be made from a different perspective. Interpreted along the lines of Millay's poem, there is a sense in "An Old Refrain" of how the natural environment can be used for healing cultural wounds. In the review previously referred to, Lloyd states that:

> Certainly the single most apparent and destructive political and social reality of Northern Ireland is ancient and ongoing separation (social, cultural, religious and political). Heaney's most outstanding and important trait as a political poet is his ability to heal separation by placing us all back into contact with the meaningful parts of our lives and surroundings. Heaney attacks our acceptance of destructive bigotries and desires that separates us from our humanity and our world through his use of language and imagery which force the reader into intense and honest contact with the objects, sensations and figures. (90)

Lloyd makes an important point here. If the last three nouns in the quotation above are qualified as *natural*, his observation provides further insight into what is taking place in the second part of "An Old Refrain", as the reader is encouraged to attend closely to the relationship between particular words, of Irish as well as both English and Scots Gaelic etymology, and their natural referents. From a colonial theme in the first part, in the second part the poem focuses on the relationship

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[173] John Wilson Foster, "The Dominion of the Physical: Reading Heaney", *The Pacific Rim Review of Books*, 3.1 (2007). Available at http://www.prrb.ca (http://www.prrb.ca/articles/issue05-heaney.html accessed 2012-02-26).

[174] Neil Corcoran, "Seamus Heaney and the Art of the Exemplary", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 17, British Poetry since 1945, Special Number (1987), 125.

between nature and language. Nature in this context acts as a frame of reference that has not been subjected to the type of separation mentioned by Lloyd, thus signifying a possible location in which a healing process might be initiated, signifying what Lloyd refers to as a "meaningful" dimension of our existence. This sense of nature as unharmed by cultural conflict is complicated by poems such as "Midnight" and "The Backward Look", poems that point more directly to the effects of cultural conflict on non-human nature. Still, despite the idealistic and Romantic notion of Lloyd's argument, it is still relevant for pointing towards how the second part of "An Old Refrain" employs natural referents in an attempt to remedy or rectify the colonial fragmentation referred to in the first part. The two parts in this sense combine what Molino has referred to as Heaney's historical linguistics with a different kind of natural linguistics. Starting with *Wintering Out*, Molino argues, Heaney began to develop

> a polyphonic voice that displaced the political and cultural antagonisms endemic to his country and relocated
> them in a realm of reflexive, historical linguistics. That is, the emancipating discourse that Heaney developed to
> circumvent Ireland's centuries-old and exclusive political monologues entailed a confrontation of historically
> diverse discourses within a single poem. Heaney chose to address the political/poetic dilemma that he and other
> Irish writers faced by making the language of Irish writers (as well as the language of Irish people in general) the
> focus of – or at least a significant factor in – his poetry. Heaney thereby circumvented the political/poetic
> dilemma with a poetry whose vernacular problematic addressed old antagonisms in an innovative way. (181).

Molino makes some important observations, but he fails to acknowledge the degree to which Heaney's historical linguistics relate to the natural world, in terms of both anchorage and slippage between reference and referent.

Molino notes further that the move from contemporary politics to historically informed reflections "did not make Heaney's poetry apolitical; rather, it redirected the political aspects already inscribed in his language" (181). According to Molino, Heaney's poetry eventually comes to employ an array of words and expressions from multiple languages (with emphasis on Irish, English and Scottish) that combine "a traditional English line of verse and create a form of poetry that circumvents political monologism by celebrating linguistic pluralism" (184); the poems "enact the vernacular problematic of the Irish speaker/writer and explode in dialect and wordplay" (188). Again, Molino fails to note the extent to which this etymological wordplay is derived from the non-human nature of the conflicted area. Symptomatically, Molino concludes his essay by stating that

"in *Wintering Out* Heaney explores one method of re-inscribing Ireland's politics, literature, and languages" (201). To make it complete, Ireland's nature should be added to that list, as seen not only from poems in *Wintering Out* but also from more recent examples in *Human Chain*.

Chapter 5:

Ecosemiotics: a structural approach to some of Hughes's animal poems

Introduction

Hughes's poem "Brambles"[175] begins:

> The whole air, the whole day
>
> Swirls with the calls of jackdaws. The baby jackdaw
>
> Generation is being initiated
>
> Into jackdawdom – that complicated
>
> Court-world of etiquette
>
>
> And precedence, jingoism and law.

The idea of a "jackdawdom" reflects the semiotic concept of Umwelt, defined by Jakob von Uexküll in 1920 as "the self-centred world of an organism"[176], the world as it is subjectively perceived by different species or individuals. The concept of the Umwelt recognises that several species may share an environment, yet have very different experiences of that environment. The Umwelt of the jackdaws, as "Brambles" suggests, is the world as it is known, understood and communicated by jackdaws, and each jackdaw must learn how to live and communicate according to the rules of that Umwelt. This means learning to interpret and respond to signs transmitted by other jackdaws, as well as by different species that are significant in the jackdaws' Umwelt.

Graham Huggan notes that some texts include an "imperative to create greater dialogue between humans and animals"[177]. One way of achieving such dialogue is for a text to focus on translations between different Umwelten. By describing the Umwelt of the jackdaws, "Brambles" creates a sense both of the world as seen by the jackdaws, and of the existence of species-specific, other than human Umwelten, and thus the limitations of the human Umwelt.

Communication between humans and non-human nature is studied within the field of

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[175] *CP*, 710-711.

[176] *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, ed. Cobley, London; New York: Routledge, 2010, 348.

[177] Graham Huggan, ""Greening" Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 50.3 (2004), 718.

ecosemiotics. Ecosemiotics attempts to bridge the field of biosemiotics, which is the study of non-human sign systems, and the field of traditional or cultural semiotics, the study of communication between humans. Communication requires agency, which in turn gives a sense of 'personhood' even to the non-human agent. Ecosemiotics, unlike bio- or cultural semiotics, is a way of deciphering or facilitating communication between human and non-human agents. In the case of "Brambles", the observations of the jackdaws' behaviour which presumably came before the poem belong to the field of biosemiotics, while the representation of those observations in the form of the poem forms part of cultural semiotics. Analysing the poem from an ecosemiotic perspective highlights how it mediates between human and non-human nature, or between different Umwelten.

This chapter analyses "Brambles" and several other poems by Hughes that address nature observation and interpretation from an ecosemiotic perspective, using especially the ecosemiotic methodology developed by Kalevi Kull and Timo Maran. Two different kinds of Hughesian poetic themes will be discussed. The first refers to poems that attempt to describe nature from a non-human perspective, that try to move inside other species' Umwelten, and that describe non-human nature in semiotic terms. "Brambles" is an example of this kind of poem, and several others can be found especially in the two collections *Season Songs* (1976) and *Flowers and Insects* (1986). The second kind of poem focuses less explicitly on a semiotic view of nature, and are less concerned with observation than with interpretation. This kind of poem interprets non-human nature and contextualises it so that it acquires meaning and significance in a human Umwelt. For these poems, an ecosemiotic perspective may aid the analysis of different aspects of the process of interpretation and contextualisation. This part of the chapter will focus on Hughes's collection *River* (1983), especially the poem "Salmon Eggs", and attempt to point to some specific ways in which this poem and the collection as a whole translates non-human nature into meaningful signs in a human Umwelt.

Ecosemiotics

In the introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, Paul Cobley states that "semiotics is the study of the sign wherever signs are to be found – perhaps, even, in places where humans have yet to set foot"[178]. This is not to say, however, that anything or everything can be a sign: according to Charles Sanders Peirce signs are always relational, and always stand for something to

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[178] Paul Cobley, "Introduction", *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, ed. Cobley, London; New York: Routledge, 2010, 4.

someone[179].

Ecosemiotics is based on Peircean semiotics, which includes three main components: sign, object, and interpretant. The sign represents an object in such a way that the object is brought into relation with the interpretant. A biosemiotic example is the relationship between flower, nectar and bee: the flower/sign represents the object/nectar to the interpretant/bee in such a way that the object and the interpretant are brought into relation with each other (the bee finds the nectar). This triadic view of the semiotic process is different from the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure, for example, who conceives of the same process dyadically, including only signifier and signified. Peircean semiotics, compared to a Saussurean version, emphasises the role of the interpretant.

In Peircean semiotics, there are also three different types of signs: iconic, indexical, and symbolical. These three types of signs relate to their objects in different ways; by similarity, physicality, or habit, respectively.

From the basic definition as the study of sign systems, semiotics is divided into several sub-fields. Human sign systems are studied within the field of anthroposemiotics, more commonly referred to as cultural semiotics, or plain semiotics. Non-human sign systems are studied in biological semiotics, or biosemiotics. Zoosemiotics is a subcategory of biosemiotics and refers to the study of animal communication, while phytosemiotics is the study of communication among plants, to name a few. Ecosemiotics attempts to bring biosemiotics and cultural semiotics into contact with each other by studying communication between humans and their non-human environment. The following figure, originally developed by Jesper Hoffmeyer[180], illustrates this:

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[179] See Cobley in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, 4.
[180] Borrowed from Kull, 350. Borrowed in turn from Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Signs of Meaning in the Universe*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 96.
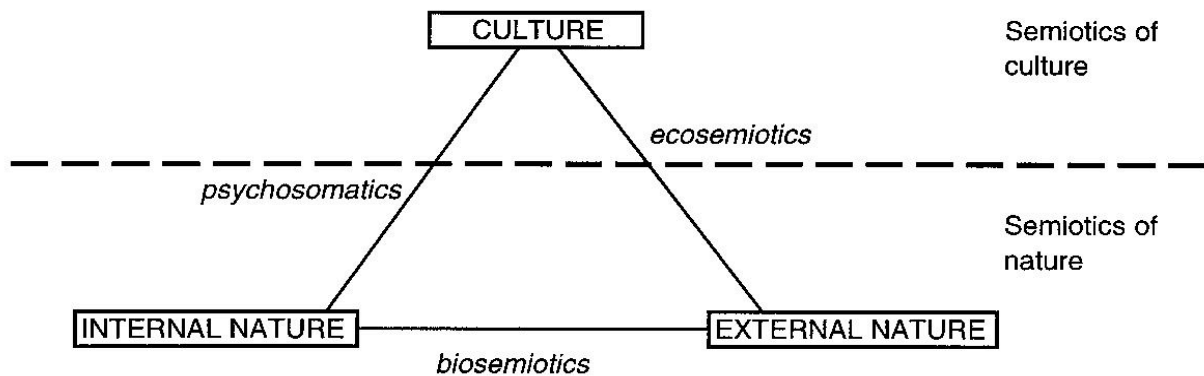
Kalevi Kull explains this figure in an article from 1998 that introduces the field of ecosemiotics, and states that:

> *Ecosemiotics* can be defined as the semiotics of relationships between nature and culture. This includes research on the semiotic aspects of the place and role of nature for humans, i.e. what is and what has been the meaning of nature for humans, how and in what extent we communicate with nature. Ecosemiotics deals with the semiosis going on between a human and its ecosystem, or a human in ones ecosystem. (350)

Ecosemiotics, unlike biosemiotics, is part of cultural semiotics, but unlike cultural semiotics is not limited to the realms of culture. Kull points out that both biosemiotics and ecosemiotics research "nature from the semiotic point of view", but unlike biosemiotics, ecosemiotics "should also include the history of culture-nature relationships, as the development of nature(s) in culture(s)" (351).

What does it mean to research nature from a semiotic point of view? According to Kull:

> Ecosemiotics describes the appearance of nature as dependent on the various contexts or situations. It includes nature's structure as it appears, its classification (syntactics); it describes what it means for people, what there is in nature (semantics); and it finds out the personal or social relation to the components of nature, which can be one's participation in nature (pragmatics). In all this, it includes the role of memory and the relationships between different types of (short-term, long-term etc.) memory in culture. (351)

Kull categorises nature-human interaction according to six different categories: (1) recognition and control, (2) decontextualisation, (3) operation and remodelling, (4) opposition and reduction, (5)

understanding and devaluation, and (6) selfing and valuation. Each of these categories can take on different meanings with regard to different parts of nature, and for different individuals. The recognition and valuation of a certain plant, for instance, is nominally different for a botanist than for a layperson. Each category requires interpretation, and moving between different categories involves both interpretation and translation, not least if more than one interpretant is involved, as the same sign or object can mean different things in different individuals' Umwelten.

In addition to the different meanings of signs and objects in different Umwelten, Kull refers to a "separation of notions" within the same Umwelt. He notes that "Uexküll with his notion of *Umwelt* has emphasised that every organism has its own subjective environment, which is different from any other, and in the case of different species of animals these differences can be very large" (354). Kull points to additional interpretative differences even between species that share the same Umwelt, based on what he calls a "separation of notions within an *Umwelt* (particularly in human *Umwelt*), or in the semiosphere" (355).

The notion of 'nature', for instance, has many different meanings. In an attempt to clarify these, Kull identifies four different kinds of 'nature': "zero nature" refers to wilderness unknown by people; "first nature" is nature as it is perceived by humans; "second nature" is any nature that has been affected by humans (managed forests, modified species, parks, gardens and so on); and "third nature" refers to images of nature informed by the image of nature as perceived by humans ("first nature"), such as poems, paintings, scientific models or digital representations.

Kull schematises how these different natures and images of nature inform each other as

0 – zero nature is	– nature from nature
1 – first nature is	– image from nature
2 – second nature is	– nature from image
3 – third nature is	– image from image
(357)	

and summarises them as:

[z]ero nature is that which biologists want to describe. The first one is that which they perceive and describe. The second one is the one in their lab. And the third nature is what they get in their papers and models (357)

Kull points out that

> [i]n the course of the development of human *Umwelt*, the part of zero and first nature in the semiosphere, as well as in the biosphere, inevitably diminishes; the causes of the loss of wilderness are as deep as the laws of the development of knowledge. Second nature cannot be built on empty space. (356)

Interestingly, this model places scientific models of nature and nature poems in the same category, as images from the image of nature.

Kull admits that these categories might appear trivial, but maintains that failing to recognize them continually leads to mistakes and possibly even falsifications as "scientists are often misguided" (357). The categories are intended to help "recognise culture in nature" (358) and nature in culture in order to avoid such mistakes.

The second part of Kull's introductory article explores the recognition that there is a significant "difference between bio- and anthroposemiosis" (359). Explaining the role of ecosemiotics in this context, Kull states that ecosemiotics is not merely "an application of ecology – in the sense of its methods or environmental factors – in semiotics" (363). Neither is it the reverse: "an application of semiotics in ecology" (363). The latter approaches a correct definition, but is inadequate because it suggests that it is possible to approach ecology from outside, something which Kull stresses is impossible, as the semiotician is already part of the ecosystem which he intends to study, as explained by the different categories of nature. Ecosemiotics is better defined according to Kull as the study of the semiotic processes "which make the organisms living and the living themselves interconnected" (363). Furthermore, according to Kull, ecosemiotics involves an extension of viewpoint beyond that of regular natural science, resulting in an "extended ecology, with a change in its philosophical and methodological assumptions" (363).

In another article in the same special journal issue, Winfried Nöth defines ecosemiotics as "the study of the *semiotic* interrelations between organisms and their environment" (1998: 333). This is a slightly different definition than Kull's, who states that ecosemiotics is concerned with the overlaps of biological and cultural semiotics. According to Kull, eco- and biosemiotics are two different (though related) fields of study, while according to Nöth biosemiotics is a sub-field of ecosemiotics. Nöth also refers to ecosemiotics as the study of "natural signs" (1998: 333), though it is unclear what a natural, compared to a non-natural or unnatural, sign is. In a later essay Nöth approaches Kull's definition, and states that ecosemiotics is

situated between the semiotics of culture on the one hand and the semiotics of nature on the other. *Culture* is involved since models developed in cultural history determine the way in which humans interpret their natural environment. Nature is involved not only since our own natural environment is the object of ecosemiotic research, but also since the orientation of organisms in prehuman life equally involves environmental semiosis.[181]

Nöth also adds that

[*c*]*ommunication*, defined as a sign process that involves a sender and a receiver, occurs not only among humans, but also between all other organisms throughout the whole biosphere. Not only cultural semiotics, but also bio- and zoosemiotics are hence concerned with processes of communication. *Signification*, by contrast, which concerns sign processes without a sender, predominates in ecosemiotics, where organisms interact with a natural environment that does not function as the intentional emitter of messages to the interpreting organism. (2001: 72)

The distinction between intentional and unintentional communication, or between communication and signification, points to how humans attribute meaning to signs that are not intended for them. Examples include bird song, which for humans often indicate a peaceful and idyllic nature while actually being expressions of territorial claims, or images of nature used to indicate the sublime. Although these are not signs that are intended for humans they nevertheless, like many other forms of non-human nature, become meaningful signs within human Umwelten.

To say that people 'read' their environments leads Nöth to his next distinction, "between semiotic and nonsemiotic environmental relationships" (2001: 72). The definition of what constitutes a semiotic relationship depends, as Nöth points out, on where you put "the semiotic threshold", as do "the role of natural and cultural signs in environmental semiosis" (2001: 72). This chapter adopts a low semiotic threshold, in accordance with Nöth's statement that ecosemiotics "will have to" assume a very low ecosemiotic threshold "if it does not reject such a threshold altogether" (2001: 72). The analysis here is thus not limited to what Nöth refers to as "conventional signs" (2001: 72) but considers an array of signs found in the natural environment and how they are translated into a cultural context, or human Umwelt.

The position of such a low semiotic threshold is, as Nöth points out, very different from 20th

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[181] Winfried Nöth, "Ecosemiotics and the semiotics of nature", *Sign System Studies*, 29.1 (2001), 71-72.

century structuralist semiotics, which considered non-lingual thought and communication "a shapeless and indistinct mass"[182]. However, Nöth also notes that structuralist semiotics did combine semiotics with studies of nature to the extent that natural structures were "investigated as content structures of texts, in particular of mythical texts" (2001: 73). Nöth notes that the study of nature as culture forms what may be called a cultural ecosemiotics:

> semiotics of nature is not a theory of natural semiosis, but a theory of how human culture interprets nature. Ecosemiotics in this vein is hence the study of the culturalization of nature. Let us call this approach *cultural ecosemiotics*. (2001: 73)

Nöth identifies four important cultural frames according to which nature is culturalised: magical, mythological, metaphorical, and pansemiotic:

> According to the pansemiotic model of the relationship between humans and their non-human environment, nature is semiotic throughout, and the signs which we perceive in our natural environment are messages emitted by God or some supernatural power. According to the magical model of environment semiosis, natural phenomena are equally messages, but their sender and manipulator, the magician, is a human, while its receiver, at least at first sight, is in our natural, physical, or biological environment. Finally, mythological models of human ecology have been culturally transmitted in the form of narratives which instruct humans about their place in nature, telling them what they can, should, and must do with their natural environment. (1998: 334)

The most relevant of these frames for Hughes is the mythological model, as Hughes's poems often relate to, depend on and illustrate ancient myths, rituals, and other forms of older nature religions.

'Nature-text'
In an article from 2007 with the title "Towards an integrated methodology of ecosemiotics: The concept of nature-text" Timo Maran attempts "to elaborate ecosemiotics towards practical methodology of analysis" (269). Maran bases his methodology on Kull's definition of ecosemiotics, and argues that an ecosemiotic methodology has to be able to integrate biological with cultural semiotics "so that the resulting synthesis would both take into account the semioticity of nature itself as well as allow analyzing the depiction of nature in the written texts" (269), a description that suggests the inclusion of a cultural ecosemiotics similar to that described by Nöth, while

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[182] Nöth quotes Saussure. See Nöth, 2001: 72.

maintaining a strong connection to the field of biosemiotics. In order to establish a relationship between "the written text and the natural environment", Maran suggests the concept of nature-text, which he argues may be used to describe "nature writing as an appreciation of an alien semiotic sphere" (269).

Before explaining the concept of the nature-text, Maran introduces his methodology by noting the systematic affiliations between ecology and semiotics, and argues that the two fields are "expressions of the same wave of systematic thinking" (269) typical of twentieth century science. In literary theory, structuralism is another example of this tendency; in the natural sciences, general systems theory is another. Besides these structural affinities, Maran notes certain "inner" resemblances between semiotics and ecology:

> Although semiotics has mostly focused on human sign activities and ecology has typically studied the life of other biological organisms, both are largely disciplines of relation, accustomed to consider their objects as relational or in relations with other objects and phenomena. They both consider such relatedness to be fundamentally important. In ecology the focus is on relations between organisms and their environment or on relations between different biological species. In semiotics the classical concept of sign itself expresses a certain type of relation: a sign "is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity". (270)

Maran agrees with Kull's view of ecosemiotics as a bridge between cultural and biological semiotics, and notes that cultural ecosemiotics "investigates to what extent nature is interpreted from a cultural perspective and to what extent various cultures interpret the same phenomena differently" (274). Maran states further that Kull's distinction between four different types of nature "has a potential to become a grounding principle for ecosemiotic theory", and that "[i]n practical research such typology can be used as a methodological tool for analyzing different forms of mediating nature in culture, or different degrees of nature's culturization" (277). Maran expresses some reservation regarding the fact that Kull's method seems to be developed primarily for relationships between people and passive nature, rather than human-animal relations. For the latter purpose, Maran suggests that some complementary theories developed by Thomas Sebeok might be helpful.

Maran emphasises "[t]he need to overcome the dichotomy between the cultural and biological approach", indicating the need for comparative studies of observations of nature and cultural

representations of nature. In order to understand the transformation of "first nature" (images of nature) into "third nature" (images of images of nature) not only a cultural semiotic but also a biosemiotic perspective is required. This is pointed out by Maran, who underlines the need to "connect, mediate and translate different sign systems and structural levels of semiotic systems in culture-nature relations, to recognize and explicate possibilities for categorization, textuality and meanings in animate nature, and to bring forth natural, *animal* and nonverbal aspects of human culture and its texts" (279).

As a tool for doing this, Maran proposes the concept of the "nature-text":

> On the level of practical analysis the necessity to integrate two branches of ecosemiotics should result in the formation of research methodology that allows both the representations of nature in culture and nature in its own semiosic activity to be covered. The perfect model object for such a twofold framework for analysis is nature writing. A nature essay includes the author's imaginations, social, ideological and cultural meaning relations and tensions, but it also embraces organisms, natural communities and landscapes with their special properties and abilities to grow, communicate, learn and multiply. The understanding of nature writing does not depend solely on interpretation of the written text, but also on structures of outer nature, which have their own memory, dynamics and history, and if those outer structures change, then the field of possible interpretation for the written text will also change. The object of ecosemiotic research should therefore also be considered twofold: in addition to the written text that speaks about nature and points to nature, it should also include the depicted part of the natural environment itself, which must be, for the relation to be functional, to at least some extent textual or at least textualizable. I will call the unit that is formed through meaning relations from those two counterparts nature-text. (280)

Described figuratively as:
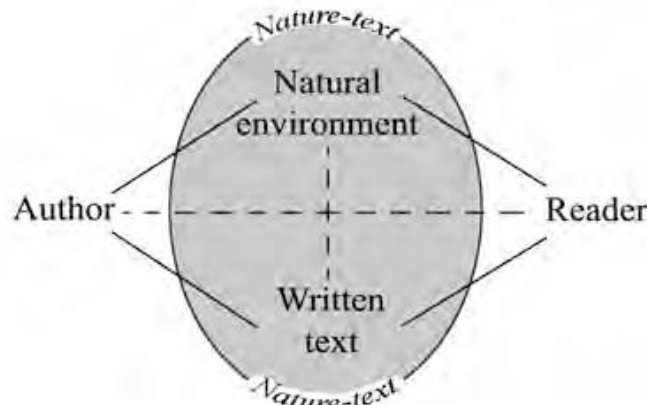
The figure shows how the nature-text is comprised of four different components: writer, reader, nature and text. In the case of "Brambles", this means that the nature-text that the poem is part of is formed by Hughes, the reader, the poem, and the actual jackdaws that exist outside the poem. For each reader of the poem, the nature-text changes slightly, as each reader relates the poem to their own Umwelt. This variability is pointed out by Maran, who notes that the relationship between the different parts of the nature-text is flexible, and that each part is "characterised by its own semiosic activity" (281).

Maran's methodology is developed within the frames of the Tartu-Moscow semiotic school, which in turns belongs to a European tradition of semiology, different from "American pragmatist semiotics" (Maran, 289). According to the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, a text is anything that is "used, understood and valued in culture", including cultural expressions such as costumes or paintings, as well as other types of symbols such as animals, plants or other forms of non-human nature in so far as "they become distinctly meaningful in culture" (Maran, 283). According to this tradition, the environment itself may be read as a text,which brings about the question of who is the writer of that text. According to Maran, the

> natural environment can be understood to be a result of common creative activity, "written" by individuals of many different species, each proceeding from their own sign system, Umwelt, and life activities. Some of those authors, such as beavers and ants, shape landscape to a remarkable degree and make changes that influence the habitat of many other species, humans included. Also tracks of wild animals in the landscape, which connect drinking places, feeding areas, and resting places, are part of environmental scripture. Although the descriptions of such changes in the environment and the names of animals that have caused these are attributed [to] human culture, one must admit that ant nests and beaver dams in themselves are the creation and self-expression of

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animal authors. (285)

In order to answer the question of how the environment should or could be read, Maran turns to zoosemiotician Sebeok, who argues that before language there is another, preceding system, which he calls "the-world-as-perceived"[183]. Maran explains that in this system

> signs are distinguished by the organism's species-specific sensory apparatus and nervous system and aligned with its natural behavioral resources and motor events […] According to Sebeok, humans possess two mutually sustaining modeling systems – the anthroposemiotic verbal, which is unique to the human species, and the zoosemiotic nonverbal, which unites us with the world of nonhuman animals. The existence of a primary zoosemiotic modeling system is hard to notice for humans, because we are born into it (which makes it self-evident) and also because it is to a large extent overwritten by the system of conventional meanings. The existence and properties of the-world-as-perceived become, however, more apparent if the perceptual possibilities and communication systems of different species are studied. Direct and spatial perceptions, tactile and olfactory sensations as well as many occurrences of nonverbal communication between humans belong to the sphere of nonverbal modeling. Language resources are often insufficient for describing these kinds of phenomena, but it is certainly possible (and this is often done) to express these kinds of sensations by textual means. (286)

Hughes attempts to turn non-verbal and non-human experiences of nature into human language in this way in many of his animal poems that express and translate other species' Umwelten into a textual, cultural and poetic form, describing how different species 'read' their environments. In "Hawk Roosting", for instance, Hughes attempts to speak from the point of view of a hawk, representing "[s]imply nature" (Faas, 199), in an attempt to translate the hawk's "world-as-perceived" into human language.

Maran states further that

> [n]ature writing that relates to immediate environmental experiences is probably the most suitable material for studying traces of such zoosemiotic modeling. The attention of the researcher can turn here to the perceptual properties of humans as biological species, to the ways how one can relate perceptually and bodily with the environment and to the possibilities to express these experiences. (287)

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[183] Suggested by Thomas A. Sebeok in "In what sense is language a "primary modeling system?", *Semiotics of Culture, Proceedings of the 25th Symposium of the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics, Imatra, Finland, 27th-29th July, 1987*, ed. Henri Broms and Rebecca Kaufmann, Helsinki: Arator, 1988, 73-74.

Maran defines nature writing as "a written text that is related through meaning relations to a part of natural environment", and states further that such a text "carries out two processes: it communicates nature and at the same time it values nature through that communication" (287). Though Maran seems to have primarily non-fiction nature essays in mind, his definition may include fictive nature writing, such as nature poetry, as well.

The concept of the nature-text, developed "for studying texts that represent nature" (271), can help to highlight both how natural signs are turned into cultural signs and how they remain as natural signs in their own right as parts of non-human semiosis. Maran notes that

> [i]f nature is understood as being composed of various Umwelten and semiotic spheres, which are foreign and partly inaccessible to humans, then every nature essay turns out to be an attempt to raise these natural foreign semiotic spheres above the interpretation threshold of human culture. Therefore, according to the concept of nature-text, nature writing could be understood as an aesthetical expression of the appreciation of the foreign semiotic spheres of nature. (288)

Many of Hughes's poems attempt to bring non-human species or phenomena above such a "threshold of human culture", translating the "world-as-perceived" by other species' into human language, but there are also many poems by Hughes that attempt to do the opposite, that emphasise the otherness of non-human nature and the limited ability of humans to understand a nature that is outside their own Umwelten.

In summary then, Maran states that "ecosemiotics endeavours to study both semiosic activity in nature and its cultural representations" (289) with the main objective of trying to solve "communication problems between humans and nature" (290). His concept of nature-text is meant to help bridge the gap between biological and cultural semiotics, in order, hopefully, "to pinpoint the problems in our communicative relations with [nature], and maybe even explicate possibilities for the restoration of concordance" (290). This chapter will attempt to analyse first "Brambles" and a few similar poems as examples of texts that "study semiosic activity in nature", before focusing on nature's "cultural representations" in *River*.

Poetry and ecosemiotics
A few attempts to combine ecosemiotics with literary analysis have been made, notably by John

Coletta who has attempted to analyse works by John Clare[184] and Coleridge[185] from an ecosemiotic perspective. According to Coletta, if the meaning of a sign "is not *self*-evident, it must be in part Other-evident – that is, meaning is in part environment-evident" (1999; 246). In relation to Clare's poem "The Raven's Nest", this means, according to Coletta, that

> [t]he ecological indicators of raven and 'old oak' are also iconic indicators (or indices) of the old men ('old oak'='old men') themselves and of their relevance; the old men's sympathetic recognition (the Peircean interpretant) of this iconicity and the sense (an indexical one) of having been called to speak out on its behalf (to tell personally sustaining stories about the nest and tree that in return safeguard the tree's existence) is of course a semiotic equivalent of biogeochemical cycling: a reciprocal process whereby the soil and the soul (and the natural and human community) are sustained. Indeed, the Peircean interpretant here, the *recognition* of a sustaining iconicity and the subsequent *calling out* on behalf of that which calls to you (an indexical cycle) becomes itself a sign of the environmentalism of our time. (248-249)

To illustrate further, Coletta refers to a contemporary work of art by indigenous people in Mexico. The artwork shows (among other things) a peyote cactus both inside and outside the head of a deer. According to Coletta, the peyote cactus is a symbolic sign that indicates that there is enough food for the community. Using a Peircean semiotics, Coletta describes the artwork as including sign (the peyote), object (sufficient food) and interpretant (the community, specifically the community's shaman). The sign is used by the interpretant (according to shamanic rituals) to procure the object, which is sufficient food for the community. The fact that the peyote is pictured inside the head of the deer refers according to Coletta to the shaman's endeavour to see the world from the point of view of the deer:

> The practical or instrumental value of the shamanistic vision is that the shaman is brought to see the world from the object's point of view to the end that the whereabouts of the object […] might be known to the shaman; that is, thinking like a deer (iconic information) is likely to give one insight (and 'outsight') into the question of what the deer would do and thus where it might be (indexical information). (252-253)

A psychoactive substance, Peyote has long been used by indigenous people in America for

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[184] John Coletta, "Literary Biosemiotics and the Postmodern Ecology of John Clare", *Semiotica*, 127.1/4 (1999), 239-272.

[185] John Coletta and Dometa Wiegand-Schroeder, "Do Rocks Have Desire? Renewable Historicism, Coleridge's "Outness" of Mind, and Peircean Biosemiotics", *SEED*, 3.2 (2003): 94-142.

transcendent and meditative practices, and its function as sign in this picture also points to its instrumental role in the shamanistic ritual.

Different from iconic information, which has a mimetic or explanatory function, indexical information is used to predict the future. The object or referent is defined further by Coletta as that which "enlightenment calls its object, that which is usually considered passive, a patient to the agency of the human subject" (255). According to Coletta, Clare in this manner "dramatizes the signing action of nature" (264).

Semiotic nature in "Brambles" and other poems

"Brambles", from *Flower and Insects*, also dramatises sign activities in non-human nature. As mentioned, the poem's first stanza indicates the Umwelt of jackdaws, and describes how young jackdaws learn the rules of this world, in the lines quoted in the beginning of this chapter:

> The whole air, the whole day
> Swirls with the calls of jackdaws. The baby jackdaw
> Generation is being initiated
> Into jackdawdom – that complicated
> Court-world of etiquette
>
> And precedence, jingoism and law.

The "world of etiquette" refers to signs transmitted and interpreted by jackdaws, and introducing the younger birds into "jackdawdom" means teaching them to interpret and transmit those signs, so that they can understand and be understood within world as it is known, understood and communicated by jackdaws. With a different tone, the jackdaws' confinement to their own Umwelt is also described in the poem as

> Nearly a prison world – with bars
> Of cries and signals. The jailors
> Are all the other jackdaws.

Moving from jackdaws to briars, "Brambles" continues by stating that

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> Briars are such a success, their defences
> So craftsmanlike,
> Their reachings so deliberate, are they awake?

The question "are they awake?" suggests what Wendy Wheeler has in mind when she talks about culture as perceived from a biosemiotic perspective:

> biosemiotics does away with the idea that nature and culture are very different, and even opposed, phenomena. Biosemiotics suggests, rather, that culture is emergent in nature. It puts us back in nature as semiotic animals in a semiotically perfused natural and cultural world. This idea that culture is nature might also suggest (I think it strongly does) that human socio-cultural developments are often best understood via organic models.[186]

By asking if the briars are awake, Hughes reverses the perspective of culture as nature as described by Wheeler, and suggests that nature is culture rather than the other way around. However, this reversal is then re-reversed in the next stanzas:

> Surely [the briars] aren't just numb,
> A blind groping. Yet why not?
> Aren't my blood-cells the same?
> What do even brain-cells fear or feel
>
> Of the scalpel, or the accident?
> They too crown a plant
> Of peculiar numbness.

In these lines, culture, or humans, are describes as being just as numb and automatised as the briars with "[t]heir reachings so deliberate". The question is no longer whether the briars are awake, but whether anything or anyone is awake. In the next stanza, the poem suggests that the jackdaws are like the briars, as

> the jackdaws
> Work darkly to be jackdaws

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[186] Wendy Wheeler, "Postscript on Biosemiotics: Reading Beyond Words – and Ecocriticism", *New Formations*, 64 (2008), 144.

> As if they were seeds in the earth.

These lines relate to Kull's fourth category of processes involved in humans' perception of nature, 'opposition and reduction', explained as:

> Recognition means an ability to make distinctions, which, in a simple case, are polar. Making distinctions (polar oppositions) has a tendency to replace the importance of the whole by the importance of particular parts. A trivial example in our context would be the distinction between nature and culture, which leads us to think that the processes in culture and nature are separated, and that the processes of culture or respectively of nature are more important to consider than those of the whole. (353-354)

"Brambles" questions the separation and opposition between nature and culture by first suggesting that nature is like culture (the briars are "awake"), and then that culture is like nature, in the lines that suggest that the speaker is, at least on a cellular level, "numb", just like the briars.

The next stanza suggests that the world is perfused with semiotic activity: even in the organism's innenwelt (referring to an organism's inner environment, as compared to the outer environment referred to by the Umwelt) "mute cells" interpret and transmit signs, without awareness or recognition of the organism of which it is part as an individual:

> The whole claque is a benighted religion
> Around the godlike syntax and vocabulary
> Of a mute cell, that does not know who we are
> Or even that we are here,
> Unforthcoming as any bramble flower.

These lines portray culture as just as 'unforthcoming' and unaware as non-human nature, as 'unawake' as the briars. Humans, like all other parts of the natural environment, act in response to signs in their Umwelt, just like the baby jackdaws are being taught to do in the beginning of the poem.

Terry Gifford refers to what he calls "the linguistic invention" (2009: 53) of *Flowers and Insects* and *Season Songs* and states that these volumes are evidence of Hughes's ambitions as "mediator of our relationship with nature" (2009: 53). Gifford notes that the poem "Swifts"[187], from *Season*

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[187] *CP*, 315-316.

Songs, represent signs of spring as reassuring signs that, as the poem puts it, "the globe's still working":

> Suddenly flickering in sky summit, three or four together,
> Gnat-whisp frail, and hover-searching, and listening
>
> For air-chills – are they too early? With a bowing
> Power-thrust to the left, then to right, then a flicker they
> Tilt into a slide, a tremble for balance,
> Then a lashing down disappearance
>
> Behind elms.
>   They've made it again,
> Which means the globe's still working, the Creation's
> Still waking refreshed, our summer's
> Still all to come.

According to Gifford, "[t]here is a poetic shift here that is linguistically exhilarating – from the brilliant detail of the earlier phrase that encapsulates the swift's sudden appearance out of nowhere into our lives that apprehend them as a speed that is a sound, to the larger perspective in which 'global' is both size and time" (2009: 54). In these different ways described by Gifford, the swifts become signs that indicate the arrival of spring, which in turn indicate that the world is "working".

The poems in *Season Songs* and *Flowers and Insects* pay close attention to signs in the non-human environment, and attempt, like Gifford also notes, "to convey the detailed organic workings of natural processes" (2009: 56). The poem "Tern"[188], also from *Flowers and Insects*, like "Brambles" describes the world of a bird using linguistic terminology, and depicts the tern as responding to signs in its environment in an immediate, unselfconscious way:

> The wings – remote-controlled
> By the eyes
> In his submarine swift shadow
>
> Feint and tilt in their steel.

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[188] *CP*, 720.

Suddenly a triggered magnet

Connects him downward, through a thin shatter,

To a sand-eel. He hoists out, with a twinkling,

Through some other wave-window.

His eye is a gimlet.

Deep in the churned grain of the roller

His brain is a gimlet. He hangs,

A blown tatter, a precarious word

In the mouth of ocean pronouncements.

His meaning has no margin.

Leonard Scigaj notes that "Tern" illustrates "the intimate symbiosis of bird or insect with the ecology of its environment" to the extent that "one might consider the bird the ocean's utterance"[189]. The bird is a symptom of its environment, and can be described as an 'utterance' only because its actions are immediate responses to triggers in its Umwelt: when the bird's eye detects a movement in the water beneath him, he reacts like "a triggered magnet" and is drawn "downward, through a thin shatter, / To a sand-eel". That the bird's "meaning has no margin" refers to the fact that nothing the bird does is unrelated to its environment. This is a recurring theme in Hughes's poetry, and is contrasted by a human context in which there is room for contemplation between sign and action. For the bird, there is no such room. For Hughes this margin is often something negative, suggesting that people are no longer natural in their environment, that they have become alienated from their natural surroundings.

The description of the tern and its existence in direct relation to its natural habitat suggests Hughes's views on poems as similarly spontaneous, unselfconscious acts of creation closely related to their environment, both the inner environment of the imagination and their physical settings. The descriptions of the speed of the tern's flight, its symbiosis with its ecological surroundings, and its sudden grip of its prey can all be read metaphorically as descriptions of Hughes's views on poetic creation. The relationship between capturing real animals and writing animal poems is explained in the first part of Hughes's essay "Poetry in the Making" in *Winter Pollen*:

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[189] Leonard Scigaj, "Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision", *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar, New York: St Martin's Press, 1994, 176.

In a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps even killing them. And they have a certain wisdom. They know something special…something perhaps which we are very curious to learn. Maybe my concern has been to capture not animals particularly and not poems, but simply things which have a vivid life of their own, outside mine. (10)

Like the bird in "Tern", which forms a perfect, unselfconscious ecological unit with its surroundings, the words and images of a successful poem relate immediately and powerfully to the imagination as well as to the physical environment. Similarly to how the bird can be described as an utterance of the ocean, the successful poem is an utterance of the imagination. Similarly to how the bird catches the sand-eel, the poem catches a thought or feeling from the inner life and world. Compared to other human activities, where there is a margin or space between action and meaning, poetry in this sense has for Hughes more in common with principles of ecology than civilized culture. Hughes explains further:

How can a poem, for instance, about a walk in the rain, be like an animal? Well, perhaps it cannot look much like a giraffe or an emu or an octopus, or anything you might find in a menagerie. It is better to call it an assembly of living parts moved by a single spirit. The living parts are the words, the images, the rhythms. The spirit is the life which inhabits them when they all work together. It is impossible to say which comes first, parts or spirit. But if any of the parts are dead, if any of the words, or images or rhythms do not jump to life as you read them, then the creature is going to be maimed and the spirit sickly. (12)

The idea that animals and poetry function according to similar ecological principles are an essential element to Hughes's poetics. Capturing the spirit of an animal in a poem suggests successfully capturing the spirit of the poem, while portraying the life and activities of animals is a way of simultaneously describing the life of the imagination.

"The Honey Bee" is another poem from *Flowers and Insects* that, like "Brambles" and "Tern", also describes nature from a semiotic perspective:

The Honey Bee
Brilliant as Einstein's idea
Can't be taught a thing.
Like the sun, she's on course forever.

As if nothing else at all existed

Except her flowers.

The last line suggests that in the Umwelt of the honey bee there is nothing except flowers, as flowers is the only thing that has meaning in the honey bee's Umwelt. In the world of the bee there are, consequently, "[n]o mountains, no cows, no beaches, no shops".

If "Brambles", "Swifts", "Tern" and "The Honey Bee" describe animals in perfect tune with their environments or Umwelten, "Wolfwatching"[190], from the collection with the same name (1989), suggests what happens to a species when it is removed from its natural habitat. The poem describes a wolf in a London zoo that, removed from its Umwelt, is reduced to "listening to London". As a result, the wolf is bored and sluggish, a mere shadow of a 'real' wolf:

Woolly-bear white, the old wolf

Is listening to London. His eyes, withered in

Under the white wool, black peppers,

While he makes nudging, sniffing offers

At the horizon of noise, the blue-cold April

Invitation of airs. The lump of meat

Is his confinement. He has probably had all his life

Behind wires, fraying his eye-efforts

On the criss-cross embargo. He yawns

Peevishly like an old man and the yawn goes

Right back into Kensington and there stops

Floored with glaze. Eyes

Have worn him away. Children's gazings

Have tattered him to a lumpish

Comfort of woolly play-wolf.

The discrepancy between the wolf's natural surroundings and this individual's immediate experience (London, Kensington, children, bars) illustrates its entrapment between two different semiospheres: one that is is physically in relation with (but unable to act within), and one that it has evolved according to. This discrepancy is referred to especially in the poem's first sentence, describing the

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[190] *CP*, 754.

mismatch between the wolf's hearing and the noise that surrounds it, and in lines 8-9, describing how the eyes of children have "worn him away". As a result, the wolf loses its 'wolfdom': it becomes more like "an old man" or "a woolly play-wolf". The anthropomorphic descriptions suggest the wolf's function in a human semiosphere rather than in its own Umwelt.

The transformation of the wolf into a sign in a human Umwelt is described by Kull's second category of nature-human interaction, "decontextualisation". Using the example of relocation of plants, Kull states that

> [r]ecognition of an object, at least to some extent, decontextualises it. To be able to replant specimens of a useful species automatically means that specimens are taken out of their original biocoenosis, removing with this many connections with other species which are not taken with the plant to its new habitat. In built (artificial) ecosystems, for instance fields or parks, people often grow foreign, non-indigenous plants. Therefore, species in such places may encounter new relationships with other species which they have never experienced before. These plants are taken away from the context in which they have evolved. (353)

These processes are described and illustrated in "Wolfwatching": the zoo is a built artificial ecosystem, and the wolf is forced to relate to unknown surroundings that do not correspond to his natural environment.

The anthropomorphising of the wolf, the comparison of the animal to an old man or a toy, exemplifies Kull's third category of nature-human interaction, referred to as "operation and remodelling". This category involves human remodelling of nature into a form that makes it recognisable in a human Umwelt. According to Kull,

> [o]peration always depends on (is regulated by) the forms and images the organism (a human) has acquired. Operation does not follow the whole structure of the environment and its webs of relationships, but discretisises it and disregards many sides. Consequently, it changes the environment, making it more similar to the human's own face. (353)

This takes place in Hughes's poem, but it also takes place on the level of the zoo as a phenomenon, to which the poem also refers.

Decontextualised and anthropomorphised, the weight of the wolf's head is "useless": it has no purpose and no relation to its surroundings:

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> All his power is a tangle of old ends,
> A jumble of leftover scraps and bits of energy
> And bitten-off impulses and dismantled intuitions.

Unlike the baby jackdaws that are introduced into their Umwelt in "Brambles", this animal is taken out of its Umwelt, and it "no longer / Knows how to live up to" its "wolf-pelt".

The failure of the old wolf is contrasted by a younger individual, whose faculties are "still intact" and which is still "waiting / For the chance to live":

> The rufous ears and neck are always ready.
> He flops his heavy running paws, resplays them
> On pebbles, and rests the huge engine
> Of his purring head. A wolf
> Dropped perfect on pebbles. For eyes
> To put on a pedestal. A product
> Without a market.

Contrasting the initial hopefulness and energy in the first of these lines, the concluding statement that this "product" has no "market" confirms that this younger wolf is as decontextualised as the older one, though its faculties have not yet been worn down. Nothing in the poem seems to suggest that as time goes by, the younger wolf will not suffer the same destiny as the old wolf, as the "iron inheritance" of evolution becomes increasingly frustrated:

> The incredibly rich will, torn up
> In neurotic boredom and eaten,
> Now indigestible. All that restlessness
> And lifting of ears, and aiming, and re-aiming
> Of nose, is like a trembling
> Of nervous breakdown, afflicted by voices.
> Is he hearing a deer? Is he listening
> To gossip of non-existent forest?

The restless movements of the wolf's ears and the "aiming" of its nose indicate a search for signs that will direct its behaviour. The listening for a deer in an imagined forest suggests the wolf's

receptivity to the right kinds of signs, indicating persistent relationships between signs, objects and interpretants in the ecosystem.

River

Kull refers to "the semiotic aspects of the place and role of nature for humans, i.e. what is and what has been the meaning of nature for humans, how and in what extent we communicate with nature". While *Flowers and Insects* and *Season Songs* describe the semiotic relationship between non-human species and their environments, *River* (1983) illustrates how non-human nature acquires meaning in a human Umwelt, as indicated by Kull.

According to Gifford, *River* is "the last themed collection of [Hughes's] own work to engage directly with humans' relationship with the forces of the natural world" (56). The collection suggests a global ecosystem, stretching from the sky to the sea, as described in a line from "December River"[191]: "[t]his vein from the sky is the sea-spirit's pathway". The collection covers a whole year, from "The Morning before Christmas"[192] to "Four March Watercolours"[193] to "An August Salmon"[194] and "October Salmon"[195], before concluding with the "January haze" of "Salmon Eggs"[196]. Gifford states that *River* expresses "the symbolic value of a river as a 'vein' in the life of the 'sea-spirit' that regulates our globe". The river can be described as a sign that in turn is, as Gifford notes, "a key indicator of the state of our relationship with our home" (2009: 57).

The most important presence in *River*, next to the actual river, is salmon. While the river signifies the interconnectedness of the global ecosystem, the salmon, framed by religious imagery, indicates that the ecosystem is sacred. This is most explicit in the last poem in the collection, "Salmon Eggs", which describes the return of the salmon to its birthplace where it will lays its eggs before it dies in terms that suggest a religious ceremony:

> I make out the sunk foundations
> Of dislocated crypts, a bedrock
> Time-hewn, time-riven altar. And this is the liturgy
> Of Earth's advent – harrowing, crowned – a travail

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[191] *CP*, 339-341.
[192] *CP*, 639-640.
[193] *CP*, 644-647.
[194] *CP*, 660-661.
[195] *CP*, 677-679.
[196] *CP*, 680-681.

> Of raptures and rendings. Perpetual mass
> Of the waters
> Wells from the cleft.

Gifford states that in these lines life and death are "delicately held in juxtaposition", forming an "elemental momentum", and furthermore that

> [t]his momentum is a crucial sign of the essential process of 'Earth's coming', our environment in a healthy state of regeneration. It is not surprising that this should be regarded as sacred, another statement of what our Christian culture mythologises in stories that might be evoked by the two words, 'harrowing, crowned'. The pain of the cost within the celebration of the 'crowning' of the cycle is perceived by the poet as experienced by the river itself when he writes that it is 'undergoing itself / In its wheel', just as 'the sun rolls' and 'the earth rolls'. This is all so hard to fully comprehend that the poet turns his attention aside and ends with the line, 'And mind condenses on old haws'.(58-59)

Before the speaker turns his attention aside, he has tried to submerge himself in the river, in order to see the river from the point of view of other species and move outside his own Umwelt:

> In bone damp cold
> I lean and watch the water, listening to water
> Till my eyes forget me
> And the piled flow supplants me, the mud blooms
> All this ponderous light of everlasting
> Collapsing away under its own ephemera
> Mud-curdling, bull-dozing, hem-twinkling
> Caesarean of heaven and earth, unfelt
> With exhumations and delirious advents

The last lines, when the speaker turns his attention aside, acknowledge, as noted by Gifford, that the speaker is unable to comprehend the river from a perspective different than his own, suggesting a failure to transcend the boundaries of his own Umwelt. Instead, the speaker frames the salmon in a cultural context by turning it into a sign that indicates a sacred cycle of life and death, also represented by the river:

> Sanctus Sanctus

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Swathes the blessed issue.

              Perpetual mass

Of the waters

The religious terminology in these lines can be interpreted in two ways: they can be read as suggesting the difficulty of moving outside a Christian framework for describing something, in this case the natural world, as sacred, as Hughes does in *Crow*. Such a reading would suggest that it is this difficulty of moving outside one's cultural tradition that in the poem's last line causes the mind to condense "on old haws". Alternatively, the religious terminology can be read as an attempt to replace Christianity with a spirituality based on a view of the natural world as sacred. By describing the river as "Sanctus Sanctus", this reading would suggest that Hughes attempts to change the meaning of that phrase from signifying a Christian tradition to instead signifying the flow of water, a natural instead of a transcendental phenomenon. According to this interpretation, a distinctively Christian phrase such as "Sanctus Sanctus" is used specifically with the intention of changing what it signifies.

The salmon indicates the river as an iconic sign, as its life journey is circular and cyclical like the water cycle, but also as an indexical sign, as it is physically part of the river. It is also a symbolical sign that indicates the various meanings that have been assigned to the salmon in different cultures. Some of these inform Hughes's use of the salmon in these poems as a shamanic device, as Ann Skea has noted. Skea states that while the river is described as sacred,

> [t]he Goddess is embodied, too, in the plants and many of the river creatures. But the river creatures, more than anything else, act as Shamanic guides for Hughes, drawing him through the the sliding "water mirror" meniscus of the river's surface into the deep, fluid Otherworld of imagination. Salmon, in particular, serve this function in *River*, and salmon were always regarded with special reverence by the Celts as being the source of wisdom and inspiration.[197]

According to Skea, "it is through his encounters with fish that [Hughes] enters the Otherworld".

In accordance with Kull's statement that cultural ecosemiotics "investigates to what extent nature is interpreted from a cultural perspective and to what extent various cultures interpret the same phenomena differently", the nature-text of "Salmon Eggs" suggests a cultural interpretation of the

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[197] Ann Skea, "Ted Hughes and the British Bardic Tradition", Symposium Paper, University of Cairo, December, 1994. Available at www.annskea.com (http://ann.skea.com/cairo.htm, accessed 2012-03-24).

river as sacred based on the river as a sign of something "[m]ore vital than death", as "death here seems a superficiality". This is signified by the circular journey of the salmon, which lay their eggs "for each other", as well as by the circularity of the water cycle and of the annual cycle reflected in the collection's structure, from January to January.

As noted by Sagar in *Ted Hughes and Nature*, the circular pattern of the water and salmon is also signified by images of the wheel, which appear in several of the *River* poems. According to Peirce's definition, the wheel is an iconic sign, meaning that it indicates the river based on a relationship of similarity – 'this is like that'. However, the river is then a symbolical sign, relying on a relationship of habitual association, referring to a cultural context in which nature indicates a divine presence.

In the nature-text of "Salmon Eggs", then, the river and salmon are iconic signs that represent cyclical processes that in turn indicate something "more vital" than life and death. The life cycle of the salmon and the journey of both salmon and water are portrayed as signs that indicate an earth goddess, or nature as sacred. The poet act as interpretant of these signs using shamanistic processes, as noted by Skea. The notion of river and salmon as they exist outside the poem are combined with cultural representations of them in the poem, which rely on religious and ceremonial imagery that draw on myths and traditions outside the poem, to form a nature-text in which the river and salmon are signs that indicate the sacredness of the cycle of life and death that they represent. By signifying the river as sacred while at the same time acknowledging its otherness, in the last lines of the poem, "Salmon Eggs" is also a nature-text that, in accordance with Maran's definition, "is used to describe nature writing as an appreciation of an alien semiotic sphere" (269).

Chapter 6:

'The place in me': Heaney, globalisation and sense of place

Introduction

In an anniversary article for "Heaney at 70", Dennis O'Driscoll states that

> [i]n his 70 years, Seamus Heaney has lived through many eras, growing up in rural Derry, where blackberry-picking was an annual rite, and entering the age of the BlackBerry smartphone. His first light flickered from candles and paraffin lamps; by 1995, the Nobel Foundation's spotlight had beamed in his direction. From the present age, when spring water is commercially bottled and marketed, he can look back on a childhood in which household water was carried from iron pumps and stone wells. Having been all ears for the crackling voices from a wet battery wireless in the 1940s, he has lived to record each of his poetry collections on CD.[198]

The developments that have taken place during Heaney's lifetime, what O'Driscoll refers to as "the Heaney era", include technological progress, globalisation and environmental changes. Increasingly global perspectives have come to complement and sometimes even replace local considerations. Heaney has also been witness to a developing peace process in Northern Ireland, which has also been a global process in so far as it has been negotiated by international agencies.

In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, Ursula Heise argues that globalisation is now

> the central term around which theories of current politics, society, and culture in the humanities and social sciences are organized. In literary and cultural studies, it is gradually replacing earlier key concepts in theories of the contemporary such as "postmodernism" and "postcolonialism." (2008: 4)

In her study, Heise examines how a sense of attachment to local surroundings translates, or does not translate, into a sense of global place attachment. The ability to translate the local into the global equivalent becomes especially relevant with regard to environmental issues, as reflected, as Heise notes, in popular environmental slogans such as "Think Global, Act Local". Against this background, Heise looks for cultural representations of what she calls "a globalist consciousness"

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[198] Dennis O'Driscoll, "Finding the right words in which to speak for us", *Irish Times*, April 2009). Avalaible on www.irishtimes.com (http://www.irishtimes.com/indepth/seamus-heaney/finding-the-right-words-in-which-to-speak-for-us.html, accessed 2012-04-02).

(4), for images in literature, film and photography that suggest a global sense of place attachment.

This chapter traces a development from a local to a global sense of place in Heaney's poetry, by comparing some early poems named after local places in the area where Heaney grew up with later poems that illustrate a comparatively different set of concepts and ideas relating to place. The chapter suggests that in his later poems, Heaney finds ways to represent "a global consciousness" as described by Heise by adopting a systems-oriented perspective for describing and imaging global connectedness.

The first section of the chapter outlines Heise's theory about place, globalisation and the environment. With reference to Heise's analysis, the development of images that represent the earth as a single entity that started in the 1960s is briefly described. Two important concepts used by Heise are introduced: deterritorialisation and (eco-)cosmopolitanism. The next section outlines Heaney's thoughts on place and place attachment as formulated in his 1977 lecture "The Sense of Place". The last three sections discuss representations of place in poems by Heaney from different points in his career. Starting with *Wintering Out*, "Anahorish"[199] and "Broagh" are discussed as examples of *re*territorialisation. A process of deterritorialisation is seen as under way in *Station Island* (1984), especially in the poem "Making Strange", and continued in "The Birthplace", also from *Station Island*. The poem "From the Land of the Unspoken", from *The Haw Lantern* (1987), introduces the idea of imagining a global, interconnected context by picturing the world as a system. The idea of being 'at home' in a natural, non-human system is finally discussed in relation to two recent poems by Heaney; the title poem from *Electric Light* (2001) and "A Herbal" from *Human Chain* (2010).

The analysis in this chapter thus takes as its point of departure Heise's analysis of images that work as "metaphor[s] for a cultural moment in which an entire planet becomes graspable as one's own local backyard", especially as relevant in relation to environmental issues. Perhaps, as suggested by O'Driscoll, if Heaney "played something of a Yeatsian role in a time of Irish violence, his Wordsworthian gifts are needed in an age when the natural world is being catastrophically imperilled".

"Sense of place and sense of planet": from "The Blue Marble" to planetary boundaries
Heise states that "a globalist consciousness has forcefully been taking shape ever since space flight

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[199] *Wintering Out*, 16.

enabled the first views of Planet Earth from outer space in the 1960s" (4). The idea of the earth as a single unit, with unique and limited resources, was effectively illustrated by photographs such as "Earthrise" (1968) and "The Blue Marble" (1972):

"The Blue Marble"

Images like these, according to Heise, suggested strongly the idea "of a unified and balanced world" (23), and affected thinkers from a variety of academic fields, "as diverse as media theorist Marshall McLuhan and atmospheric scientist James Lovelock" (22).

Environmentalism developed as a new social movement in response to what was perceived at the time to be, as described by Heise, "looming global disaster from the dual threat of nuclear annihilation and environmental collapse" (20). Images of the planet as seen from space soon became iconic images for various environmental movements, movements described by Heise as "initially fueled by powerful visions of the global, from the Gaia hypothesis to Spaceship Earth and popular slogans such as "Think globally, act locally"" (20). Paradoxically then, Heise notes, images of the "Blue Planet" resulted in "an antitechnological rhetoric relying on an image produced by advanced technology" (23).

The idea of the earth as a single, vulnerable unit informed among other things, as Heise notes, James Lovelock's Gaia theory, first proposed in a number of articles in the 1970s and popularised in *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* from 1979[200]. Lovelock argued that the entire planet can be regarded as a single, self-regulating organism that strives to uphold optimal conditions for life on

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[200] James E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

earth. Heise notes that "the popular conception of the Gaia hypothesis became a shorthand for holistic approaches to the natural environment that emphasized balances, interdependencies, and the need for preservation rather than scientific analysis and technological exploitation" (24). In 1983, Lovelock together with Andrew Watson presented a computer model called "Daisyworld" that illustrates a deliberately oversimplified systems model showing the biosphere as a self-regulating mechanism[201]. Based on the belief that the planet itself, undisturbed by humans, will maintain optimal conditions for human and other forms of life, Lovelock argued for environmental policies based on conservation and preservation.

Ideas and theories that in different ways analyse and describe the earth as a complex integrated system has continued to prevail in scientific as well as popular imaginations in the later 20th and early 21st century. It is, for instance, the basic principle of the field of ecology[202], and in a wider sense of general systems theory, described as scientific field of inquiry in 1968[203].

Today, a system-oriented approach designed to address specifically environmental issues is researched and promoted by, among others, the Stockholm Resilience Centre. This research group uses a transdisciplinary approach for understanding local and global socio-ecological systems. In an article published in *Nature* in 2009, researchers from the Resilience centre proposed nine different "planetary boundaries" used to identify "a safe operating space for humanity"[204]. The planetary boundaries and the safe operating space is illustrated in this figure:

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[201] Andrew Watson and James E. Lovelock, "Biological homeostasis of the global environment: the parable of Daisyworld", *Tellus B*, 35:4 (1983), 286-289.

[202] Notably, the wikipedia page for "ecology" is illustrated by the photograph "The Blue Marble" (2012-04-15).

[203] By Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy in his book *General System theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, published initially in 1968.

[204] Johan Rockström et. al., "A safe operating space for humanity", *Nature*, 461 (2009), 472-475.

"Planetary Boundaries"
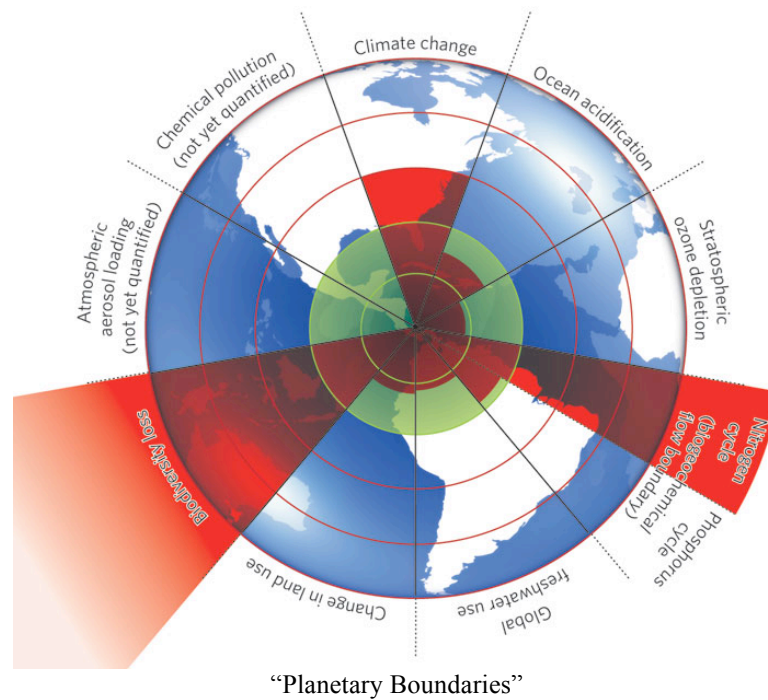
The green area in the centre tentatively marks humanity's "safe operating space". The intention is that the nine different boundaries specify how much humans can perturb the earth system before risking that the entire planet reaches a so called tipping point, beyond which conditions may change dramatically. This image was recently referred to as an "iconic figure"[205] by Helmuth Trischler, director of research at the Deutsches Museum and co-director of the Rachel Carson institute in Münich. It has been modified and reused in a number of different contexts, among others by the popular science magazine *New Scientist*:

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[205] Part of the panel on "*Museums in the Anthropocene: Climate Change and Social History*" at the Science and Technology Studies (STS) conference at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, 2012-05-04.
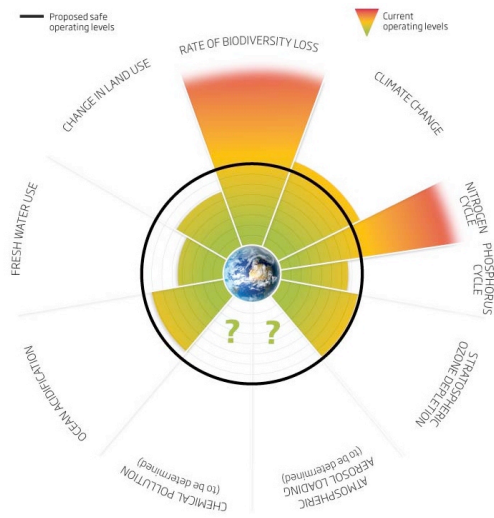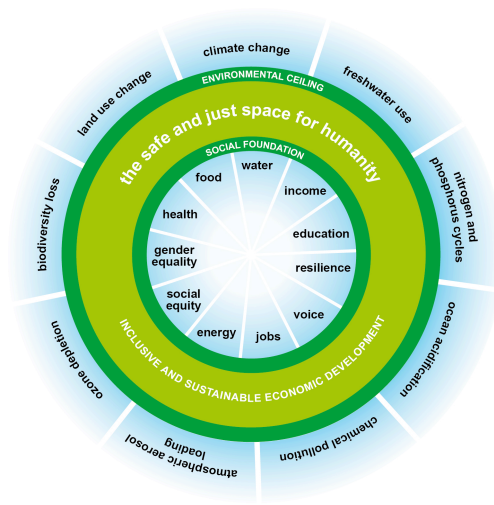
by the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP):
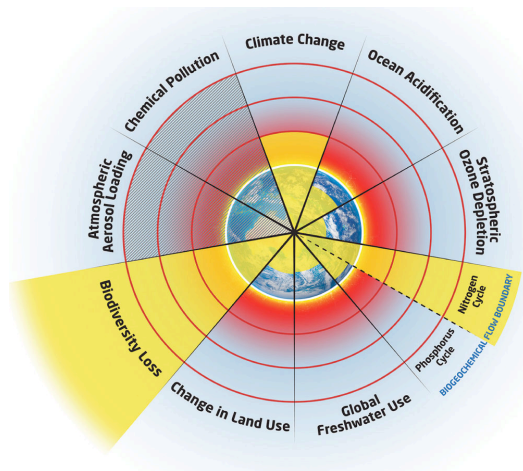
and by Oxfam International:

Different from Lovelock, who argued for an approach to environmental problems based on preservation and conservation, motivated by the belief that the earth itself strives to maintain optimal conditions for life and that biodiversity in itself makes ecosystems more 'robust', researchers at the Resilience centre argue for a proactive approach, based on managing and manipulating the earth's systems so that the values for each subsystem stays within its designated boundary. This could include large-scale interventions, such as geoengineering projects to regulate the climate.

A comparison between this figure created by the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the photograph of the earth as seen from space can be used to illustrate the advances that have been made in imagining and describing the earth as a single system in the last fifty years, or during what O'Driscoll calls "the Heaney era".

According to Heise, since the 1960s environmentalist discourses have "evolved in a field of tension between the embrace of and the resistance to global connectedness, and between the commitment to a planetary vision and the utopian reinvestment in the local" (21). The increasing number and detail of scientific representations of a global environment creates, Heise argues, a need for corresponding cultural representations, of new ways of imagining place in a global sense:

> In this multidisciplinary debate, the question of what cultural and political role attachments to different kinds of space might play, from the local and regional level all the way to the national and global, has assumed central importance. Literary and cultural critics as well as anthropologists, sociologists, historians, philosophers and political scientists have investigated the imaginative strategies and devices that allow individuals and communities to form attachments to these different types of spaces and to maintain them over time as an integral

part of their identities, and have explored what overarching cultural and ideological purposes such commitments have been made to serve in different communities. (4-5)

Many environmental movements focus on local issues, resisting different forms of globalisation. While local campaigns remain important, increasing attention need also to focus on the global in a positive sense. Heise argues that "[r]ather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place, environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world" (21).

As part of this development, Heise mentions that in the past decades alternatives to nation-based concepts of identity have appeared, contributing to "an abundance of cultural studies that were skeptical vis-à-vis local rootedness and instead validated individual and collective forms of identity that define themselves in relation to a multiplicity of places and place experiences" (5). According to Heise, the idea of deterritorialisation, defined as a "weakening of the ties between culture and place" (21), describes part of this process:

> ecologically oriented thinking has yet to come to terms with one of the central insights of current theories of globalization: namely, that the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place, in a process that many theorists have referred to as "deterritorialization." Undoubtedly, deterritorialization, especially when it is imposed from outside, is sometimes accompanied by experiences of loss, deprivation, or disenfranchisement that environmentalists have rightfully resisted and should continue to oppose. Yet deterritorialization also implies possibilities for new cultural encounters and a broadening of horizons that environmentalists as well as other politically progressive movements have welcomed, sometimes without fully acknowledging the entanglements of such cultural unfolding with globalization processes that they otherwise reject. The challenge that deterritorialization poses for the environmental imagination, therefore, is to envision how ecologically based advocacy on behalf of the nonhuman world as well as on behalf of greater socioenvironmental justice might be formulated in terms that are premised no longer primarily on ties to local places but on ties to territories and systems that are understood to encompass the planet as a whole. (10)

Together with theories of cosmopolitanism and globalisation, deterritorialisation can according to Heise "provide a useful basis for thinking about environmental allegiances that reach beyond the local and the national" (21).

The concept of cosmopolitanism is qualified by Heise, for her purposes, as a kind of "eco-cosmopolitanism", referring to an "environmental world citizenship, building on recuperations of

the cosmopolitan project in other areas of cultural theory" (10). In the late 1990s, theorists from different fields began to use the term cosmopolitanism in order to express what Heise refers to as "a way of imagining forms of belonging beyond the local and the national" (6). Cosmopolitanism in this sense can be seen as describing the positive outcome of deterritorialisation; a sense of global place attachment replacing a weakened local equivalent. The various theorists that Heise refers to attempted to give cosmopolitanism a new significance, different from its earlier associations with, in Heise's words, "social privilege and leisure travel" (6):

> [w]hile there are considerable differences in the way these theorists rethink cosmopolitanism, they share with earlier theorists of hybridity and diaspora the assumption that there is nothing natural or self-evident about attachments to the nation, which are on the contrary established, legitimized, and maintained by complex cultural practices and institutions. But rather than seeking the grounds of resistance to nationalisms nation-based identities in local communities or groups whose mobility places them at the borders of national identity, these theorists strive to model forms of cultural imagination and understanding that reach beyond the nation and around the globe. (6)

After a wave of "countercritiques" that argued for the importance of local and national belonging as foundations for identity and resistance in a globalised world, the debate has according to Heise reached "a conceptual impasse: while some theorists criticize nationally based forms of identity and hold out cosmopolitan identifications as a plausible and politically preferable alternative, other scholars emphasize the importance of holding on to national and local modes of belonging as a way of resisting the imperialism of some forms of globalization" (7). The result is a "theoretical stalemate" between local and national identities as essentialist and oppressive on the one hand, and as forms of resistance to global domination on the other. Heise quotes Arif Dirlik who has commented on this stalemate that "the defense and the repudiation of place both carry considerable theoretical plausibility and for that same reason seem in their opposition to be confined within a theoretical world of their own out of which there is no exit that is to be revealed by theory"[206]. Heise also notes Dirlik's consequent conclusion that in order to move forward "the entire discussion should be shifted to the level of specific case studies" (8).

This chapter attempts such a case study of Heaney. For, as Heise notes: "while the advocacy of local, national, or global forms of identity, given the impasse these discussions have reached, may

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[206] Arif Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination". Quote from Heise, 2008: 7.

no longer make much sense at a very general and abstract level, it nevertheless remains an important issue in particular cultural and historical contexts" (8).

"The Sense of Place"

Heaney discusses place and place attachment in some detail in a lecture from 1977 entitled "The Sense of Place", included in *Preoccupations*. Heaney begins the lecture with the following statement:

> I think there are two ways in which place is known and cherished, two ways which may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious.[207]

The primary topic of the lecture is the meaning of place in the specific context of Ireland and Northern Ireland, but some observations are applicable to a more general discussion of place and place attachment. Heaney notes the difference between places that have a widespread cultural meaning and more anonymous places where a typical visitor has no preconceptions that provide the place with a specific meaning or framework. In some cases, the lack of cultural meaning is not due to an absence of tradition, but rather to the fact that older traditions and cultures are no longer part of the common or popular imagination:

> When we go as tourists to Donegal or Connemara or Kerry we go with at best an aesthetic eye, comforting ourselves with the picturesqueness of it all or rejoicing in the fact that it is unspoiled. We will have little felt knowledge of the place, little enough of a sense of wonder or a sense of tradition. Tory Island, Knocknarea, Slieve Patrick, all of them deeply steeped in associations from the older culture, will not stir us beyond a visual pleasure unless that culture means something to us, unless the features of the landscape are a mode of communion with a something other than themselves, a something to which we ourselves still feel we might belong. (132)

Heaney compares these kinds of anonymous places with other places that "now live in the imagination", that "stir us to responses other than the merely visual". When confronted with such places, Heaney states, "our imaginations assent to the stimulus of the names, our sense of the place is enhanced, our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country

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[207] Seamus Heaney, "The Sense of Place", *Preoccupations*, 131.

of the mind, whether that country of the mind takes its tone unconsciously from a shared oral inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both, it is this marriage that constitutes the sense of place in its richest possible manifestation" (132).

As an example, Heaney takes the poem "Inniskeen Road, July Evening" by Patrick Kavanagh, and states that the dialectical expressions used in the poem inscribe it within the tradition and culture of this particular place. Rather than describing an outsider's view of the place, Heaney states that the use of dialect signal that Kavanagh "meets his people at eye-level, he hears them shouting through the hedge and not through the chinks in a loft floor, the way Synge heard his literary speech in Co. Wicklow" (138).

However, Heaney also states that compared to a poet like John Montague, for instance, Kavanagh is not really a place-based poet:

> Kavanagh's sense of his place involves detachment, Montague's attachment. When Montague asks who he is, he is forced to seek a connection with a history and a heritage; before he affirms a personal identity, he posits a national identity, and his region and his community provide a lifeline to it. Whereas Kavanagh flees the abstractions of nationalism, political or cultural. To find himself, he detaches rather than attaches himself to the communal. *I* rather than *we* is his preferred first person. (143-144)

The difference could be described as a difference between local and national, further extrapolated as a difference between local and global, in the sense that the local is also individual, and the individual representative of the universal, whereas the national arguably represents a constructed or artificial sense of identity. Heaney quotes Kavanagh, who states that "[p]arochialism is universal; it deals with the fundamentals"[208]. Heaney's description of Kavanagh's detachment from place compared to Montague's attachment is based on this difference between local and national: "Kavanagh's place names are there to stake out a personal landscape, they declare one man's experience, they are denuded of tribal or etymological implications" (140), while Montague's place names "are rather sounding lines, rods to plumb the depths of a shared and diminished culture […] redolent not just of his personal life but of the history of his people, disinherited and dispossessed" (141).

Heaney ends "The Sense of Place" by looking forward and stating that in modern, mobile times "[w]e are no longer innocent, we are no longer just parishioners of the local". However, he adds that

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[208] Patrick Kavanagh. Quote from Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 139.

despite that loss of innocence, he remains convinced that "those primary laws of our nature are still operative" and "that it is to […] the stable element, the land itself, that we must look for continuity" (148-149).

"Anahorish" and "Broagh"

In *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind* (2002) Eugene O'Brien argues that Heaney moves from a position close to Montague's towards a position closer to Kavanagh's: from place attachment to detachment from place, from communal and regional to individual and universal. "Anahorish" and "Broagh", two poems from *Wintering Out*, demonstrate Heaney's early sense of place attachment.

"Anahorish" is the name of Heaney's primary school. The poem with this title describes the speaker's early experiences of this place:

> My 'place of clear water',
> the first hill in the world
> where springs washed into
> the shiny grass
>
> and darkened cobbles
> in the bed of the lane.
> *Anahorish*, soft gradient
> of consonant, vowel-meadow,
>
> after-image of lamps
> swung through the yards
> on winter evenings.
> With pails and barrows
>
> those mound-dwellers
> go waist-deep in mist
> to break the light ice
> at wells and dunghills.

The poem focuses on the actual name, "Anahorish". Greg Garrard notes that in this poem "naming, thoughtfully carried out, shows that the poet is at 'home'" (1999: 186), and furthermore that

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Heaney's poetry in a more general sense exhibits "a naming of places which is at once (and perhaps paradoxically) restorative and commemorative" (187). Garrard describes the phrase "*Anahorish, soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow*" as a "poetic topology" (188) that, a few lines further on, turns into "mythotopology":

> Heaney moves suddenly from a near-contemporary 'after-image of lamps' to the pre-historic 'mound-dwellers' in a single stanza break, registering the archaic watery resonances in *Anahorish*. We might call this something like 'mythotopology' because of the sense of unbroken continuity developed between the poet and the ancient keepers of the 'first hill in the world'. (188)

The idea of a "mythotopology" as described here by Garrard relates to the meaning of place discussed by Heaney above as derived from older, often forgotten, cultures and traditions. It is between ancient history in this sense and the poet that an "unbroken continuity", as Garrard puts it, is established in "Anahorish".

The place described in "Anahorish" is, however, an idealised place. Garrard notes that the "'ecolectal' voice" in the poem "is possible in this unproblematic way only because all relevant historical differences – between Catholic and Protestant, Gaelic and Hiberno-English, present-day and Bronze Age inhabitants – have been suppressed" (189). This idealisation of history undermines the attachment between poet and place in the poem, which is then based on an imaginary reconstruction of an idealised past. The idealisation in "Anahorish" is eventually qualified in a later poem in *District and Circle* (2006) entitled "Anahorish 1944"[209]. This poem depicts the same place in different terms, describing the arrivals of American soldiers to Anahorish:

> 'We were killing pigs when the Americans arrived.
> A Tuesday morning, sunlight and gutter blood
> Outside the slaughterhouse. From the main road
> They would have heard the squealing,
> Then heard it stop and had a view of us
> In our gloves and aprons coming down the hill.
> Two lines of them, guns on their shoulders, marching.
> Armoured cars and tanks and open jeeps.
> Sunburnt hands and arms. Unknown, unnamed,
> Hosting for Normandy.

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[209] *District and Circle*, 7.

> Not that we knew then
> Where they were headed, standing there like
> youngsters
> As they tossed us gum and tubes of coloured sweets.'

The quotation marks around the entire poem creates a distance between poem and poet, perhaps suggesting that a story is being told rather than a memory recollected.

"Broagh"also describes a place from Heaney's childhood. As Garrard notes, in this poem the name Broagh is not only assigned to the place, but is described as part of the physical environment, almost as if it was pronounced by the landscape itself:

> The garden mould
> bruised easily, the shower
> gathering in your heelmark
> was the black *O*
>
> in *Broagh*

The link that these lines establish between the physical place and its name suggests a sense of continuity between the two different experiences of place that Heaney refers to at the beginning of "The Sense of Place", between a "lived, illiterate and unconscious" experience on the one hand, and a "learned, literate and conscious" experience on the other. The link between language and physical environment is further suggested by the following lines:

> *Broagh*,
> its low tattoo
> among the windy boortrees
> and rhubarb-blades
>
> ended almost
> suddenly, like that last
> gh the strangers found
> difficult to manage.

The last two stanzas suggests an 'us' and a 'them', comparing a native's experience of the place

compared to an outsider's. This difference, according to Garrard, "introduces an element of discord into the tidy picture created by the mythotopology" (189). The idea of "mythotopology" reflects the relationship between nature and culture tied to a particular place, captured and concentrated in this poem in the sound and pronunciation of the word 'Broagh'.

"Broagh", like "Anahorish", confirms a relationship between speaker and place. As noted by O'Brien, both poems signify "a politicisation of the land"[210]. O'Brien quotes David Lloyd in this context, who describes the establishment of a relationship between poet and place as evident of a "foreclosed surety of the subject's relation to place, mediated as it is by a language which seeks to naturalize its appropriative function"[211].

Based on their affirmation of the relationship between poet and place "Anahorish" and "Broagh" can be described as poems of re- (in response to colonisation) rather than deterritorialisation as outlined by Heise. Heaney's later collections suggest a move away from this kind of affirmation of place towards a questioning of the idea of rootedness and the relationship between place and identity. O'Brien argues that Heaney moves away from speaking from a tribal and communal point of view (like Montague does, according to Heaney) towards developing an identity politics that is self-centred rather than communal (more like Kavanagh's). This move can be interpreted as a move towards an increasingly flexible sense of place and belonging, in line with Heise's description of an (eco-)cosmopolitan sense of identity in relation to place. The first step suggesting this move is described as deterritorialisation, and is illustrated by two poems from *Station Island*, "Making Strange" and "The Birthplace".

"Making Strange" and "The Birthplace"

Referring to *North*, Richard Kirkland states that "[b]eyond representation, the poetry becomes an embodiment of the real angst of the community and its place, while Heaney is absolutely assimilated into its place"[212] (260). After *North*, however, the poems begin to open up towards the outside world, to new perspectives and influences. As suggested above, part of this process entails a focus on the individual as representative of the universal rather than on the communal, regional or national.

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[210] Eugene O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney and the Place of Writing* (*PW*), Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002, 51.
[211] David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993, 25.
   Quote from O'Brien, *PW*, 52.
[212] Richard Kirkland, "Paradigms of Possibility", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen, London: Macmillan Press, 1997, 260.

"Making Strange"[213] literally shows an outsider's perspective on Northern Ireland. According to Kirkland, this poem "subtends its nominal consideration of identity as expressed in relation to geography under a desire to achieve a satisfactory form of coherent closure within its own formal limits" (262). Different from "Anahorish" and "Broagh", "Making Strange" describes an area from the poet's childhood not though the poet's own memories, but through the eyes of a stranger. The poem juxtaposes the outsider's view of this place with the perspective of one of the locals, with the poet himself caught in the midst:

> I stood between them,
> the one with his travelled intelligence
> and tawny containment,
> his speech like the twang of a bowstring,
>
> and another, unshorn and bewildered
> in the tubs of his wellingtons,
> smiling at me for help,
> faced with this stranger I'd brought him.

Kirkland notes that "Michael Parker has helpfully noted that this poem has its genesis in a guided tour of South Derry undertaken by Heaney for the benefit of the Jamaican poet Louis Simpson" (263). Heaney describes the origin of the poem in an interview:

> It started from a chance meeting between my father, myself and Louis. He was being driven by me from Belfast to a poetry reading in the University of Ulster at Coleraine, so I took a detour through my part of the country and stopped at the pub next to our old Mossbawn house. Next thing, my father appears on the scene, and is being included as more or less part of the tour. So there I was between the pair of them, at home and not at home, between the Toome Road and the open road. (O'Driscoll, 2008: 113)

The poem continues by introducing a third voice onto the scene:

> Then a cunning middle voice
> came out of the field across the road
> saying, 'Be adept and be dialect,

[213] Seamus Heaney, *Station Island*, London: Faber and Faber, 1984, 32-33.

tell of this wind coming past the zinc hut,

call me sweetbriar after the rain
or snowberries cooled in the fog.
But love the cut of this travelled one
and call me also the cornfield of Boaz.

Go beyond what is reliable
in all that keeps pleading and pleading,
these eyes and puddles and stones,
and recollect how bold you were

when I visited you first
with departures you cannot go back on.'

Paul Keen suggests that this third voice is the voice of poetry, suggesting that the solution to the conflicting views of the visitor and Heaney's father is not a separation of notions but rather a "dialectical engagement – poetry as a place where the conversations between these different voices can be heard"[214].

It could also be interpreted as the voice of place. In this sense, it ties in with references to dialect in other poems by Heaney, as the voice of place is also dialect. According to this reading, the physical landscape is given a voice of its own, contrasting the perspectives of the same place heard through the voices of Heaney's father and of the stranger. Just like the voice of poetry could be a place for "dialectical engagement" as suggested by Keen, so could place provide a frame of reference for conversations between different voices.

The combination of "adept" and "dialect" is clarified by the following encouragement of the strange voice to "love the cut of this travelled one" while at the same time "call me also the cornfield of Boaz". The cornfield of Boaz is a reference to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale", where "Ruth […] sick for home / […] stood in tears amid the alien corn" (ll. 66-7)[215]. The juxtaposition is between the strange and the familiar, of staying close to home and moving away, suggesting a conflict of interest between local and global that the speaker attempts to reconcile. In Keats's poem

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[214] Paul Keen, ""Making Strange": Conversations with the Irish M/Other", *Irish University Review*, 26.1 (1996), 77.
[215] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale", *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978, 369-372.

the speaker also hears a voice, which he acknowledges was also "heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown" (ll. 63-4), suggesting that the "cunning middle voice" in Heaney's poem is not unique, but a universal principle. The poem seems to suggest that the need for appropriate forms that can accommodate both sides of the juxtaposition can be achieved either through the means of poetry, as Keen suggests, or through an appropriate notion of place that manages to be at the same time local and global.

The poem concludes with the poet proceeding to show the stranger the area, as originally planned and according to the advice of the "cunning middle voice":

> I found myself driving the stranger
>
> through my own country, adept
> at dialect, reciting my pride
> in all that I knew, that began to make strange
> at that same recitation.

The defamiliarisation process described by the poem, which is the effect of the poet seeing the area through the eyes of the outsider's, can also be described as a deterritorialisation process, as it dissolves the speaker's existing view of this place. The poem indicates how the introduction of the outside world (in the form of the visitor) into the speaker's home territory makes the familiar landscape appear strange, weakening the kind of place attachment that was affirmed in poems such as "Anahorish" and "Broagh". Whereas in "Broagh" at the end of the poem outsiders' inability to correctly pronounce the name of the place was used to identify an 'us' versus a 'them', in "Making Strange" the outsider's point of view is accommodated and allowed to make the familiar place take on an at least partly new meaning through this new, cosmopolitan perspective. In this way, "Making Strange" exemplifies Heise's definition of deterritorialisation as describing "how experiences of place change under the influence of modernization and globalization processes" (51).

Deterritorialisation is part of an alternative to what Heise refers to as a "primary investment in the local" (10). According to Heise, while "affirmations of local ties can play an important role in environmentalist struggles", environmentalists also need "to come to terms with one of the central insights of current theories of globalization: namely, that the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place" (10). "The

Birthplace"[216], also from *Station Island*, suggests a deterritorialisation process from a different perspective than "Making Strange". The poem is about Thomas Hardy. Its third and final part begins by asking:

> Everywhere being nowhere,
> who can prove
> one place more than another?

The subsequent lines further denounce a local sense of place, as well as feelings of being at home and at rest. Instead the poem describes a sense of restlessness, of being "afloat among galaxies":

> We come back emptied,
> to nourish and resist
> the words of coming to rest:
>
> *birthplace, roofbeam, whitewash,*
> *flagstone, hearth,*
> like unstacked iron weights
>
> afloat among galaxies.

The "unstacked iron weights" suggest feelings of relief rather than distress, perhaps to be read in relation to Heaney's personal experience of being weighed down by place-related issues and perceived responsibilities as a Northern Irish poet. The description of being "afloat among galaxies" further describe feelings of weightlessness.

The feelings of weightlessness are undermined by a recognition of a nevertheless persisting gravitation towards a particular place in the remaining lines of the poem. In these lines, as in "Broagh", the written or spoken words merge with the speaker's immediate, physical surroundings:

> Still, it was thirty years ago
> I read until first light
>
> for the first time, to finish

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[216] *Station Island*, 34-35.

The Return of the Native?
The corncrake in the aftergrass

verified himself, and I heard
roosters and dogs, the very same
as if he had written them.

Despite these final lines, O'Brien describes "The Birthplace" as a "liberating comment on place, that concept which was so central to the earlier books, where it was shot through with connotations of racial and communal identity and territory"[217]. Lines like those in the beginning of this poem's third part, stating

Everywhere being nowhere,
who can prove
one place more than another?

are according to O'Brien "emblematic of the process at work in this section of Heaney's work, as he takes cultural, linguistic and historical givens, and attempts to transcend them through his writing" (*CIM*, 62). This idea is developed further in Heaney's next collection, *The Haw Lantern*.

"From the Land of Unspoken"
Referring to a line from *The Haw Lantern* that states "I could feel at home inside that metal core slumbering at the heart of systems", George Morgan asks Heaney in an interview from 1998 what the notion of "home" or being "at home" means to him. Heaney replies:

> It's not something I've thought through. I try to dive down, as far as possible, away from the analyses and the self-consciousness encouraged by these questions. I'm not quite sure what "home" means other than that deep sense of planetary, experiential creaturely, animal "at-homeness" which I'm trying to express in the metaphor of "slumbering at the heart of systems." When I hear the word "home," I hear the sound the earth might make humming on its axis. Something Wordsworthian. You know that poem "A slumber did my spirit seal" where Wordsworth says that Lucy is "roll'd round in earth's diurnal course / With rocks and stones and fields." "At home" means something like that to me.[218]

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[217] Eugene O'Brien, *Seamus Heaney: Creating Irelands of the Mind* (*CIM*), Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002, 61-62.
[218] George Morgan, "Interview with Seamus Heaney", *Cycnos*, 15.2 (1998). Available at revel.unice.fr/cycnos/

Heaney explains this feeling of "at-homeness" further as "[s]omething centred and deeply harmonious", and adds:

> I'd have to be a bit Heideggerian here, and coin a term like "in-dwelling." My favourite meditation on it is in a poem called "The Birthplace" which is about Thomas Hardy's birthplace. But I'd want to insist that when I use the word "home," I'm not talking of "hominess" in the American sense. I credit all that nostalgic part of my being but I also want to put it to the test, to remind it that we are made up of homelessness as well as centredness.

The description of being at home "at the very hub of systems" is from the first stanza of a poem by Heaney entitled "From the Land of the Unspoken"[219], from *The Haw Lantern*:

> I have heard of a bar of platinum
> kept by a logical and talkative nation
> as their standard of measurement,
> the throne room and the burial chamber
> of every calculation and prediction.
> I could feel at home inside that metal core
> slumbering at the very hub of systems.

The "bar of platinum" refers the international prototype metre, kept by the International Bureau of Weights and Measurements in Sèvres, France. This prototype was created in 1889 and kept as a standard unit for the metric system until 1960 (when a new standard was created using wavelength measurements). The platinum prototype represents something standardised and universal, with no room for local particularities or dialects. The reference of being at home in this measurements, which is exactly the same everywhere, points to the notion of one place being like all others as suggested earlier in "The Birthplace": in "From the Land of the Unspoken", the speaker experiences a feeling of being primarily at home not in a local context, or in any locality at all, but rather in the very fact that all places belong to the same system, and are defined by the same rules. In this sense, the speaker is at home in the world or planet as a whole, as a place defined by those rules. This is what Heaney refers to in the interview when he relates the notion of being at home "at the heart of

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(http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1594, accessed 2012-04-09).
[219] Seamus Heaney, *The Haw Lantern*, London: Faber and Faber, 1987, 18-19.

systems"[220] to a sense of planetary at-home-ness. In the interview, Heaney mentions the "heart of systems" rather than as earlier, in the poem, the "hub of systems". Perhaps this slip emphasises a felt connection between a personal sense of belonging (heart) and a scientific, objective understanding of the planet (hub).

The "standard of measurement" refers to a way of describing the world that is based on laws of nature rather than on human language, which also explains the title of the poem, "From the Land of the Unspoken", referring to a land governed by laws that are not made by humans. The poem's second stanza describes humanity's "exile" from this world of the 'unspoken':

> We are a dispersed people whose history
> is a sensation of opaque fidelity.
> When or why our exile began
> among the speech-ridden, we cannot tell
> but solidarity comes flooding up in us
> when we hear their legends of infants discovered
> floating in coracles towards destiny
> or of kings' biers heaved and borne away
> on the river's shoulders or out into the sea roads.

The idea of being primarily at home in a system defined by non-human laws and languages replaces the notion of being at home primarily in a particular place or community. The feeling of being "at home inside that metal core / slumbering at the very hub of systems" suggests a sense of planetary belonging based on the fact that "that metal core" represents a fundamental natural principle that is present everywhere and that makes each place similar to all other places, as described in "The Birthplace". The system that the platinum bar indicates or symbolises relates to the systems governing the planet described by the figure illustrating the planetary boundaries above. Both that figure and "From the Land of the Unspoken" suggest a systems-oriented perspective for understanding the interconnectedness of all different parts of and places on the planet.

Being at home in this non-human system also provides a sense of connectedness with non-human nature. Perhaps this is what is described in the last two stanzas of the poem as a recognition of "our own":

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[220] Heaney seems to misquote his own poem in the interview, using the phrase "heart of systems" instead of "hub of systems", as in the poem.

When we recognize our own, we fall in step
but do not altogether come up level.
My deepest contact was underground
strap-hanging back to back on a rush-hour train
and in a museum once, I inhaled
vernal assent from a neck and shoulder
pretending to be absorbed in a display
of absolutely silent quernstones.

Our unspoken assumptions have the force
of revelation. How else could we know
that whoever is the first of us to seek
assent and votes in a rich democracy
will be the last of us and have killed our language?
Meanwhile, if we miss the sight of a fish
we heard jumping and then see its ripples,
that means one more of us is dying somewhere.

According to O'Brien, the ambiguity of place and place attachment suggested by this poem and others from the same period counteracts "those appetites of gravity" (*CIM*, 105) that were expressed in earlier collections, especially in *North*. A deterritorialisation process is seen in "From the Land of the Unspoken" also by Stan Smith, who describes the poem as a "history of 'a dispersed people'"[221].

"Electric Light" and "A Herbal"

A different system is described in "Electric Light", from the volume with the same name.The arrival of electric light enables new perspectives on the familiar, suggesting a de-familiarisation process similar to that described in "Making Strange". O'Brien states with regard to this volume that

> [e]lectric light allows us to see in the dark, to see where we could not see before, to see things anew. *Electric Light* symbolises such a new perspective, as personal, cultural and political events are seen through the alembic of other cultures, literatures and languages in such a way as to see them anew. (*CIM*, 169)

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[221] Stan Smith, "The Distance Between: Seamus Heaney", *Seamus Heaney*, ed. Michael Allen, London: Macmillan Press, 1997, 239.

O'Brien also notes that some of the images in "Electric Light" are suggested in Heaney's Nobel lecture from 1995, especially the image of the radio. According to O'Brien, "[i]ronically, the actual image from "Electric Light" that is most significant is the radio dial, which allows Heaney to experience the different languages and cultures of the world through the radio "stations of the world"" (*CIM*, 169). In his Nobel lecture, Heaney describes how the radio brought the outside world into the rural kitchen of his childhood:

> When a wind stirred in the beeches, it also stirred an aerial wire attached to the topmost branch of the chestnut tree. Down it swept, in through a hole bored in the corner of the kitchen window, right on into the innards of our wireless set where a little pandemonium of burbles and squeaks would suddenly give way to the voice of a BBC news reader speaking out of the unexpected like a *deus ex machina*.[222]

As Heaney grows older, his listening becomes "more deliberate":

> Now that the other children were older and there was so much going on in the kitchen, I had to get close to the actual radio set in order to concentrate my hearing, and in that intent proximity to the dial I grew familiar with the names of foreign stations, with Leipzig and Oslo and Stuttgart and Warsaw and, of course, with Stockholm.

This introduction of the foreign into the familiar, especially in the form of foreign languages, turned Heaney's imagination away from his local surroundings and outwards to the unknown:

> I also got used to hearing short bursts of foreign languages as the dial hand swept round from BBC to Radio Eireann, from the intonations of London to those of Dublin, and even though I did not understand what was being said in those first encounters with the gutturals and sibilants of European speech, I had already begun a journey into the wideness of the world beyond.

Heaney relates this outer change to a corresponding inner change, from being "emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world" to gradually gaining a sense of the outside world, through language in general and through poetry especially. This change motivates the title of the Nobel lecture, "Crediting Poetry". Poets like Kavanagh, Bishop and Lowell, gave Heaney what he describes as "reasons for believing in poetry's ability - and responsibility - to say what happens, to

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[222] Seamus Heaney, "Crediting Poetry", nobelprize.org, 5 August 2011 (http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/heaney-lecture.html).

"pity the planet," to be "not concerned with Poetry."

"Electric Light"[223] describes the arrival of electric light in the area where Heaney grew up, and contrasts images of the new invention with images of tradition, of things that remain the same "[y]ear in, year out":

> In the first house where I saw electric light,
> She sat with her fur-lined felt slippers unzipped,
>
> Year in, year out, in the same chair, and whispered
> In a voice that at its loudest did nothing else
> But whisper. We were both desperate
>
> The night I was left to stay, when I wept and wept
> Under the clothes, under the waste of light
> Left turned on in the bedroom. 'What ails you, child,
>
> What ails you, for God's sake?' Urgent, sibilant
> *Ails*, far off and old.

A few lines further on, the poet is less helpless as he operates the radio dial: he recalls how the older people "watched me / As I roamed at will the stations of the world". The poem describes how the distant and global are introduced into the local and familiar:

> If I stood on the bow-backed chair, I could reach
> The light switch. They let me and they watched me.
> A touch of the little pip would work the magic.
>
> A turn of their wireless knob and light came on
> In the dial. They let me and they watched me
> As I roamed at will the stations of the world.

According to O'Brien, the image of the radio in "Electric Light" suggests

> an Irishness that is centrifugal as opposed to centripetal in orientation. Here we see an embracing of European

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[223] Seamus Heaney, *Electric Light*, London: Faber and Faber, 2001, 80-81.

and world culture, an unselfconscious placement of Irish experience in the context of such a culture, and a willingness to posit connections between the two. Through electricity, the light of different cultures and languages, the "stations of the world", came into the home and mind of Seamus Heaney, and this is celebrated in the cosmopolitan, sophisticated and nuanced sense of Irishness, as well as in the complexity of identity that is enunciated throughout his writing. (*CIM*, 170)

O'Brien describes here a process of deterritorialisation and cosmopolitanism as defined by Heise, of culture as less attached to the local and increasingly relating to a global context.

The electrical grid that provides the light that introduces the outside world into Heaney's childhood has a similar representative function as the metric system described in "From the Land of the Unspoken". Both systems signify a connectedness of the local to the global, relating that which is immediately experienced to a system that is of a different order and magnitude. The idea of a global interconnectedness replaces, or at least takes precedence over, the local.

However, both the metric system and the electrical grid manifest themselves locally, in a lamp or in a measurement. By thus translating a global or planetary system into local and immediate experience Heaney is able to create a sense of continuity between the local and the global. Moving between local and global perspectives and contexts, *Electric Light*, according to O'Brien, creates an intersection of on the one hand a "cosmopolitan range of names and places", and on the other "a number of local names and places which take their place in this constellation" so that "[w]hat the book achieves is the placement of these different cultures in the same structure" (*CIM*, 162-163).

O'Brien argues that from *Station Island* and onwards, Heaney "is looking for plural sources of selfhood, and for a more fluid and distanced relationship with place". By the end of *Electric Light*, according to O'Brien, Heaney's "relationship with place has been transformed, from an artesian probing of the psychic communal memory bank to a more individualistic translating and transforming of that past into a personalised aesthetic wherein the relationship with tradition is more nuanced and the perspective is more transcendental than immanent" (*CIM*, 69). In the sense that Heaney describes with reference to Kavanagh (in contrast to Montague), this transformation of communal into individual also signifies a move from the communal to the universal. Kirkland notes that based on his move from local to cosmopolitan, "Heaney is the physical embodiment of George Moore's belief that art 'must be parochial in the beginning to become cosmopolitan in the end'" (254).

O'Brien notes further that this new sense of place represented by Heaney reflects how "the sense

of place and identity exists in the mind as opposed to in the land itself" (*CIM*, 90). This idea is
expressed in the line "[m]e in place and the place in me" from the poem "A Herbal"[224], from
Heaney's most recent collection, *Human Chain*. This long poem states towards the end:

> Between heather and marigold,
> Between sphagnum and buttercup,
> Between dandelion and broom,
> Between forget-me-not and honey-suckle,
>
> As between clear blue and cloud,
> Between haystack and sunset sky,
> Between oak tree and slated roof,
>
> I had my existence. I was there.
> Me in place and the place in me.

These lines anchor the speaker in an immediate natural environment, but acknowledges at the same
time that his sense of this place comes as much from within as from without. The subsequent lines
ask how the physical experience of place can be translated and widened to include the world beyond
the directly experienced, and incorporate an abstract global context whilst maintaining a tangible
experience of the local:

> Where can it be found again,
> An elsewhere world, beyond
>
> Maps and atlases,
> Where all is woven into
>
> And of itself, like a nest
> Of crosshatched grass blades?

These lines suggest both the idea of a global interconnectedness and the world as a system, by the
reference to "[m]aps and atlases", but also asks how that sense of planetary context and
connectedness can be represented in a way that makes it comparable to the experience of the local

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[224] *Human Chain*, 35-43.

environment, of that represented by "crosshatched grass blades".

Perhaps Heaney accomplishes this through what Irene Gilsenan Nordin calls "a poetry of more detachment and wider magnitude"[225], visible from *The Haw Lantern* and onwards. Nordin argues that Heaney's early work

> is very much a poetry of the self and of the Irish rural background in which he was born and in which he grew up. There is a deep element of what he himself calls "the sense of place" – the sense of being a part of the very landscape, both geographical and historical. […] personal memory and a sense of the local have been vital ingredients in his poetry from the start.

In his article from 2000, entitled "Seamus Heaney: From the Personal to the Universal", Nordin argues that there is a development in Heaney's poetry from a "the early parochial farm poems of the sixties" to more distant perspective evident in the later poems, in which "the private memories of childhood and the inherited "given" of his cultural background are looked at in a new light" (174). According to Nordin, "[i]n this way the personal preoccupations and the self-conscious experiences of his earlier poetry are reimagined and transformed and seen in a wider, more encompassing, focus" (174).

The development that Nordin refers to could be described differently, as a move not from the personal to the universal, but from the communal to the universal. The personal, as Nordin also notes, remains important in the universal, but with a change in what it represents: from using his personal experiences to suggest Irish, Northern Irish or even more local experiences, in his later poetry Heaney's uses the personal to indicate the universal.

This change signifies a move away from what Nordin describes as a landscape that "takes on a sense of the sacred almost, a "religious force" that is seen – or rather sensed – as something that is "sacramental, instinct with signs, implying a system of reality beyond the visible realities" (174), a landscape such as in *North*. Instead, from *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney's poetry becomes characterised by, according to Nordin, "an artistic distance", signifying

> a visible moving away from the earlier digging "down and down for the good turf" to a poetry of more detachment and wider magnitude, where the poet's "inheritance" no longer is seen as a burden that weighs him down. Heaney's later poetry is a poetry of more all-embracing immanence where the looking downwards and

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[225] Irene Gilsenan Nordin, "Seamus Heaney: From the Personal to the Universal", *Studio Neophilologica*, 72.2 (2000), 177.

inwards of the early work broadens to include a looking upwards and outwards as well. But even if the subject matter and the themes explored appear less personal, the subjective element is still important; and the digging down into the past is still seen an essential part of the creative process, where the personal and the known are always the starting point. The poems often start with the purely personal and then, as they progress, move from the first person to the second person "you" – the more detached listening voice that Heaney often uses when he wants to convey the contemplative, meditative mood that is evoked in much of his later poetry. The poetic utterance thus moves beyond the personal to a deeper awareness, as the poet/speaker becomes part of a wider more universal picture, where he finally loses himself in his creation. (177-178)

This feeling of freeing oneself from an attachment to the local has implications for the environment as well, as the ability to feel a sense of belonging to something beyond one's local surroundings reflects a sense of planetary belonging. Being able to move from the personal to the universal rather than from the personal to a limited communal perspective enables a zooming in and out between the local and the global in a way that reflects the environmental slogan also referred to by Heise, "think globally, act locally". Heaney is able to do this as he, as Nordin puts it, "manages to let go of the strong physical heavy pull of the earth and while the early sense of the sacred and the "magical view of the world" are still at the centre of his work, to these he adds a new freedom" (178). This sense of freedom, still anchored explicitly in the physical earth and soil, can be translated into a felt continuity between place and planet.

Conclusions: Hughes, Heaney and ecopoetics

The concluding section of this thesis draws on the results from the individual chapters to suggest how Hughes and Heaney create an ecopoetics that unites ecology with poetic creation. The first part focuses on Hughes's anti-anthropomorphism, expressed through references to evolutionary and other natural processes that take place on a scale beyond the apprehension of the individual human being. The second part discusses the relation in Heaney's poetry between language, ecology and his own poetic process. The final section contextualises Hughes's and Heaney's respective ecopoetics in a broader discussion of the relationship between poetry and ecology.

Hughes: anti-anthropomorphism and nature on a non-human scale
Hughes's poems reach beyond the realm of the human in their attempts to reflect and describe nature from a non-anthropocentric perspective. Hughes's anti-anthropomorphism can be recognised in at least three different forms. The first of these has to do with scale. Frequently, Hughes's poems refer to natural processes that take place on a scale beyond a human sense of time or space. This is seen in the *Elmet* poems, for example, which, as discussed in chapter three, portray the passing of the last ice age and the subsequent formation of the moors and the Calder valley. The *Elmet* poems rely on this recognition of natural processes beyond human influence to suggest that the negative environmental impact of industrialisation on the Calder valley will eventually be erased from the area, overcome by non-human nature.

Natural forces of similarly non-human scale or influence form one of the basic themes of Hughes's entire poetics, present in poems about natural instincts and other signs of evolutionary processes. They are recognised both in the very large and in the very small, as suggested in these lines from "Shackleton Hills", quoted in chapter three:

> Stars sway the tree
> Whose roots
> Tighten on an atom.

This 'world tree' connects the smallest building blocks of nature, such as atoms, molecules and DNA, to the largest constellations in the universe, represented by the stars. For Hughes, these different scales of nature are interconnected and governed by the same universal and elemental

powers. Humans form only a small part of this system, and are wrong to think that they can control the forces of nature.

By depicting processes that are not readily apprehensible to humans, Hughes takes a biocentric rather than an anthropocentric standpoint. In many ways, the views expressed in his poems are similar to those of deep ecology. As Clark notes, for deep ecologists

> the essential problem is *anthropomorphism*, the almost all-pervading assumption that it is only in relation to humans that anything else has value. Deep ecologists urge a drastic change in human self-understanding: one should see oneself not as an atomistic individual engaged in the world as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as part of a greater living identity. All human actions should be guided by a sense of what is good for the biosphere as a whole. Such a *biocentrism* would affirm the intrinsic value of all natural life and displace the current preference of even the most trivial human demands over the needs of other species or integrity of place. (2011: 2).

Hughes promotes a similarly humble understanding of the place of humans in relation to the non-human world.

Hughes's depictions of a universal, interdependent and connected ecosystem, explicit in *River* and *Moortown Diary*, are, as noted by Jonathan Bate and also referred to in the introduction to this thesis, inspired by contemporary definitions of ecology. As Bate suggests, the then new science of ecology offered a scientific framework for Hughes to which he could connect his ideas, though, as Bate also notes, natural scientists might "not be entirely happy with Hughes's spiritual claims" of a metaphysical connection between cells in the body, animals in the field, and stars in the sky. For Hughes, however, the concept of ecology not only suggested such a connection of universal energies or natures but, furthermore, included the poet as especially positioned to 'tap into' and channel those energies[226].

For Hughes, the connection to the natural environment is spiritual. As humans separate themselves from a close connection with the natural environment, they damage their own inner natures as well as their surroundings. This connection between inner and outer natures are a second expression of anti-anthropomorphism in Hughes's poetics, because it relies on the recognition of non-human natures within humans, necessary for a spiritual connection to the outer world. As discussed in the first chapter, *Crow* enacts a rekindling of this spiritual connection to the natural

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[226] Hughes explains this notion in, for instance, "Ted Hughes and Crow: An Interview with Egbert Faas", in Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (1980).

world, displaced by a Christian, technology-oriented world view. In this light, *Crow* can be seen as part of a deep ecological movement, described by Andrew Brennan in *Thinking About Nature*:

> deep ecologists argue that human flourishing or self-realisation requires a re-evaluation of our relationship with the rest of nature. This re-evaluation has taken various forms in the brief history of the movement, but a prevailing theme has been to urge the abandonment of our human-centred modes of thinking and valuing, and – more recently – to undertake a real identification with nature.[227]

Brennan notes that the views of deep ecologists often involve metaphysical claims: "Two common appeals are to idealism (the claim that the world is in some way mind-dependent) and to various kinds of global holism (the idea that all things are interdependent in a significant way)" (7). Hughes's notions of the poet as shaman, mediating a spiritual relationship between a human community and a world otherwise beyond human reach or comprehension, and of poetry and the imagination as ways of connecting to the goddess of nature (the White Goddess described by Robert Graves[228]) suggest a deep ecological connection to a fundamentally non-anthropocentric world view. This strong version of deep ecology, characterised by a connection to the natural world that is at the same time metaphysical and non-transcendent, constitutes a special expression of what Bron Taylor describes as dark green religion, discussed in the first chapter. Related to both deep ecology and dark green religion, Hughes's poetics could be characterised as a 'dark green poetry'.

Hughes recognition of non-human nature in humans stresses similarities rather than differences between humans and other animals. The instincts and habits of different species that many of Hughes's animal poems describe are recognised as manifestations of slow evolutionary processes, making large-scale forces visible to the individual's perspective. Hughes's descriptions of predatory behaviour have caused some critics to accuse him of writing 'poetry of violence'. However, as discussed in the first chapter, the violence that Hughes's means to portray is not of a negative kind, according to his own explanation in "Poetry and Violence", but of a different order, inherent in all natural processes as a necessary part of the struggle for survival. Performed in the way intended by their creator, these actions are wholly 'natural' and amoral.

These natural forces are seen in some, but not all, human actions. Hughes recognises them in creative processes, such as the writing of poems. This link between evolution, animal instinct and

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[227] Andrew Brennan, *Thinking About Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology*, London: Routledge, 1988, 6.
[228] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (1948).

human creativity is most directly illustrated in Hughes's poem "Thrushes", where a small bird hunting for worms on an urban lawn is compared to a shark stabbing at a wound in its own body, and then to Mozart in the act of composing music. In "Poetry and Violence", Hughes explains that these are different expressions of the same creative, elemental force, performed according to the laws of nature. According to Hughes, poetry can channel this powerful, potentially destructive force into a positive, regenerative energy. In so far as they capture this creative energy, Hughes's poems are themselves expressions of a more-than-human nature.

The emphasis on similarities rather than differences between humans and animals suggests that Hughes's poetry can be read as posthumanist. As discussed in the introduction, Cary Wolfe states that the human/animal dichotomy depends on a definition of the human that "is achieved by escaping or repressing [...] its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary". By emphasising precisely the ways in which humans are like other animals, and the fact that humans ultimately depend on a natural world that they cannot control, Hughes undermines the humanist human/animal dichotomy described by Wolfe. Furthermore, by suggesting ways of thinking and connecting to the natural world that have their origin in non-Western traditions and religions, Hughes distances himself from Enlightenment thought traditions in particular, not just thematically but also through "*how* thinking confronts that thematics" (Wolfe, xvi).

A third expression of anti-anthropomorphism in Hughes's poetry is the recognition and portrayal of nature's own agency, apart and independent from humans. This is expressed in poems where the speaker attempts to move outside his own sphere of experience in order to see the world through different, non-anthropomorphising eyes, and to, in some sense, speak 'for' or 'as' nature. In "Salmon Eggs", for instance, the speaker tries to contemplate the river "[t]ill my eyes forget me". A similar idea is approached in *Flowers and Insects*, as discussed in chapter five, in descriptions of agency in nature through recognition and representation of non-human semiosis and communication.

The anti-anthropomorphic theme persists from Hughes's early poems to his later collections, but its mode of expression changes. While many of the early poems depict acts of violence or destruction, as in many of the animal poems, the later collections focus on processes of renewal, such as the annual cycles of the seasons in *River*, and of life and death in *Moortown Diary*. This thematic change from descriptions of animals in action towards observation of quieter ecological relationships, from competition to symbiosis, is reflected by a corresponding change in form, from the forceful and assertive poems of *Crow*, for instance, towards the more reflexive and humble tone

of *Moortown Diary* and *River*. This change suggests a more benevolent perspective on the functions of ecology, in accordance with Brennan's observation in *Thinking About Nature*, from the same decade as *River*, that "far from competition being the ultimate determinant of life on earth, it seems that symbiotic associations are the *sine qua non* of any life support system" (129). A similar notion informs Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, proposed in the late 1970s.

The development from poems about individual animals to depictions of larger ecosystems is also reflected by a change from poems that form more self-contained units, as in the early collections, to the later collections where the different poems form part of a larger story, as in *Crow*, *Gaudete*, *Remains of Elmet*, *Moortown Diary* and *River*. By including a role for humans in the ecosystem, *Moortown Diary* also adds a new dimension to the portrayal of ecological relations, suggesting a move away from the strongest forms of anti-anthropocentrism in Hughes's poetics.

Heaney: language, ecology and the (non-)native

As discussed in chapter four, Heaney portrays how linguistic environments reflect and co-evolve with their natural settings. Poems like "A Backward Look" and "A Herbal" suggest how a particular name for a species intertwines with the species itself. Reflecting a creative imagination shaped by the discourses of anti-colonial thought, Heaney relates both the linguistic and the natural environment to questions of nativeness, recognising strangers that intrude and compete with natives, sometimes threatening existing species but sometimes also creating possibilities for changing ecosystems where new species can thrive.

The intertwining of language with the natural world is illustrated in the poem "Canopy", from Heaney's most recent collection, *Human Chain*. In this poem trees in the Harvard yard, through which the speaker is walking, resonate with voices from "everywhere". This is not in the speaker's imagination, but the result of hidden amplifiers in the trees' canopies. The poem suggests not only that the local, rooted trees are connected to whispers from afar, but also that nature resonates, in this case literally, with human languages, cultures and ideas. It also illustrates how we are surrounded by environments of speech and languages, forming 'ecologies' of their own. Furthermore, the poem describes how human voices speak out of a natural setting:

> It was the month of May,
> Trees in Harvard Yard
> Were turning a young green.

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There was whispering everywhere.

David Ward had installed
Voice-boxes in the branches,
Speakers wrapped in sacking
Looking like old wasps' nests

Or bat-fruit in the gloaming –
Shadow Adam's apples
That made sibilant ebb and flow,
Speech-guttering, desultory

Hush and backwash and echo.
It was like a recording
Of antiphonal responses
In the congregation of leaves.

Or a wood that talked in its sleep.
Reeds on a riverbank
Going over and over their secret.

"Canopy" indicates how languages cannot merely be described as linguistic environments, but actually take part in the ecology in the sense noted by Buell; "[g]enres and texts are themselves arguably 'ecosystems', not only in the narrow sense of the text as a discursive 'environment', but also in the broader sense that texts 'help reproduce sociohistorical environments' in stylized form" (2005: 44). The same notion is expressed as a process of "environing"[229] by Paul Warde and Sverker Sörlin in the introduction to *Nature's End*, indicating how people turn 'nature', something quite distinct from a human or cultural realm, into 'environment', nature as co-produced and historicised by humans. In "Canopy", as elsewhere in Heaney's poetry, the human and natural world are portrayed in mutual processes of 'environing'.

In Heaney's linguistic ecology, there are native as well as alien words, and some that are threatened by extinction. Heaney's poetics also include frequent examples of words that exhibit particular relationships with place, through their origins and dialectal variations. As discussed in

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[229] Paul Warde and Sverker Sörlin in "Making the Environment Historical – An Introduction", in *Nature's End: History and the Environment*, ed. Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 8.

chapter four, the linguistic environment, like the natural one, is for Heaney an environment to cherish, where iteration and reuse of individual words and expressions, as in "An Old Refrain", are attempts to do just that: words become "gleanings and leavings" to be kept "in the combs / of a fieldworker's archive", as in "The Backward Look".

The presence of non-natives in the poems is complicated by the fact that they are written in English, the alien tongue. Irish words in an otherwise English poem take on a double standard, simultaneously native and alien, while the English words are intruders that are at the same time already present 'within' the native ecology. The poem becomes a hybrid, a place for preservation and reintroduction of species in an environment that is at the same time native and foreign, where the poem itself becomes an environment in which multiple languages, traditions and cultures can thrive.

Heaney's focus on native places, languages and dialects to some extent represents what Clark calls a "bioregional project of 'reinhabitation'" (2011: 125). However, the presence of non-natives in the form of English and other foreign references are signs of a countervailing internationalism, a current that generally runs stronger than bioregionalism in Heaney's poetics, especially in the later collections. The combination of and tensions between bioregional and international trends suggest images that combine local with global perspectives, relating to the kind of environmental cosmopolitanism that Heise describes and that are discussed in the last chapter of the thesis.

The presence of strangers in the (natural as well as linguistic) environment also counteracts nativist and bioregional emphases by introducing non-essentialist views of cultures and species that relate to queer ecocritical perspectives. As suggested in chapter four, the elaboration on species and species' names in "An Old Refrain" suggests a willingness to include strange and foreign words in order to form a hybrid of English and Irish linguistic traditions. In the sense that both English and Irish words are strangers in some respect suggests that they can be described as the kind of "strange strangers" that Timothy Morton notes in "Queer Ecology": "Their familiarity is strange, their strangeness familiar"[230].

Another layer of strangeness versus familiarity can be seen in "An Old Refrain" if the linguistic and the natural are considered together, so that a familiar plant becomes strange when it is named by a foreign language, perhaps especially if that language belongs to a coloniser. The strangeness introduced is then similar (though uninvited) to the strangeness experienced in "Making Strange",

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[230] Timothy Morton, "Queer Ecology", *PMLA*, 125:2 (2010), 277.

also discussed in the last chapter, where Heaney brings a friend from abroad to Ireland, and is faced by this person standing next to his own father, who suddenly seems strange to the speaker through the foreigner's eyes. The presence of these multiple layers of strangeness in Heaney's poetics, and the instability of the concept of the native, reinforces the trend away from nativism and bioregionalism and towards internationalism and cosmopolitanism that is recognised on other grounds in Heaney's poetics in chapter six.

Hughes, Heaney and an ecological poetics

The concept of an ecological poetics suggests that there is a special relationship between ecology or environmentalism and the formal qualities of poetry; that ecopoetry is not merely 'about' nature in a thematic sense, but actually addresses or reflects ecological relationships in a different, intrinsic way. Though this thesis mainly addresses the relationship between human and non-human nature in Hughes's and Heaney's work on a thematic level, some remarks on their work as ecopoetic in this stronger sense will conclude the thesis.

Angus Fletcher argues for a particularly strong form of ecopoetics in *A New Theory for American Poetry*, stating that "poetry takes environmentalist concerns to a higher level":

> Unlike most prose discourse, poetry expresses close personal involvements, and hence pertains to the way we humans respond, on our own, to environmental matters. [...] An art like poetry that enhances the presence of the individual is bound to be central in showing how we should understand our environmental rights and obligations. The issue then is this, what is my own response to my surrounding?[231]

For Fletcher, furthermore, poetry is not merely a reflection or representation of nature, it actually *is* nature. The poem constitutes an "environmental form" (Fletcher, 6). It is an expression of the same forces that create the physical world, and is part of the same global ecosystem that all other forms of life ultimately belong to.

Developing this argument, Fletcher identifies what he calls "the *environment-poem*, a genre where the poet neither writes *about* the surrounding world, thematizing it, nor analytically represents the world, but actually shapes the poem to *be* an Emersonian or esemplastic circle" (9). Invented by Walt Whitman, environment-poems, according to Fletcher, "aspire to surround the

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[231] Angus Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination*, Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004, 3-4.

reader so that to read them is to have an experience much like suddenly recognizing that one actually has an environment, instead of not perceiving the surround at all" (9). Whitman's rhapsody, for example, according to Fletcher, "perpetually liminal, acquires a Thoreauvian wildness" (9). Though Fletcher limits his argument to poetry, Buell suggests that it could be expanded to include other genres as well, and that such environment-texts could help recognise "how the social landscape figures as part of total landscape" (2005: 51).

The relationship between ecology and poetry is also discussed by Hubert Zapf, in "Literary Ecology and the Ethics of Texts", and by John Felstiner in *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* Taking a different approach than Fletcher, Zapf is interested in the relationship between biological and cultural ecologies, which he characterises as a relationship of "interdependence-yet-difference"[232]. He suggests that cultural ecologies that involve "the internal landscapes produced by modern culture and consciousness are equally important for human beings as their external environments" (852). In so far as they address how the experiences that shape those landscapes are expressed in language and images that rely on sensory relations and responses to the natural environment, cultural ecologies are intertwined with biological ecologies. According to Zapf, this interrelationship between language, imagination and nature suggests that literature is an especially compelling form of cultural ecology, because it can express and explore the changing relations, the "nonlinear complex feedback relationships", between nature and culture. Literature that explores the relationship between nature and culture in this sense Zapf terms 'literary ecologies'.

Like Hughes, Felstiner emphasises poetry's ability to "quicken awareness" of our natural surroundings as a first step towards developing the will to "lighten our footprint in a world where all of nature matters vitally", according to the sentiment "[f]irst consciousness then conscience"[233]. Felstiner's statements that "poetry more than any other kind of speech reveals the vital signs and warning signs of our tenancy on earth" (4) and that "[p]oems make us stop, look, listen long enough for imagination to act, connecting, committing ourselves to the only world we've got" (11) are similar to Hughes's comparison in "Poetry in the Making" between a poet and a fisherman, staring at his float. What these two activities have in common, Hughes suggests, is the ability to focus their attention on a single thing or thought, and hold it there for so long that all distractions dissolve and they can "enter one of the orders of bliss" (1994: 19). In this state of mind, Hughes argues, the

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[232] Hubert Zapf, "Literary Ecology and the Ethics of Texts", *New Literary History*, 39.4 (2008): 851.
[233] John Felstiner, *Can Poetry Save the Earth: A Field Guide to Nature Poems*, New Haven, Conneticut: Yale University, 2009, xiii.

poet/fisherman can become aware of the world beyond the image/float:

> You are aware, in a horizonless and slightly mesmerized way, like listening to the double bass in orchestral music, of the fish below in there in the dark. At every moment your imagination is alarming itself with the size of the thing slowly leaving the weeds and approaching your bait. Or with the world of beauties down there, suspended in total ignorance of you. And the whole purpose of this concentrated excitement, in this arena of apprehension and unforeseeable events, is to bring up some lovely solid thing, like living metal, from a world where nothing exists but those inevitable facts which raise life out of nothing and return it nothing. (1994: 19)

Those "inevitable facts" signify something similar to the "only world we've got" referred to by Felstiner. The process that Hughes describes of training the imagination to 'settle' on that world so long as to form a 'deeper' connection to it than we experience in our everyday lives result in the kind of ecopoem that Felstiner describes. In a review of Felstiner, Garrard notes that this notion of ecopoetics is "a type of ecocritical Russian formalism that promotes the moral value of poetry's *ostranenie* (defamiliarisation)" (2010: 14).

Like Fletcher, Felstiner stresses the importance of the individual as the basis for poetry's relevance to environmentalism, stating that "[t]he essential choices, ticklish for government and industry, fall to us first as individuals in our eating, housing, clothing, childbearing, transport, recreation, voting" (13). The emphasis on the importance of the individual's role to the relationship between poetry and the environment is contradicted by Clark's claim that environmental thinking is so difficult precisely because its scope is insufficient as long as it starts with the individual, that "[s]cale effects are straightforward to exemplify but impossible to apprehend in any particular individual case"[234]. Clark points out that climate change in particular is not about the individual, but rather "a matter of *context*" (2010: 135), and that this is difficult for ecocritics (and others) to deal with, other than in abstract terms:

> much ecocriticism takes the individual attitude as its starting point and then argues for a change in the choices which that individual makes. Thus, it is hoped, the growth of an 'ecological awareness' through the study of environmentalist non-fiction, eco-poetry or real ventures into the wild, will be somehow sufficient to produce an ecologically viable society. Such thinking effectively recognises that climate change enacts a drastic reconfiguration of given distinctions of public and private but, without more sustained work on the nature of the

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[234] Timothy Clark, "Some Climate Change Ironies: Deconstruction, Environmental Politics and the Closure of Ecocriticism", *The Oxford Literary Review*, 32.1 (2010), 135.

state, ideology, modes of production etc, still seeks to engage it solely in terms of individual attitude and choice. The focus on the individual, whether as green consumer, a reader of an ecocritical argument, or as a backpacker, reinforces the illusion that reality and power remain a matter of individuals pursuing their rights and opinions (2010: 141)

Climate change, according to Clark, means that we are "suddenly in need of confronting how current modes of thinking and acting are inadequate or anachronistic" (2010: 135). In its most serious implications, environmentalism, including literature and criticism, is about how the human population responds to environmental problems, more than about how each of us responds on our own.

Fletcher's affirmation of the importance of the individual, and his statement that "the strong message of [the environment-poem], it if needed one, would be that a good society must become a self-organizing system, without too much top-down control", is subject to the risk described by Clark of turning environmental politics into a question of the moral choice and responsibility of the individual, thereby reinforcing "a culture of narcissistic individualism already implicated in consumer democracy and environmental danger" (2010: 144-145). Clark argues that ecocritics need to engage with questions involving environmental racism and elitism and health as matters of social justice on a level that is not centred around the individual.

Clark's definition of ecopoetry is different from both Fletcher's and Felstiner's, though it could probably include the latter's description. It focuses on the poem's ability to challenge established modes of thought and offer new types of images for relating to environmental problems of non-individual proportions and scales:

a loosely 'ecological' poetic emerges in the development and extension of modernist techniques that had been initially pioneered in the first four decades of the twentieth century. At issue is an aesthetic interested in formal experimentation and the conception of the poet or poem as forming a kind of intellectual or spiritual frontier, newly coupled with a sense of the vulnerability and otherness of the natural world, distrust of a society dominated by materialism and instrumental reason, and sometimes giving a counteraffirmation of non-western modes of perception, thought or rhetorical practice. The poem is often conceived as a space of subjective redefinition and rediscovery through encounters with the non-human. (2011: 139)

In different ways, both Hughes and Heaney can be described as ecopoets in light of Felstiner's and Clark's definitions. Both poets' work "live on the sensory shock of things", and depend on "seeing

the things of our world afresh by saying them anew" (Felstiner, 2, 3). Hughes, like Felstiner, stresses the importance of a heightened awareness of non-human nature and the role of the imagination, trained by reading and writing poetry, for connecting to the natural world. Especially Hughes's animal poems, which question and challenge definitions of human nature, enact encounters with non-human nature. Intertwining linguistic with natural environments, Heaney's poems illustrate the kind of literary ecology characterised by Felstiner as exploring the interdependencies between cultural and biological ecologies.

Hughes's ecopoetics, which strives towards speaking for, or even as, nature and 'channelling' the energies of the natural world, reflects Fletcher's claim that poetry "gives voice to the unbreakable link between nature and humanity, since poetry, our imaginative making, seems to participate in nature" (4). In Hughes's case, this "unbreakable bond" does not suggest a bond between nature and humans that is different from other ecological relationships, but rather indicates the presence of nature within humans, with poetry being one of its potential outlets or expressions. References in Hughes's poems to very large- as well as very small-scale processes, and to natural processes within and without the individual, relate human experiences to an interconnected, global ecosystem, in which the poems themselves participate.

Heaney's ecopoetics is of a different kind than Hughes's. Rather than moving away from anthropocentric perspectives, Heaney suggests an 'ecology' that incorporates natural as well as cultural elements, especially by combining and intertwining natural with linguistic environments. Heaney's poems not only record or reflect such processes, but in themselves contribute to this natural/linguistic environment in ways similar to those outlined by Zapf with regard to biological and cultural ecologies, including linguistic reflection of sensory experiences of the natural environment and interdependencies between natural and political/cultural processes, as discussed in chapter four.

The tension between bioregionalism and internationalism in Heaney's poetics involves a sometimes fraught relationship between local loyalty and cosmopolitan freedom and self-assertion. In addition to the examples discussed in chapter six, poems in *Station Island* also reflect this tension. In "Station Island xii"[235], the last of the "Station Island" poems, the speaker encounters "the ghost of James Joyce"[236], who tells him, with a "voice eddying with the vowels of all rivers", to set

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[235] *Station Island*, 92-94.
[236] Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics*, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009, 38.

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off on his own, and trust his own voice:

> 'Your obligation
> is not discharged by any common rite.
> What you must do must be done on your own
>
> so get back in harness. The main thing is to write
> for the joy of it. Cultivate your work-lust
> that imagines its haven like your hands at night
>
> dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.
> You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.
> Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,
>
> let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.
> Let go, let fly, forget.
> You've listened long enough. Now strike your note.'

The poem describes not only the speaker's difficulty in trusting his own voice in relation the earlier writer, but also the letting go of a sense of responsibility of writing 'for' Northern Ireland. The poem claims the speaker's right to "fill the element / with signatures of [his] own frequency", a necessity for the poetic imagination: "You lose more of yourself than you redeem / doing the decent thing". The poem urges the speaker to accept and claim that

> The English language
> belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires,
>
> a waste of time for somebody your age.

On grounds of poetic as well as personal freedom, the poem justifies moving out of the local, Irish context, but it also contains an element of self criticism for not being able to do so. Abandoning the familiar is associated with both fear and freedom:

> It was as if I had stepped free into space
> alone with nothing that I had not known

already.

A similar claim for artistic freedom is further outlined in "On the Road"[237], the last poem of *Station Island*. In this poem the speaker is

   up and away

  like a human soul
  that plumes from the mouth.

The poem describes the necessity of being in motion, of finding new places and perspectives by following different paths. At the end of his journey, the speaker imagines, he will find a hidden place, far away from his origins:

  I would migrate
  through a high cave mouth
  into an oaten, sun-warmed cliff,

  on down the soft-nubbed
  clay-floored passage,
  face-brush, wing-flap,
  to the deepest chamber.

  There a drinking deer
  is cut into rock

In this magical place, the poet will find inspiration:

  I would meditate
  that stone-faced vigil

  until the long dumbfounded
  spirit broke cover
  to raise a dust

---

[237] *Station Island*, 119-121.

in the font of exhaustion.

The emphasis on motion and on seeing things from the outside in order to both experience new things and gain a different understanding of the familiar captures an important dimension of developing an environmental world citizenship (as discussed in chapter six), suggesting that local nature cannot be comprehended only from within, from a bottom-up, bioregional perspective, as suggested by Fletcher, but also needs the outsider's view.

The relationship in "On the Road" between immediate, physical nature and the outsider's view suggests a widening ecological thought that can begin to include, as Clark suggests, components and scales that are not immediately accessible to the single individual. The trend towards an increasing international and global focus in Heaney's later poems compared to his early collections is, as mentioned, perhaps better described less as a trend towards internationalism as a replacement for local or regional perspectives than as a trend towards images that are capable of relating simultaneously to entities of varying scale, from the local and regional to the national, global and universal. Like Hughes's poetry, Heaney's poems also address questions of scale in this sense.

The problem of scale is most acute in issues relating to climate change, which, as Clark points out, presents a challenge to ecocritics of "keeping pace intellectually with an event whose scale, complexity and incalculability is such to resist representation or being conceptualised" (2010: 132). Clarke suggests that the challenges that climate change pose to the ability of humans to conceptualise issues of such scale and uncertainty render attempts to meet environmental crises with ideas of better management insufficient, as the idea of management itself assumes that humans can understand and control the natural world, something which an issue as complex and unpredictable as climate change indicates is impossible:

> A geographical and geological contingency, the finitude of the earth, now compels us to trace the anthropocentric enclosure of inherited modes of thinking and practice. The enlightenment project to render all the elements of nature part of a calculable technics is made to face its own dysfunction in the agency of what had previously been excluded from reckoning, or, more precisely, in that which had always been included-as-excluded. The condition of closure renders anachronistic inherited economic, political practices and modes of judgement without acceptable alternatives appearing in their place. The epoch whose intellectual closure is now visible, the 'flat earth' epoch so to speak, inaugurates the need to think a bounded space in which the consequences of actions may mutate to come back unexpectedly from the other side of the planet. The 'environment' is no longer thinkable as an object of 'crisis' for us to decide on or manage: it ceases being only a

passive ground, context and resource for human society and becomes an imponderable agency that must somehow be taken into account, even if we are unsure how. (2010: 134)

Hughes suggests that the creative process of reading and writing poetry is a way of realising and considering the agency of the natural world. By connecting to rather than controlling forces of nature, humans would, in Hughes's view, gain a better, more humble understanding of their place in the global ecosystem. Hughes's poetics thus suggests not merely a modification or adaptation of current environmental values and thoughts, but a drastic change to a new, spiritual and ecocentric view of nature-human relations. Clark describes the "intellectual closure" of modernity (defined "as the assumption that the natural world exists for human ends, the dominance of liberal-democratic systems of government embedded in market capitalism, and the privilege given to scientific knowledge as the solely reliable guide in managing the social and natural worlds" (Clark 2010: 132)) as a cul de sac (2010: 142), brought into effect by the scope, scale and complexity of climate change. The description is similar to Hughes's notion of a "dead end of a wrong direction" from "Top Withens", referring to the end of the relationship between exploring, exploiting humans and a passive, infinite nature as it has developed at least since the last ice age.

The notion of nature as a passive, stable entity is also addressed by Morton, who states in *Ecology without Nature* that this "idea of 'nature' which so many hold dear will have to whither away in an 'ecological' state of human society" (2007: 1). Morton wants to replace the concept of nature with a particular notion of ecology:

> 'Ecology without nature' could mean 'ecology without a *concept* of the natural.' Thinking, when it becomes ideological, tends to fixate on concepts rather than doing what is 'natural' to thought, namely, dissolving whatever has taken form. Ecological thinking that was not fixated, that did not stop at a particular concretization of its object, would thus be 'without nature.' (2007: 24)

Morton also suggests that "it is in art that the fantasies we have about nature take shape – and dissolve" (2007: 1). Brennan anticipates Morton's argument already in his study from 1988, noting the dangers of equating the concept of 'natural' behaviour with innate qualities of the organism and stating that, given the confusion surrounding the term 'natural', "a case could be made for dropping the term from our descriptions of phenomena" (88). Brennan points out that though there are some connections between 'natural' behaviour and inherited qualities, such as physical characteristics

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making certain diets more 'natural' than others, attempts to translate this connection into moral guidelines quickly become problematic. Extended beyond strictly biological traits, Brennan states, such reasoning can be used to argue that "everything that happens is natural" (90).

Neither Hughes nor Heaney make a clear distinction between nature and ecology as differentiated by Morton, but the distinction between nature as something fixated and 'out there' and ecology as something less constant and easier to adapt to new ideas of ecosystems and biomes that are integrated with human societies can be used to point to an important difference between Hughes's and Heaney's ecopoetics.

For Hughes, though nature has agency, it remains a stable point of reference, while human imagination and conceptualisation falter both in judgement and in the ability to perceive, comprehend and live according to natural processes and laws. Hughes's poems strive to portray that which lies beyond social and cultural constructions of nature, through anti-anthropomorphic descriptions and points of view. Morton suggests that nature can refer either to a substance or an essence (and notes that this is "[o]ne of the basic problems with nature" (2007: 16)). For Hughes, nature is primarily an essence, and it is this essence that the poems search for and aim to describe, and identifies in the DNA of humans, in the behaviour of other animals, in all ecological relationships and in the natural processes that shape the world beyond human influence. In Hughes's poetics, different substances of nature are, as Morton puts it, "just a variation in their atomic structure" (2007: 18). For Hughes, this essence is sacred without being transcendental or anthropocentric.

Hughes's ecopoetics contradicts Morton's statement that environmental literatures "encapsulate a utopian image of nature which does not really exist – we have destroyed it" (2007: 24). The essence that Hughes describes can be pushed back, as in "Crow's Undersong" (discussed in the first chapter), but it cannot be destroyed, only its different materialisations can be, as seen in poems where Crow is obliterated only to be immediately resurrected (see for example "Magical Dangers" or "Glimpse"). As an evolutionary trickster, Crow embodies a different nature concept than the utopian image that Morton refers to. Morton notes that "for many cultures nature is a trickster" (2007: 31), and this is certainly the case for Hughes. This means that for Hughes Crow embodies not just evolution but the concept of nature in a wider sense. Rather than thematising nature, *Crow* is an enactment of the nature concept in Hughes's poetics.

Heaney does not, like Hughes, search for a nature that is untainted by humans. Instead, he is

interested in the mutually influencing relationship between nature and culture and in the details of how nature is constructed by human language, values, culture and history. While Hughes describes "simply nature", Heaney portrays the human and the non-human world as intertwined. In *Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate states that like Wordsworth, Heaney

> sees into the life of things and he yearns for the rural places in which he grew up. But, like Yeats, he has been hurt into poetry by 'mad Ireland'. In *Seeing Things* (1991), his finest volume of mature work, he revisits Glanmore, the farm of his childhood, but he never fully gets back to nature. He squares up to the Januslike quality of the poet – singer of earth, exile from earth – remains warily on guard as he crisscrosses between culture and nature. (203)

Perhaps he does not even crisscross between nature and culture, but is unable to separate the two at all. Commenting further on the lines from Heaney's poem "Squarings": "I took a turn and met the fox stock-still, / Face-to-face in the middle of the road", from *Seeing Things*, Bate compares Heaney to Hughes:

> at the heart of the poem the speaker is entered by 'wildness' but cannot return to the wild because he is contained within his car. Furthermore, the fox is not Heaney's habitual animal. It belongs to his friend, and a key influence on his first volume, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966): Ted Hughes. Hughes was a truly feral poet, scavenging like a fox on the margins of urban modernity. His poetry has the hot stink of animal flesh, whereas this fox of Heaney's is cunningly hedged with literariness […] His compulsion to cross back through the fox's startled eye is a symptom of his loss of unity with nature. (203)

A corresponding difference is seen in Heaney's increasingly cosmopolitan outlook, compared to Hughes's insistence on immediate experiences of his surroundings, also noted by Bate:

> In contrast to Seamus Heaney, who began as a poet of turf, bog and locality, but has become ever more cosmopolitan in his interests, Hughes dug himself in a smallholding in the far west of England. In his later poetry, he is always driving away from London, back to the farm. He rarely went abroad, and when he did the places which inspired him were the Australian outback and the wilderness of Alaska. (29)

These physical journeys reflect Hughes's and Heaney's poetic journey's and the development of their respective ecological thinking.

Clark points out that the questions that face ecocritics in the 2010s are of an entirely different, or

at least additional, order than those that informed early ecocriticism in the 1990s. Concerns regarding preservation of individual species or local pollution have been added to by complex climate change issues, requiring new and challenging theoretical and conceptual approaches. As a result, ecocriticism is rapidly changing and diversifying, even as this thesis is being written. For ecocritics, Clark notes, "there seems no off-the shelf oppositional stance ready to be used or adapted, only a great deal of new work to be done" (2010: 147).

Among the new critical and theoretical directions initiated, a general trend can be recognised away from what Kate Soper has called a nature-endorsing to a nature-skeptical view, from a commitment to mimesis to deconstruction, posthumanism and queer theory. This change has profound effects on the notion of what ecopoetics can or should be, leaning away from poetry that thematises nature towards poems that offer, to use Heaney's formulation from a different context, "images and symbols adequate to our predicament" (*Preoccupations*, 57-58). This development is arguably leading away from the direction initially taken by ecocriticism, towards a connection with and accessibility from outside the academy, in exchange for increasing theoretical sophistication. One of the challenges for future ecocriticism is to maintain both these aims at once.

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