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| University of Sheffield – School of English |
| 'This Being Called Human' |
| Nature and Human Identity in W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett. |
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**Dedications**

I have to thank my family: Kathryn and Paul Bates, Enid Jones, Grahame Bates, and my dearly departed grandparents; Norah Bates, and Ken Jones. Without the love, support, and care you have provided over the years, I would never have achieved this.

I cannot begin to express my thanks to Annis Cordy, who has been so patient, considerate, and loving throughout this process. Words fail me when I think of how much I have depended upon you these last few years, how you’ve supported (and disciplined) me, and I hope my actions will speak of my immeasurable gratitude for years to come.

Dr. Jill Tattersall and Tim Cordy for your hospitality, generosity, and support – this thesis might never have been completed without your generosity.

This project is, of course, massively indebted to my academic supervisors; Prof. Sue Vice and Prof. Adam Piette. Thank you for your guidance, inspiration, and encouragement throughout this process, and for refusing to let me give up.

**Abstract**

This thesis examines the representation of human identity in regards to the relationships and interactions with non-human nature in the writing of W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett. Through a discussion of the processes through which humans inhabit, delineate, and preserve settlements and cultural artefacts, the analysis proceeds to interrogate the impact of these upon the depiction of the urban and rural landscapes, and the interaction of humanity with the natural world. This approach depends upon a phenomenological strand of ecocritical thought, informed by the writing of Martin Heidegger and Robert Pogue Harrison, in order to establish the underlying signification of human landscapes via land ownership and memorialisation.

The thesis then approaches the impact of modern technology and modes of living, particularly in industrial cities, upon the process of human self-identification, and the impact of this upon human interactions with animals. The discussion that follows approaches the fluidity of the human state, informed by Eric L. Santner's writing on creatureliness, and Carolyn Merchant's research regarding the role of empiricism in setting the precedent for human domination of the natural world. This leads to an analysis of the pastoral trope and notions of land ownership, through which the narrators of Sebald's and Beckett's writing hope to elide the human/nature division so that they might escape the dehumanising influence of the modern city, and the ecophobic worldview preserved within it.

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**Introduction**

*The religion, art, ideas, institutions, and science through which a culture expresses itself are ultimately reflections of the ways it relates to nature*. – Robert Pogue Harrison.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Samuel Beckett and W.G. Sebald are not authors often discussed in relation to one another, nor too frequently in relation to ecocritical theory. Indeed, the reasons for their inclusion as the primary focus of the present study have been the subject of many discussions at conferences, with colleagues, and the occasional individual outside of the academy: Beckett's artistic expression, with its focus upon concision, his practice of editing work by cutting swathes of text from the manuscript until the end result arose, condensed and saturated with meaning, and his unworldly dramatic pieces that position his subjects beyond the recognisable bounds of our own surroundings, leaves little room for the detailed representation of the biosphere to take centre stage. Sebald's writing, barring his late collections of poems, takes the form of much more detailed, sprawling accounts of human and natural history which bring the human and non-human worlds into close contact, however his work primarily frames the natural world as a foil against which human history can be discussed rather than forming the focus of his discussions. Despite their differing approaches and degrees of direct engagement with the topic of this thesis, significant elements of these authors' bodies of work complement the other's discussion of environmental interactions: Sebald and Beckett both draw much of their literary and artistic technique from the European modernist tradition, complete with its cautious embrace of urbanism and mechanisation, and their focus upon personal and collective trauma as an important influence upon the experience of being within the world. Both authors are united in the end-points each identifies as arising from this process however: the gradual obsolescence of the human body and the eradication of the existing natural order. The key difference here is how Sebald and Beckett represent this process and the effect it has upon the biosphere.

Both Sebald and Beckett write about the annihilation of the natural world in some capacity, and it is their differing approaches to this and the theme’s continuing presence throughout both authors' bodies of work that makes them ideal subjects for this investigation. Sebald's novel *The Rings of Saturn* prominently discusses the rapid decimation of European plant life as a result of Dutch Elm disease, followed rapidly by the 1987 hurricane that further devastated East Anglia's woods, animal, and plant life.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the aftermath Sebald finds the once fertile earth transformed into 'barren clay' after the unimpeded heat of the sun 'destroyed all the shade-loving plants so that it seemed as if we were living on the edge of an infertile plain'.[[3]](#footnote-3) The birds, with nowhere to roost, leave the area so that in the weeks that followed 'there was now not a living sound' – a cataclysmic denouement for the novel's penultimate chapter, and the point of termination for the narrator's imaginative tour of East Anglia before the final section's overview of the silk trade throughout history. In Sebald's fiction the extinction of all life is never far from the narrator’s mind: whether it is the barren expanse of the Orford Ness military compound, the omnipotence of combustion engines and fossil fuels throughout industry, or the countless accounts of humanity's tendency towards war, hunting, and the Holocaust, the human species remains teetering on the edge of extinction, and is forever threatening to eradicate the entirety of the biosphere through its self-destructive practices.

Where Beckett's texts often focus upon the personal and philosophical implications of identity and being in the world, there is also a common strand of post-catastrophe experiences in his writing. The play *Endgame* famously occurs in a sealed room, surrounded by a world where, it is claimed, there is 'no more nature'.[[4]](#footnote-4) Similarly *Waiting for Godot* occurs at the side of a country road, and yet rather than rolling fields and agrarian scenes the audience is confronted with a singular tree - the production of *Godot* directed by Beckett himself with the San Quentin Players featured a particularly stark backdrop, featuring only impressionistic variegated grey clouds. *Rough for Theatre I* unfolds within a city littered with debris, the human population notable by their absence, and toward the piece's conclusion B informs A that 'It seems to me sometimes the earth must have got stuck, one sunless day, in the heart of winter, in the grey of evening'.[[5]](#footnote-5) The sense of, and presentation of, historical repetition and timelessness that typify this piece, *Endgame*, and *Waiting for Godot* reveal Beckett's body of work as it focuses upon a world that has ceased to function as it does in the present natural order: without day and night, or the seasons, and the passage of time, the development of ecosystems, evolution of species, and rejuvenation of the planet cannot occur. The planet has stopped dead, in a horrifyingly literal sense. The human being is not exempt from this system either, often trapped or unable to age and die as they might hope, reflecting the human condition at its unnatural point of failure. This thread of Beckett's work is at its most focussed in his stream of consciousness pieces, most notably *The Unnameable* and *The Calmative* wherein the characters' lives are artificially extended for as long as the text exists and is read, and *Catastrophe* where the worn and weary human is preserved in a pseudo-theatrical exhibition of the human species.

Peter Boxall is one of a limited number of academics to have addressed the writing of Sebald and Beckett together in conjunction with an ecocritical or biophilic approach.[[6]](#footnote-6) As Boxall argues, '[Beckett, Sebald, and Coetzee] are preoccupied by what happens when a human looks into the eyes of an animal, and by what John Berger calls the "narrow abyss of non-comprehension" across which such a gaze must pass.' Boxall's article goes on to suggest that the incomprehensibility of the animal's emotional life, despite the intimacy of the exchanged glance, extends to humans and the understanding of others' perspectives in the writing of Sebald and Beckett. Boxall writes that '[t]he verse does not reach through the page towards the gaze but settles itself beneath it, behind it, relinquishing the ethical challenge and promise of the face to face'. The emotional and ethical implications of this are twofold. Firstly Boxall acknowledges the impossibility of total empathy; the perspective of the subject, whether animal or human, is uniquely theirs and cannot be readily known by the observer or reader. Secondly, text is a medium that has a limited capacity to express the full meaning of emotions and ideas of another being to the reader. Boxall argues that in the writing of Sebald and Beckett the animal other is isolated from the human by the boundary of vision, which is representative of a wider set of behaviours, thoughts, and communicative acts, and that this division cannot be bridged.

Boxall suggests that the key commonality that must be discussed in Beckett's and Sebald's representations of human and animal interactions is the interaction of their gazes as each attempts to interpret and interact with its counterpart. Specifically, Boxall posits that in Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*, the (potentially) accidental inclusion of Sebald's reflection in a photograph of a Bazaar window in Terezín[[7]](#footnote-7) represents '[t]he becoming one of man and horse [...] achieved not by erasing the gulf that separates them' but by 'bringing that threshold itself [...] onto the surface of the page'.[[8]](#footnote-8) What Boxall's analysis fails to acknowledge is that the horse in this episode is in fact a statuette, depicted mid-gallop with a human rider; the gulf being bridged here is not that between human and animal, but between the present moment and a cultural artefact. The meeting of gazes unites the reader, the photographer, the author, Austerlitz, and the maker of the statuette as each interprets and relates their understandings of the horse as a cultural object to one another. We are being made privy to various human ideas of animals as transportation, companions, even as aesthetic objects, but the animal's identity and emotional life remain unknowable. This thesis aims to follow Boxall's direction in seeking to reveal further the symbolic nature of human interactions with the natural world as they are represented in literature, whilst acknowledging that this cognitive and empathetic divide is mostly impassable. Instead of representing the coming together of human and animal minds, as Boxall argues, the statuette is one in a long line of animal images in Sebald and Beckett that are indicative of the constantly shifting idea of nature as it is reformulated by humans over time. It is these changing historical and cultural interactions with the non-human world that this thesis will discuss in the hope of better exemplifying the literary significance of ecological representation.

**I – Rationale: Emigration, Trauma, and Intertextuality**

The selection of Sebald and Beckett as the primary subjects of this thesis can be ascribed to a combination of biographical coincidences, and the combination of the pairing’s grounding within a modernist literary tradition. A point of intersection, beyond the appearance of Beckett's portrait in Sebald's poetic collection *Unrecounted*, that is worthy of note is that both Sebald and Beckett were émigrés. Beckett's decision to remain in France, after finally 'accept[ing]' that he was 'what [mother's] savage loving has made me',[[9]](#footnote-9) feeling that his psychological traumas, culminating in bouts of paralysis and extreme anxiety, and the influence of his upbringing could only be escaped if he physically removed himself from the influence of his mother and his native land.[[10]](#footnote-10) The author and his mother, as a result of their continuing disagreements, had failed to coexist in a matter satisfactory to them both since Beckett's return from London, and so Beckett left to settle in Paris in October 1937.[[11]](#footnote-11) James Knowlson details how, while Beckett's work is 'full of Ireland, he had become convinced that he could never function properly there as a writer', especially given his experiences of censorship in the Irish press, his strained family life, and the ongoing libel dispute between the family of Willie 'Boss' Sinclair and Oliver Gogarty, in which Beckett was to serve as witness.[[12]](#footnote-12) The public humiliation of Beckett at the trial, after which *The Irish Times* reported Beckett to be an unreliable witness and 'a bawd and a blasphemer', only strengthened Beckett's resolve to remain away from Ireland wherever possible, as well as further souring his relationship with his mother, who was humiliated by the coverage.[[13]](#footnote-13)

W.G. Sebald, similarly, had left his country of birth as a result of his contempt for the idea of writing within his home country, as well as a strained familial relationship; primarily his inability to reconcile his love for his father with his participation in the war, and later his father's silence regarding his role serving with the Wehrmacht.[[14]](#footnote-14) This, coupled with the cultural burden of being a German born at the end of the Second World War and the oppressive academic environment he found himself within, precipitated Sebald's decision to leave Germany for good. When asked by Carole Angier whether Sebald could discuss the war with his parents, Sebald replied:

Not really. Though my father is still alive, at eighty-five... it's the ones who have a conscience who die early, it grinds you down. The fascist supporters live forever. Or the passive resisters. That's what they all are now in their own minds. I always try to explain to my parents that there is no difference between passive resistance and passive collaboration - it's the same thing. But they cannot understand that.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The author's disgust with the widespread acceptance of such problematic moralising in post-War Germany, combined with Sebald's disillusionment with the German academy, populated with professors who it transpired 'were all ardent supporters of the [Nazi] regime in one way or another',[[16]](#footnote-16) led to the author's enrolment as a foreign languages assistant in Manchester at the age of twenty-one. Sebald lived the remainder of his life, like Beckett, as an émigré, writing at a remove from the environments his writing represents. Both authors' positions as naturalised outsiders within their adopted cultures is evident throughout their bodies of work, populated as they are by isolated nomads, vagrants, and marginalised figures. This narrative positioning allows Beckett and Sebald to reflect the influence of the Second World War and the Holocaust, industrialisation, and rapid urbanisation upon human interactions with the natural world as well as the concept of nature as a set of phenomena beyond the human realm of experience.

Where Sebald could not be expected to have any memories of direct exposure to the Second World War itself, having been born in 1944, Samuel Beckett's experience of the conflict was much more immediate. Not only did Beckett help translate documents for the French resistance cell 'Gloria SMH' during the German occupation of France, but he was actively pursued by the Gestapo once his resistance cell was betrayed by a double agent, Robert Alesch.[[17]](#footnote-17) Finding some security in Roussillon, Beckett had to await the end of the war, all the while hoping not to not be discovered by local officials and informants, or betrayed again.[[18]](#footnote-18) Initial hardships including a severe lack of food and financial difficulties were to remain long after the war as rationing continued throughout the now near-deserted Paris. As Beckett wrote to George Reavey, 'life in Paris is pretty well impossible, except for millionaires': [[19]](#footnote-19) high rates of rent, scarcity of employment, and limited resources made the prospect of remaining in Paris untenable for the foreseeable future. Beckett went on to enrol in the French Red Cross, and became an ambulance driver in St-Lô which was already known as 'la Capitale des Ruines', where 'of 2600 buildings 2000 [were] completely wiped out, 400 badly damaged and 200 "only" slightly'.[[20]](#footnote-20) Beckett's experiences of the war were therefore not restricted to the lasting psychological and societal impact it had upon its survivors, their families, and the wider culture of a nation as Sebald's were, but included direct exposure to the realities of occupation and the difficult processes of reparation and healing that followed. Beckett witnessed the full course of the war and its devastating effects as an adult, only too aware of the psychological and physical suffering it caused whilst living in a nation occupied by the enemy, a position unavailable to Sebald who was born shortly before the war's conclusion. Sebald and Beckett will inevitably have been influenced differently by these historic events as a result of this, with Sebald's approach focussing primarily upon the influence of post-memory and the aftermath of trauma as it affects cultural ideas of natural history and Beckett's writing more frequently operating within the scene of trauma, examining the changing attitudes of the ill-fated individual as they suffer at the hands of an uncaring world.

For Sebald, the piles of rubble that remained in many German cities were a disquieting reality of his upbringing, the true significance of which was only revealed later in life: in *Vertigo* the narrator recalls how 'almost every week we saw the mountains of rubble in places like Berlin or Hamburg, which for a long time I did not associate with the destruction wrought in the closing years of the war, knowing nothing of it, but considered them a natural condition of all larger cities'.[[21]](#footnote-21) The war remains an unknown quantity for this fictionalised younger Sebald; it was only with age that an awareness of the war's implications could be gained, and even then it was only after his emigration that Sebald felt he could effectively represent and discuss this disastrous period of his nation's history. Despite the superficial acceptance of these ruinous landscapes by the young Sebald, there remains a latent disgust that permeates his accounts of these environments; in his short piece 'To the Brothel by way of Switzerland: On Kafka's travel diaries', Sebald writes 'On Munich station, where you could see huge mounds of rubble and ruins as you stood in the forecourt, I felt unwell and had to throw up'.[[22]](#footnote-22) The massive trauma perpetuated by the carpet bombing campaigns conducted upon the civilian population of Germany, rises to the surface and disorients Sebald; the author retrospectively infuses these landscapes with a catastrophic aura, relabeling them as the site of horrific deeds committed against innocents. Sebald's decision to include these details in order to nuance the representation of his childhood understanding of post-war Germany is indicative of his desire to demonstrate how these environments may have been understood by, and how they may have shaped the development of, a child raised in post-war Germany and subsequently affected his discussion of the war's impact upon European history and wider cultural ideas of the urban landscape in post-War Germany.

It is this underlying sense of dread and revulsion within an ordinarily familiar and nurturing zone that shapes the writing of both authors; especially their representations of society, humans, animals, and the physical environment. The underlying systems of engagement with the environment remain, for each author, those of the individual - from the unending chatter of Beckett's *Unnameable*, through the peripatetic accounts of his vagrant protagonists, through to the traumas that underpin the experiences of Sebald's narrators and characters, it is the filter of individual environmental experiences that determines the representation of the world within each author's work. Not only is there a symptomatic approach to representing trauma and environmental unease in Sebald's writing, but in Beckett there is a similarly elusive concern with the immediate psychological and personal means by which the individual reinterprets the sensory data they receive regarding their place within the world. As Mark Nixon shows in his study of the author's German Diaries, Beckett saw in Franz Kafka some elements of a psychological kindred spirit, following his precursor's example by 'recognising the therapeutic effect of writing' whilst acknowledging that the act of writing did not equal a solution to the underlying causes of his bouts of depression and anxiety.[[23]](#footnote-23); [[24]](#footnote-24) As Nixon adds, the familiarity of Beckett with Kafka's writing is difficult to quantify; themes, his later reading of the Czech author is known to be extensive - it is after 1945 that Beckett became fully versed in Kafka's body of work.[[25]](#footnote-25) Despite this uncertainty regarding Beckett's degree of familiarity with Kafka before the Second World War, Beckett was almost certainly aware of, and probably read some work by, Kafka as a result of his association with the literary journal *Transition*. The editor of *Transition*, Eugene Jolas, was a known admirer of Kafka's writing and often featured new translations and fragments wherever possible. This resulted in Beckett's 'Sedendo et Quiescendo' appearing alongside three of Kafka's short stories in the journal's twenty first issue, and a review piece by Beckett being published in the same issue as the concluding segment of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis'.[[26]](#footnote-26) Beckett's earlier narratives do appear to share certain thematic and metaphorical affinities with Kafka's writing, namely the degeneration of the individual's physical and psychological state, and the transformation of ordinarily familiar and safe zones into oppressive zones that repel the central figures of the narrative, either in reaction to their altered state of being or because they are now perceived as distressing as a result of the character's altered understanding of their environment arising from their newfound perspective.

We can see this process at work in Beckett's 'The Expelled', where a description of the narrator’s impaired mobility is followed up with some rudimentary self-diagnostic psychoanalysis. Describing his inability to integrate with wider society, as a result of his difficulty walking, the narrator recounts:

Stiffness of the lower limbs, as if nature had denied me knees, extraordinary splaying of the feet to right and left of the line of march. The trunk, on the contrary, as if by the effect of a compensatory mechanism, was as flabby as an old ragbag, tossing wildly to the unpredictable jolts of the pelvis. I have often tried to correct these defects, to stiffen my bust, flex my knees and walk with my feet one in front of the other, for I had at least five or six, but it always ended in the same way, I mean by a loss of equilibrium, followed by a fall.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The narrator's ungainly means of locomotion is used to alter the reader's understanding of the character away from that of a particularly eccentric disabled man to that of an entity almost unrecognisable as human. Beckett's narrative presents the reader with a cruel caricature of a man with improperly formed and splayed lower limbs and a limp, saggy mass in the place of an abdomen, joined together by a wildly jolting pelvis; the character is, in this passage, more a flailing embodiment of the id than model citizen. This, combined with the character's possession of 'at least five or six' feet further positions the narrator away from the commonly accepted model of human physiology despite his attempts to correct his gait, and it is when the narrator attempts to make these corrections that he most commonly meets with injurious mishaps, a system of images that repeats throughout the text. This metaphorical inhumanity is then explained as 'due, in my opinion, in part at least, to a certain leaning from which I have never been able to free myself' - the childhood tendency toward concealing his own incontinence.[[28]](#footnote-28) As a result of this past habit, the narrator not only adapted his walking to minimise the inconvenience to himself whenever he had soiled his clothing, but also 'became sour and mistrustful, a little before [his] time'.[[29]](#footnote-29) Beckett's narrator in 'TheExpelled' demonstrates the centrality of the carnivalesque body to the author's literary technique: the self-defecation and physical peculiarities of the individual concerned throughout the text are shown to arise directly from the body's design as a breeding, consuming, and defecating entity. The incompatibility of this truth with the demands of a wider society that strives to appear removed from the natural world then causes the character's behaviour to manifest itself in this way as they simultaneously attempt to conceal, and indulge, their self-gratification at the behest of their natural bodily processes.

Beckett's narratives, and their protagonists, frequently remind the reader of the unity of function our bodies have with those of other animals, and it is in doing this that the carnivalesque mode of inhabiting the landscape allows Beckett's writing to interrogate the modern attitude towards the body and its affinity with/division from the natural world. Rather than maintaining a sense of propriety, of concealing the base functions of the body from polite society – leading to his collection *More Pricks than Kicks* falling foul of the Irish Censorship Act – Beckett's texts often seem to delight in foregrounding the actions of the orifices and humours:

It passed the time, time flew when I scratched myself. Real scratching is superior to masturbation, in my opinion. [...] I itched all over, on the privates, in the bush up to the navel, under the arms, in the arse, and then patches of eczema and psoriasis that I could set raging merely by thinking of them. It was in the arse I had the most pleasure, I stuck in my forefinger up to the knuckle. Later, if I had to shit, the pain was atrocious. But I hardly shat any more.[[30]](#footnote-30)

These extensive accounts of the body's most intimate functions, desires, and indulgences places Beckett's depictions of the human body in line with the Bakhtinian grotesque, relishing the life-affirming and equalising universality of life, death, excretion, and pleasure-seeking. It is through the grotesque that Beckett engages most directly with ecology; as Michael Bell reasons '[t]he carnivalesque body is also an ecological body, a body interacting and exchanging with the environment, bringing in solids and fluids at the top and sending them back out through the bottom.'[[31]](#footnote-31) It is as a result of this association between the carnivalesque body's fixation upon satisfying these primal desires and the natural world that Beckett's narrator is so readily shunned by his fellows; not only is his open self-gratification unwelcome in modern 'polite society' but it also acts as a visual reminder of the fallacy upon which urban modernity is dependent – that humans are somehow different and separate from nature, privileged to control it and powerful enough to master it.

The ubiquity of these constants – birth, death, consumption, and defecation – extends beyond the individual's interactions with their immediate environment and into the wider world-view of Beckett's fictional universe:

We have here the typical grotesque picture of the world, in which the generating and defecating body is fused with nature and with cosmic phenomena [...] we further see various kitchen and household materials and activities in their carnivalesque aspect (soup served to oxen, oats fed to dogs).[[32]](#footnote-32)

Despite Bakhtin's subject being François Rabelais, the cycling of living matter from plant, to human, to animal, to plant in *Watt* functions much the same, establishing the same system of interconnectedness and ecological interdependence as that to which early humans were subjects. Rather than discard unwanted food or the contents of the master's chamber pot via the bin or nearest convenient drain, the group that inhabit Mr Knott's house consume a rough gruel made from whatever is currently available, and waste nothing by feeding any leftovers to a specially maintained dog (or one of their backups), and using the resulting human and animal faeces to fertilise the garden in order to acquire further crops.[[33]](#footnote-33) Beckett's narrators, and their grotesque fixations upon the bodily humours and functions acts as a conduit through which his writing can discuss the underlying divisions between human ideas of nature, and the self-definition of a 'human' that is required to maintain the illusion of separation from the natural world.

Sebald's indebtedness to Kafka is much more immediately apparent than Beckett's, and affects the representation of the characters' inhabitation of place in a similar manner, using the literary mode to interrogate the personal and social history that shapes the individual's psychological state and subsequently their behaviour. Sebald's novel *Vertigo* contains an entire section dedicated to Kafka – 'Dr. K takes the Waters at Riva'.[[34]](#footnote-34) Sebald's decision to rename Kafka as 'Dr. K.' Grants the section's subject a required degree of anonymity due to the semi-fictional nature of the account, with the character being a composite formed partly of biographical details regarding Kafka's life, combined with elements of Kafka's fiction before being subjected to additional fictional embellishment by Sebald . This complication is only furthered by the later arrival of the hunter Gracchus,[[35]](#footnote-35) one of Kafka's literary creations that has crossed the threshold of the original text and entered the fictional world inhabited by Sebald's biographical Kafka, exiting one fiction to inhabit the extra-diegetic world of the fictional Kafka described in Sebald's novel.[[36]](#footnote-36) This connection between Sebald, Beckett, and Kafka is not the subject of this thesis, but it does illustrate an important commonality of my chosen subjects: Sebald and Beckett both manipulate the idea of fiction, and meta-fiction, in order to elicit discomfort and empathy in the reader, to create tension and suspense, and to examine the experience of marginalised individuals in modern urban and rural spaces. Their admiration, and to some extent emulation, of Kafka's techniques also demonstrates clearly their awareness of the social and personal psychological influences upon the bodily engagement of the individual with other humans, non-human entities, and the environment. As will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the influence of psychological trauma, self-identification, and social histories can be vital to the representation of the biosphere in the writing of both Sebald and Beckett.

**II – Approach and Structure**

The critical field of ecocriticism is characterised by its malleability, although the prevailing definition at present is that provided by Camilo Gomides:

The field of enquiry that analyses and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Gomides' definition functions well as a statement of intent whilst remaining open enough for a variety of methodologies to be applied without issue. This thesis seeks to align, broadly, with this approach to criticism, promoting the discussion of literary works and their representations of their fictional and extra-diegetic environments, especially those not commonly thought of as ecologically minded. The aim of this research is therefore to demonstrate the viability of branching ecocritical approaches into texts that fall beyond the 'green canon', seeking to discuss the representation of human and natural interactions in texts and isolated images where the author might not have consciously written with the direct intent to advocate environmental responsibility. To this effect, this thesis sits broadly within what Lawrence Buell calls '"second-wave" or revisionist ecocriticism',[[38]](#footnote-38) focussing upon a range of literary environmental depictions rather than a restricted set of nature poems and wilderness fiction.

Much like Buell, by discussing the environmental aspects of these authors' work, I aim to investigate how the modernist tradition and changing attitudes towards natural and human-made environments become manifest in the representation of the biosphere in the writing of my subjects, W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett.[[39]](#footnote-39) This will allow the thesis to discuss more thoroughly the impact of the two World Wars and the increasing mechanisation of daily life upon human ideas and interactions with the wider environment, especially given the propensity of both authors to depict their characters occupying desolate and war-damaged locales. The post-war urban landscape is often nightmarish, uncaring, or otherworldly in the writing of Sebald and Beckett, which raises the key questions this thesis hopes to address: looking to demonstrate how both Beckett and Sebald represent the urban landscape's effect upon the individual's sense of occupation within the local and wider environments, and how this is reflected within the literary technique, language, and contextualising of the text.

The first chapter seeks to expand upon our understanding of Beckett's and Sebald's literary representations of landscape perception and those ecologies which immediately relate to the central subjective perceiver of their texts. Taking the lead of ecocritical and phenomenological writers such as Robert Pogue Harrison, Martin Heidegger, and Lawrence Buell, the process of inhabiting and delineating place so that it might be imbued with emotional and historical meaning is discussed so that the environmental perception of the characters who inhabit the worlds created by Sebald and Beckett might be better analysed. Through an analysis of each author's representation of the traumatic psychological states and physical impairments often exhibited by their characters, it is established that each author utilises a highly subjective form of landscape engagement in their writing which is dependent upon the suffering of their focalisers. The centrality of the traumatised and injured perceiver shapes much of the later discussion of these topics throughout the thesis. The root of environmental and ecological interactions in the context of eco-phenomenological critical thought alters the critic's reading of Sebald's realism, and Beckett's anti-realism, so that each demonstrates the variability of landscape perception in light of personal, social, and ecological change. From this discussion of the varying methods through which Beckett and Sebald demonstrate the establishment of the characters' being-in-the-world, this thesis then expands to discuss specifically the social, modern urban, animal/wilderness, and pastoral traditions as they are used by Beckett and Sebald to examine human engagement with, exploitation, and fear of the natural world.

Having discussed the literary representation of landscape perception, in regards to personal variables such as psychological and physical illness, the second chapter expands this discussion to account for the influence of social and cultural ideas of landscape upon the inhabitation of place. This thesis argues that the role of the city, as a communally designated place and protective zone seemingly removed from the influence of nature, is that of a Derridean archive – the urban zone is itself testament to, and protector of, its own social and natural histories. Taking its lead from the writing of Edward S. Casey, and Jacques Derrida, this chapter argues that the urban zone is ultimately designed to resist the place-erasing influence of nature and preserve the human cultural artefacts contained within. In the writing of W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett, this is of limited efficacy however; often the narrators suffer bouts of disorientation and mental confusion when faced with contradictory cultural histories at sites of memorialisation and within urban spaces. Through the discussion of these points of historical conflict, and the processes at work in effecting them, this chapter intends to continue the discussion of the theoretical groundwork of this and the first chapter into the following sections, expanding upon these ideas in order to discuss the specific influence of modern industrial urbanism upon place formation, degradation, and individual perception.

Taking these ideas forward the third chapter seeks to establish the specific role of the urban centre and modernity in this context within Beckett's writing. As an author active throughout the 20th century, Beckett's writing spanned not only the Second World War, but bore witness to the mechanisation of warfare and industry, the advent of the affordable automobile and the accompanying decline of the horse and cart, and the expanding monopoly of the urban experience as the default mode of living. Through the experiences of Watt, Mercier and Camier, and the characters of *Waiting for Godot* this chapter analyses the means by which Beckett represents the division of human and natural realms, as well as the manner in which his writing reflects the malleability of this distinction in light of the uncertainty of what constitutes a truly 'natural' state of being. Finally the discussion turns to the difficulties of establishing and maintaining personal and social histories in the face of the natural world's continual effacement of human monuments as it works in tandem with the influence of mass transit in Augéan non-places, rendering monumentalising processes impotent throughout urban centres and across large swathes of the countryside.

Chapter four discusses the ethics of treating animals as natural resources for the betterment of human experience and the representation of such acts in the writing of Sebald and Beckett, and while this is a highly subjective issue (affecting not only one's literary analysis but also one's wider perspective and lifestyle) I outline a rationale for the following interpretation of the representation of human and animal interactions in Sebald and Beckett. Tracing the modern implementation of the Western Judaeo-Christian endorsement of the enslavement and exploitation of animal and natural entities via the work of Simon Estok, and Peter Singer, this chapter goes on to discuss the means in which both Sebald and Beckett acknowledge the difficulty of legitimising humanity's exploitation of the natural world. Following this, this chapter moves on to discuss the over-zealous manner in which humanity jealously asserts its ownership of natural resources, whilst turning a blind eye to the duty of care that must run alongside such ownership – pollution, the over-use of chemical agents, and the resulting collateral damage are all ignored by humans throughout the writing of W.G. Sebald, whereas in Beckett it is often already too late to prevent the catastrophic fallout caused by modern human lifestyles. Finally the discussion turns to the role occupied by many of Beckett's narrators within the human/nature discourse; constructing a malleable form that is rejected by others as inhuman, yet is far from truly animal. By drawing upon Walther Benjamin and Eric L. Santner this chapter discusses the diverse effects the creaturely narrator's mode of being has upon the representation of humans, animals, and society.

Finally these topics lead to the discussion of pastoral as a literary mode symptomatic of trauma, prolonged human manipulation of the biosphere, and the temporality of this human dominion over nature. Here this thesis also seeks to discuss the pastoral as a means of removing the individual from the human systems of identification and historicising that typify much of our interaction and interpretation of the natural world. Drawing upon Terry Gifford and Donna Coffey's complementary readings of pastoral as a literary genre directed toward ideas of the natural landscape as a place of healing and regeneration throughout history, the role of pastoral within Sebald's narrative writing is examined as it constitutes a false refuge for his myriad reclusive and traumatised characters. The ultimate failure of these refuges is then tied to the tropes discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis: the distorted perception of natural spaces as areas offering healing and salvation or humans, the impossibility of occupying a truly 'natural' landscape due to the constructedness of the human concept of nature, and the latent artificiality of most of the natural spaces to which these characters turn. The ultimate failure of the pastoral mode in providing solace for those who seek it is then analysed alongside the tradition of pastoral as a genre with strong associations with the landed gentry and upper classes, culminating in a discussion of the decline of these strata of British society in post-war Britain and the disintegration of the estates they maintained. The implications this has for the pastoral mode in Sebald significantly alter the role country estates, their surrounding parks and lands, and their inhabitants can play. Where previously pastoral provided a structure around which narratives of rejuvenation through indulgence in nature can be achieved, in Sebald's texts the healing power of the natural world can only act to undo the damage wrought by humans; it is a system through which Sebald's characters can voluntarily relinquish their influence upon the natural world, seeking moral salvation but often losing their health, mental wellbeing, or lives in the process.

These analyses will combine, as the thesis proceeds, to formulate a fuller ecocritical approach to the authors in question; one that embraces the impact of urban experience, social and technological change, and the constructedness of place in its discussion of literature. By approaching the writing of Sebald and Beckett in this way, this thesis will demonstrate how this method can be used to investigate further the prevalent themes of these texts: the significance of selfhood in the modern age, the processes of historicising and commemoration, and the relationship of the human race with the wider biosphere. This work also aims to lay the groundwork for future critical work that might expand upon this approach so as to facilitate wider debate in ecocritical research as to the manner in which changing attitudes towards the environment have altered its representation over time in the arts.

**1 – Phenomenological Ecology and Place Perception**

*The walker's approach to viewing nature is a phenomenological one and the scientist's approach is a much more incisive one, but they all belong together.* – W.G. Sebald*[[40]](#footnote-40)*

Owing to the distinct approaches towards environmental representation and ethics represented in the writing of W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett, this study must begin with a discussion of the perception of the biosphere by the solitary perceivers who are the subjects of these authors' works. Both authors are characterised by their consistent focus upon the experience of the individual; whether it is the fictionalised author of Sebald's ambulatory novels, or the torrent of speech voiced by Beckett's disembodied consciousnesses, the environments of these texts are consistently described from the perspective of an individual, isolated consciousness. This chapter forms the basis of much of the later discussion of these authors' works within this thesis as originating within the ethical and perceptual bases of the individual characters concerned, and the reader's interpretation refracted as it is through this literary perspective and their own experience of reading the text in the present. It is as a result of these authors' propensity for first person narration, and their examination of individuals as they actively engage with their environments, that their works are so fruitfully examined from an approach that originates within phenomenological eco-criticism. By approaching W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett via the writing of Paul Virilio, Martin Heidegger and Robert Pogue Harrison, this section will investigate the importance of the author's use of first person narratives as a crucial factor in establishing an understanding of their representation of the changing makeup of post-industrial societies and their relationships with the environment. It is through the manipulation of the reader's exposure to the literary environment, often via the use of mentally or physically impaired focalisers, that both authors demonstrate the vital importance of the subject in establishing a literary environment and shaping the reader's interpretation of humanity's place within the biosphere.

One cannot begin to analyse the textual representation of the environments we inhabit without first acknowledging the processes through which we engage with them on a personal level, and the manner in which the author recreates this process within the text. As Paul Virilio writes, the ‘self-construction’ of the environment as one perceives of and interacts with it, ‘is a common reality, predating every construction, which the vital needs of the ambulatory subject impose on each and every one of us’.[[41]](#footnote-41) In regards to the literary depiction of the environment, this would mean that the interpretation of such spaces is simultaneously that of constructing an environment in which the literary subject can exist, and of their being within this constructed zone; it is the perceiver's presence within this environment that grants it narrative existence and its function within the text. Virilio's argument also serves to highlight the utility of ecological literary criticism: in the writing of a novel, the author formulates a set diegetic environment in the act of writing the text, which the reader is then able to experience through reinterpretation of the author's lexical and stylistic choices. Much like in their engagement with the extra-diegetic world, the reader must go through a process of interpretation and world-construction in order to formulate a working model of the literary environment in order to engage and interact with it as a constructed space.[[42]](#footnote-42) As the reader's understanding of the text-world originates within the collaborative forces of the author's representation of the environment as it is reinterpreted by the reader it follows that the reading of a given text will change as wider attitudes towards the natural world and climate change affect the reader's perception of the biosphere.

Virilio's argument works in accordance with Felix Guattari’s conceptualisation of ecosophy, the study of a complete philosophy of the environment, comprising the interpretive underpinning of human subjectivity, social relations (and by extension social constructs such as the city, and ‘nature’), and the environment as it is engaged with as a world of objects.[[43]](#footnote-43) The environment acts as the underlying material that forms the basis from which the individual formulates their understanding of their world, with this world-view in turn shaping the social aspects of ecological thought through the sharing of these ideas by means of discussion and artistic representation. In this way, all art is open to ecological critique, as every work of art represents an individual's environmental understanding as it enters the social domain and on occasion becomes a part of a culture’s social consciousness. As such, Heideggerian phenomenology also has a role to play within the ecocritic’s practice, as it is the aim of both approaches to understand how it is that the individual perceives, and engages with, their world.

When combined, these theories indicate that it is the highly subjective nature of environmental perception that renders the literary depiction of the environment tied to the perception of space by the individual. Having been depicted by the author as an array of interrelated objects within the diegetic realm, the makeup of an environment is then reinterpreted by the reader based upon the content of the text combined with their own understanding of the environment and its relationship with humanity. However, all points of reference within this scheme radiate from a central, subjective point; the focaliser of the text. Regardless of their trustworthiness, degree of knowledge regarding the wider schema of the text, or (lack of) omnipotence, the degree of detail revealed to the reader via the focaliser is the exclusive means of apprehension available to the reader. When Jacques Austerlitz describes his journey from Holešovice to Lovosice the narrator recounts the scene as relayed to him:

As one leaves [Lovosice], the appearance of which I can no longer remember, said Austerlitz, a wide panorama opens up to the north: a field, poison-green in colour, in the foreground, behind it a petrochemicals plant half eaten away by rust[...][[44]](#footnote-44)

Despite the dearth of information provided by the character and narrator, the reader is able to imagine a wide expanse of land as a result of their understanding of the concept of 'a wide panorama', and the type of land, vegetation, and shape (or shapelessness) that reflects the idea of a field. The description of the field as 'poison-green' reveals Austerlitz's own impression of the landscape as spoiled, polluted by the nearby chemical plant, colouring the reader's mental understanding of the scene due to a 21st century audience's wider awareness of climate change and the ecological damage caused by industry. It is the combination of Austerlitz's account of the grass’ unnatural discoloration and the decaying state of the factory combined with the reader's knowledge of their own ecological and environmental context that frames this scene as a critique of the petrochemical industry. Without this input from the reader the scene might merely depict a discoloured field that happens to be close to a weathered factory complex, however widespread concern regarding the impact of industrial waste upon the environment means that it would be difficult for a contemporary reader to ignore this implicit criticism of human chemical and industrial processing. The reader will not have been able to make any of these connections, however, had it not been for Austerlitz's response to the scene; his aversion to the colouration of the vegetation, and his fixation upon the pall of corrosive smoke emanating from the plant.

In the writings of W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett the frequent use of a first-person narrator secures these constructed environments within the subjective experience of the individual, and as such should be interpreted as part of a larger process of environmental representation and interpretation. As the act of being-in-the-world[[45]](#footnote-45) cannot occur without the individual inevitably constructing an idiosyncratic world-view, as a result of the unique sensory data they receive from their experience of the environment, it is vital to first determine how it is that environmental perception is represented by Sebald and Beckett, and how the individual’s ability to engage with their environment is shaped by the physical apparatus and process of this act. The physical ability of the characters to interact with their world along with the physical shape of their landscapes shape their understanding of their surroundings, and these concrete factors are then manipulated by the psychological and personal aspects of their subjectivity.

**1.1 Transportation and Perception**

In W.G. Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn* the narrator opens with an account of his hospitalisation, and the resulting experience he has as a result of looking out of his room’s window and at the city below:

[A]ll that could be seen of the world from my bed was the colourless patch of sky framed in the window. Several times during the day I felt a desire to assure myself of a reality I feared had vanished forever by looking out of that hospital window [...] so I too found the familiar city, extending from the hospital courtyards to the far horizon, an utterly alien place.[[46]](#footnote-46)

The narrator’s panic at being unable to establish himself within the context of the external world is a direct result of his being within an immediate environment which perceptually isolates him from the wider landscape. His alienation from the external world is demonstrated further by Sebald’s reference to Franz Kafka’s 'Metamorphosis' when he compares his experience to that of Gregor Samsa: ‘[as Samsa’s] dimmed eyes failed to recognise the quiet street where he and his family had lived for years’.[[47]](#footnote-47) The narrator’s experience of looking down upon the city is likened to Samsa’s transformation from a member of the human race into a ‘gigantic insect’ incapable of engaging with the society of which he was once a part. Sebald’s narrator is not simply experiencing physical separation from the surrounding city, but cultural and social alienation from it and the society it represents as a result of his hospitalisation. The designation of the narrator as a patient, to be contained and treated within an institution, not only identifies him as unfit to engage with wider society and the environment beyond, but also speaks of his mental distress. Much like Samsa, Sebald’s narrator finds himself alienated from his society and confined to his room as a result of his condition, left with only the imaginative ability to escape his imprisonment. The scene subsequently transforms from an unnatural landscape to a fantastical one, becoming ‘a maze of buildings’, ‘a sea of stone or a field of rubble, from which the tenebrous masses of multi-storey carparks rose up like immense boulders'.[[48]](#footnote-48) The future intersects with the present as the population ceases to exist and the city degenerates into ruins, providing the reader with a glimpse of the apocalyptic visions plaguing the narrator – not only does he feel divorced from the sense of belonging and community provided by being an active member of society, his isolation renders other humans non-existent and their society now long extinct.

This leads the reader to question just what it is that has caused Sebald’s narrator to be hospitalised and subsequently lose his connection with a world with which he was previously so intimately associated, the underlying subject of the novel's remainder. The narrator is so overwhelmed by visions of future devastation that he looks out of his window ‘to assure [himself] of a reality [he] feared had vanished forever’; not only is the narr­­­­ator attempting to re-establish his association within the wider world below, but he is attempting to prove that in existing, the present world is that which is real rather than the apocalyptic scene he first witnesses through his window. The reader's understanding of this scene is already altered by the character's prescience; however despite the assumed truth that the city below remains occupied and functional as ever, the inevitable ruin of the city and its occupants is already embedded within its physical makeup by the narrator's perception of it as a wasteland. The reader's perception of, and engagement with, the literary environment is not solely the result of the landscape’s physical form as described within the text, but also of our mental processing of the characters' and narrator's representation of this data, and it is the nature of these mental processes as they cross layers of narratological and chronological interference that is a vital theme of Sebald’s prose.

Sebald’s narrator is incapable of establishing an emotional connection to the world that surrounds him; as he perceives of the overlapping temporal worlds beyond the hospital window, he fails to recognise its association with himself in the present. In order to uncover the underlying rupture of the subject-object relationship that has caused this emotional disconnection from the surrounding landscape, it is important to establish how it is that the narrator attempts to engage with his environment. In this vignette the narrator is not only physically remote from the city that he sees below him, as a result of the window that separates them, but also perceptually due to the distance that is created by his occupying a space above the city. Instead of being situated within the social and physical confines of the city, he positions himself in a perceptually separate environment, because, as Paul Virilio writes, the multi-storey building acts as a ‘*static vehicle* [original emphasis]’ for the occupying individual.[[49]](#footnote-49) The static vehicle, Virilio argues, is taking over from the ‘dynamic vehicles’ of modernity (cars, trains, and bicycles) due to the decreased perceptual distance between different civilisations and settlements that modern technology facilitates through instantaneous communications (the internet, television, and telephones). In these buildings, the ‘elevator [takes] the place of the domestic automobile’ by allowing people to move between floors that are, in these buildings, equivalents to different streets, neighbourhoods and geographical regions on the ground.[[50]](#footnote-50) The narrator, positioned as he is within one such static vehicle, is not only physically incapable of interacting with his wider environment, but is in an imaginatively separate geographical territory.

When occupying a vehicle, static or otherwise, Michel de Certeau suggests that the window divides ‘the traveller’s (the putative narrator’s) interiority and [...] the power of being, constituted as an object without discourse, the strength of an exterior silence.’[[51]](#footnote-51) The relation between the perceiver and world beyond is blocked by the semi-permeable membrane of the window, which allows vision to operate unimpeded, but blocks or limits the other senses’ ability to engage with what lies beyond it. An early Sebald poem demonstrates this impasse, when the speaker ponders:

For how hard is it

To understand the landscape

As you pass in a train

From here to there

And mutely it

Watches you vanish.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The speaker's experience of a 'mute' environment beyond the window, incapable of 'speaking' of its form and history to the train passengers, is representative of this sense of disassociation from the world beyond the immediate container of the occupying mind. The anonymity of the landscape, lying between the vital points of departure and arrival, reveals the modern attitude towards wilderness; an expanse of land that exists only to be traversed between bastions of place-hood, lacking as they are in human historical significance, thus rendering them culturally meaningless. As Henri Lefebvre writes, the landscape is increasingly ‘traversed now by pathways and patterned by networks’ in a manner that ‘writes upon nature [...] and that this writing implies a particular representation of space.’[[53]](#footnote-53) These inscriptions upon the environment pattern the wilderness between culturally designated environments, such as settlements and landmarks, bringing the human and non-human realms alongside one another whilst acting to reinforce their difference through their apparent difference. Lefebvre adds that ‘nature space juxtaposes and thus disperses: it puts places and that which occupies them side by side’ while ‘social space implies actual or potential assembly at a central point’,[[54]](#footnote-54) - natural environments reassert their separateness to constructed place at their point of contact, and it is this action that renders their meeting with vehicular modes of transport disruptive for the occupant. The result is that the observer is unable to engage with the history of the landscape beyond, or is unwilling to inscribe it with such history, due to its so forcibly acting to reinstate the human’s affinity for culturally significant place. It is the very concept of wilderness, as a construct that repels human influence, which acts to rebuff the individual’s attempts to inhabit these environments as they are traversed. If we apply this notion to the ‘static vehicles’ of the twenty-first century, the high-rise buildings that render previously un-inscribable air inhabited place, we can see that Sebald’s narrator, in occupying such a vehicle, might succumb to a sensation of physical and perceived distance between the ground below and the building that separates the two across an open expanse of air. The narrator is located within a room that is perceptually transient in its ability to enforce a sensation of physical and temporal separation, alongside the societal and physical isolation that his being kept in hospital imposes.

In this section of *The Rings of Saturn* the narrator is unable to occupy the landscape beyond that of his hospital room, alienated due to the limitations his distance from the rest of the world imposes upon his ability to secure himself within the world. This alienation is furthered by the atemporal layering of its representation: seeing the city’s present form, empty and lifeless, overlain with its future devastation, the narrator advances his experience to a point in time in which the city is no longer place. ‘[It] is the very definition of a place, in fact, that it is composed by the series of displacements and effects among the fragmented strata that form it’,[[55]](#footnote-55) writes de Certeau, and it is this historical underpinning of place that plagues Sebald’s narrator: the placehood of the city speaks not only of its changing over time, but also of its eventual dissolution and return to insignificance, just as its existence in the present speaks to the natural landscape since replaced by human constructions.

As such the city beyond the narrator’s hospital room acts primarily as Heideggerian equipment, simply acting ‘in-order-to’ situate his room within the larger landscape, rather than acting akin to place by enabling the perceiver to feel they are inhabiting the world.[[56]](#footnote-56) To express the function of equipment at its basest, Heideggerian equipment is that which is used to perform an action, with scant value beyond its use in performing this function: a piece of paper is equipment that allows one to make a note or convey meaning, however a note from a loved one expressing strong sentiments of affection is a treasured object, ceasing to be equipment. In this passage the city is a place which he does not occupy, and the space that he does (the hospital room) is defined in part by its perceived distance from the vista that lies before it; as Heidegger writes, ‘an entity which is itself extended is closed round by the extended boundaries of something that is likewise extended. The entity inside and that which encloses it are both present-at-hand in space’.[[57]](#footnote-57) The process of establishing a sense of oneself within, and perceiving of, a space is carried out through the perceptual delineation of various regions: the most immediate borders are those of the body, dividing *Dasein* from the external world. The immediately present-at-hand environment is the room, field, or other region that is currently occupied, and it is this place that *Dasein* engages with in the most direct manner; it is also this area that, like *Dasein* and the equipment it uses to engage with this environment, is available and capable of being manipulated by the individual. The wider extensions of the individual's perceived environment are often of decreasing availability to the individual, with those furthest reaches functioning primarily as equipment – contextual cues for the presently occupied place.

This 'extension' of entities to which Heidegger refers is the process of psychic expansion carried out by the individual to perceptually ‘occupy' a place, filling it with their presence and imbuing it with significance, whilst the section of the environment presently at hand is similarly extended so that it constitutes the entirety of the occupying entity's immediate vicinity. The narrator alludes to this process when he writes, ‘the Suffolk expanses I had walked the previous summer had now shrunk once and for all to a single, blind, insensate spot. Indeed, all that could be seen of the world from my bed was the colourless patch of sky framed in the window’.[[58]](#footnote-58) The world beyond the immediate confines of his hospital room has become insignificant, bordering on non-existence, so that only that which is immediately available as sensory data is used, unsuccessfully, to construct the narrator’s sense of his current environment. The entirety of the hospital room, which he regards himself as being ‘in’ as a result of it being ready-at-hand, uses the distance between the place where he is, and the city where he is not, to formulate the boundaries of this place*.* From this perspective, the surrounding buildings only act to pinpoint the narrator within a particular location of his current landscape, rather than to certify his existence within the world as he remains unable to manipulate or engage with them. The hospital room itself, on the other hand, acts as place due to its relational totality; it is through his imaginative and reflective engagement with it that the narrator returns to his hospital room in the future in order to narrate this novel, and within this psychic return he relates his existence primarily to the specific environment of a significant locale: the room in which he was treated for his psychological illness.

Sebald's narrator is not only perceptually in a different area of the city due to his inhabiting an area separated by a journey in this static vehicle, but also because for the narrator the physical and temporal distance between environments are inextricably linked: the 'Suffolk expanses I had walked the previous summer had now shrunk once and for all to a single, blind, insensate spot',[[59]](#footnote-59) was, as we find through the text's later discussion of the narrator's journey, saturated with the history of past destruction and tragedies.[[60]](#footnote-60) The natural world, aligned here with the history of myriad destructive events and extinctions, sits within the narrator's understanding of his personal journey and narrative, while the city to which he will one day be re-introduced after his stay in hospital represents a future series of environmental and ecological catastrophes. Gavins' discussion of text-worlds provides an explanation of this aspect of Sebald's narrator's experience; while the *origo* is normally situated in the present (both temporally and locatively), the future is normally associated with that which is before the perceiver – in the far future, to which one might 'look forward' – whereas the past is often discussed as being 'behind' us.[[61]](#footnote-61) This goes some way to explain the psychological distress and disorientation experienced by the narrator, as the fictional Sebald looks forward to a future as desolate as the history with which they were until recently confronted. The hospital room, an anonymous non-place which belongs to no one individual, is a non-place in which the narrator sits isolated, historically and prospectively besieged by catastrophe and trauma.

**1.2 Impairment and Place**

The disconnection between the more immediate worldliness of place and the landscape within which it exists also arises throughout the work of Samuel Beckett. Beckett’s use of the impaired body and psychological illness is worthy of consideration when one begins to discuss his representation of being-in-the-world, appearing as frequently as it does throughout his writing. Victoria Swanson writes that Beckett’s impairing and institutionalising of his subjects ‘ensures his characters’ vulnerability to observation’ rendering them ‘bound by authority, and so self-regulating that they might best be described as deriving their subjectivity from subjection.’[[62]](#footnote-62) Where Swanson takes her analysis towards a discussion of Foucauldian power structures, the implications of this argument for this discussion of place and environmental being-in-the-world are twofold: firstly, the impaired body and mind as ‘other’ and the subjugation of those regarded as such at the behest of ableist society, and the significance of one’s body as tool through which the phenomenal being can engage with, and perceive of, the wider environment thus establishing themselves as an entity within the world. It is, as Swanson observes, the individual’s self-awareness and self-observation that underpins these processes, with Beckett’s characters becoming more acutely aware of their being-in-the-world separately from the experience of others as a result of their realisation of their bodies’ limitations.

In *Malone Dies*, as Macmann attempts to look beyond the gates of the institute in which he lives, the isolation of the subject within an impaired and socially regulated experience becomes absolute:

[S]pace hemmed him in on every side and held him in its toils, with the multitude of other faintly stirring, faintly struggling things, such as the children, the lodges and the gates, and like a sweat of things the moments streamed away in a great chaotic conflux of oozing and torrents, and the trapped huddled things changed and died each one according to its solitude. Beyond the gate, on the road, shapes passed that Macmann could not understand, because of the bars, because of all the trembling and raging behind him and beside him, because of the cries, the sky, the earth enjoining him to fall and his long blind life.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The ailing and potentially mentally ill Macmann is associated with ‘faintly struggling things’ – objective entities and those subjective entities stripped of their humanity by their designation as ‘other’ by society, and subsequently placed into an institution away from mainstream society. The course of each patient’s life, as they ‘changed and died each one according to its solitude’ speaks of the impact of impairment upon the perception of, and engagement with, the environment: Carrie Sandahl writes that ‘disability is a vantage point, a perspective, a way of experiencing the world’,[[64]](#footnote-64) that can lead to ‘disabled people’s conception of time and space [differing] due to unique experiences of their physical surroundings and the differential pace at which we achieve developmental milestones.’[[65]](#footnote-65) Here the combination of Macmann’s incarceration within the institution and his impairment not only renders him incapable of perceiving of the world beyond the institution’s gate, but of recognising a shared experience of cultural norms between himself, those who have placed him within care, and his fellow patients, all of whom have their own unique set of bodily, sensory and psychological difficulties.

The institution, specifically the part of it he currently occupies, is for Macmann effectively the entirety of the knowable world. Here the surrounding space that was constructed to contain him (those areas that are currently present-at-hand) is active, hemming in the subjective perceiver Macmann. Perhaps this results from Macmann’s own failure to engage actively with the world and maintain its significance as place (areas of relational significance which are normally ready-at-hand) which results from his visual and sensory impairments. Similarly, space’s active role in this passage reflects the inevitable return of place to insignificance once it is no longer perceived of as separate from its surroundings by *Dasein*; for place to exist it requires perception by an individual capable of differentiating regions from one another based upon their relational significance for *Dasein*. As Macmann’s ability to engage with his surroundings via his bodily senses fails him, reducing their effective range as he degenerates, so too does the inhabitable place that surrounds him, until the known world consists entirely of the institution within which he exists. While for Sebald’s narrator it was the perceptual and physical separation created by the window and his location that cemented his disconnection from the city, here it is a combination of the institute's physical geography and the protagonist’s sensory failings. We cannot help but note the repeated references to Macmann’s confused interpretation of the objects he perceives beyond the gates: the ‘shapes’ that he cannot resolve into any certain form, which, along with the bars that obstruct his view and his blindness, all contribute to the narrative experience of perceptual limitation due to his failing visual acuity. The landscape is subsequently limited in scope to the range of Macmann’s vision and the physicality of his enclosure, as he can only see through select openings in the institution’s walls (such as the gate), and at these points he can only see a certain distance before that which is before him becomes unrecognisable. Where for many protagonists the limits of perception are the visible horizon, excepting any limitation by intervening obstacles, Beckett's characters' various health issues often lead to this foreshortening of the environment. This in turn limits the impact of the contextualising outer reaches of the landscape upon the individual's understanding of the occupied place, further shaping their understanding of and engagement with the biosphere.

Macmann’s sensory deterioration and rejection by wider society is not the only perceptual cause of his isolation within his world: the nature of place perception as a marker of personal and social history is also shown to play a role in the diminishment of place. As the other inmates ‘changed and died, each according to his solitude’, the reader’s attention is brought to the cruxes of place signification: the uniqueness of any one person's worldly engagement, and the necessity of the communication and sharing of these experiences of the world in order to establish lasting, identifiable areas of cultural significance – places that might succeed generations. Isolated from one another within their idiosyncratic worldviews as the inmates are, and ostracised by wider society due to their differences, they are incapable of participating in this latter stage of collaborative place-engagement. The inmates are no longer capable of engaging with this discourse of placehood, with their worlds limited to the exclusive perceptual range of the occupying *Dasein* within the holding area in which they are kept. Sandahl writes that ‘certain spaces are designated as sacred and only certain bodies are allowed there. The layout of physical space tells us who is in it and who can participate and at what levels.’[[66]](#footnote-66) The existence of the institute, and Macmann’s experience of being ‘trapped’ behind bars and impregnable walls, tells the reader that not only are Macmann and his fellows not allowed to enter wider society, or to engage within the processes of place-making that this would enable, but that society has created a specific physical environment to contain these individuals, and labelled it as the entirety of the world with which they might engage.

Impaired experience is used throughout Beckett’s writing to highlight the uniqueness of an individual’s engagement with place, subsequently helping to determine their understanding of the biosphere and their behaviour within their ecosystem. Lisa Diedrich, writes that it is, ‘when the [paralysis renders the body], in Heidegger’s terms, conspicuous, obstrusive, or obstinate rather than simply taken for granted’[[67]](#footnote-67) that the experience of impairment might afford further insight into the processes of worldly engagement and being-in-the-world. Macmann’s forced removal from the discourses of long-standing place formation by shared cultural experiences, coupled with his body’s failing ability to see the land beyond the gates renders the world beyond meaningless beyond its function as a border of his own realm. The world beyond is reduced to space, occupied by beings he cannot recognise as members of his own species: the sensory and societal impairment of the individual can therefore be said to have extensive implications for the formation of personal topographies and the individual’s engagement within the discourse of environmental engagement. Macmann is shown to exist within a singularly subjective world, limited by his senses, by the control of his narrator, and by his isolation within the institute, far from human society, and his perception of the environment is determined to a large extent by these factors.

**1.3 Psychological Isolation and Trauma**

Further consideration of the uniqueness of individual world perception is required at this point in order to account for a further peculiarity of both authors’ work. In the fiction of Sebald and Beckett, there is frequently a psychological or social isolation that is attached to the characters or narrators in tandem with their physical solitude; in Sebald’s writing this is often realised through the notable absence of other humans or animals in the narrator’s immediate environment and the rarity of his engagement with others, while in Beckett’s work its representation is more varied, using symptomatic representations of mental distress and the characters' rejection by mainstream society to the same ends. Sebald’s narrators and characters often seem to occupy spaces wherein they become the centre of the known landscape, as the only active perceiver within the space: in *The Rings of Saturn*, when the narrator discusses the history of Felixstowe we are told, ‘I have never encountered another human being’ in the area.[[68]](#footnote-68) Earlier in the same novel, during his walk away from Lowestoft, we are told, ‘[e]veryone who had been out for an evening stroll was gone. I felt as if I were in a deserted theatre’.[[69]](#footnote-69) The environments encountered by the narrator are typically so far away from the influence of others, although not without the interference of social and historical interpretations of these spaces, in a manner that is uniquely of the narrator's particular mental perspective. This isolation carries across to Jacques Austerlitz, for whom the fortress-town of Terezín presents a similarly empty environment:

I knew from Věra that for many years now Terezín had been an ordinary town again. Despite this, it was almost a quarter of an hour before I saw the first human being on the other side of the square, a bent figure toiling very slowly forward and leaning on a stick, yet when I took my eye off it for a moment the figure had suddenly gone. Otherwise I met no one all morning in the straight, deserted streets of Terezín, except for a mentally disturbed man who crossed my path[[70]](#footnote-70)

Austerlitz’s experience as he passes through Terezín demonstrates the combination of physical and psychological/social isolation as it is experienced; the town, despite being at first appearance fairly ordinary, is recast as abnormally deserted and almost haunted place through Austerlitz’s individualistic perception of the space, influenced as it is by his pre-existing knowledge of its history and its relationship with his own biography. For Věra's account to contradict Austerlitz’s claim, and vice versa, requires each character to have experienced the region, or acquired knowledge of it, in a manner that is in some way different from the other, however while both are assumed to have first-hand experience of the settlement's current form it is from their differing interpretations of it that their contrasting versions of the town arise. It is not hidden from the reader that Austerlitz is mentally disturbed: ‘I was to suffer [fainting fits and] complete loss of memory, a condition described in psychiatric textbooks, as far as I am aware, Austerlitz added, as hysterical epilepsy’,[[71]](#footnote-71) and by his own admission, ‘I have always felt as if I had no place in reality’,[[72]](#footnote-72) in some way separated from the world as it is experienced by others. It is made clear to the reader that Austerlitz's perception of the environment is potentially unreliable as a result of his mental illness, with his recollections further altered and subjectified by his difficulties with memory. These traits follow across to the narrators of Sebald’s other writing, further jeopardising the implicit claims to verisimilitude made throughout his work, an aspect of Sebald's literary writing that must be taken into account when discussing the representation of place perception.

Returning to the quotation at the opening of this chapter, one can see this same psychological influence upon the narrator's perception of the urban environment in *The Rings of Saturn:* the narrator, succumbing to a bout of severe depression combined with a sense of ‘paralysing horror’, is admitted to hospital ‘in a state of almost total immobility’.[[73]](#footnote-73) The narrator’s psychological disturbance manifests itself in an inability and reluctance to engage with the environment that surrounds him for fear of being ‘confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past’ and the inevitability of humanity's future extinction. The narrator also demonstrates symptoms of mental distress throughout *Vertigo*,[[74]](#footnote-74) as Mark McCulloh posits; Stendhal’s centrality in the opening chapter forewarns of the narrator’s own fall at the hands of Beyle’s eponymous disease (Stendhal Syndrome) later in the novel, causing the narrator to become paranoid, immobilised by fear and over-stimulation in the face of radical cultural changes.[[75]](#footnote-75) The narrator begins to hallucinate, visualising ‘people I had not thought of for years, or who had long since departed’ walking ahead of him, including the poet Dante and King Ludwig.[[76]](#footnote-76) The narrator’s mental state slowly degenerates, along with his ability and desire to interact with others; ‘my thoughts disintegrated before I could fully grasp them’, ‘I feared that mental paralysis was beginning to take hold of me’ (perhaps foreshadowing the events detailed in *The Rings of Saturn*), the narrator ‘spoke not a word to a soul except for waiters’, and only spoke to animals whilst all the while becoming irrevocably attached to ‘useless things’ that he carries in a plastic bag.[[77]](#footnote-77) The narrator’s hallucinatory, disjointed mental state means that just like Austerlitz, he is engaging with the world through a distorting filter of mental illness and social isolation.

Samuel Beckett’s narratives also originate from, or centralise their focalisation within, a psychologically or socially non-standard perspective. Elizabeth Barry suggests that Beckett ‘made informed use in his writing and thinking of his knowledge of clinical perspectives on pathological language use, and the effect of brain injury on language and cognition’[[78]](#footnote-78) – it follows that in mimicking the effects of brain injury on cognition in particular might alter his characters' interactions with their environments and peers. UIrika Maude further argues that there is compelling evidence of Tourettic syndromes in the behaviour of many Beckettian characters, ranging from motor tics, coprolalia, and verbal repetitions or outbursts:

Tourette’s syndrome thus confounds and collapses distinctions between voluntary and involuntary action, biological and cultural formations, motor skills and linguistic activity, neurology and psychology, poetic language and language pathologies, animal and human and body and mind.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The neurological disorders of Beckett’s characters, present in some form in the narrators of *The Novellas*,Murphy, Malone, and Macmann and many others, problematise the interface between the subject, the environment, and other beings. Not only is the perceiving individual incapable of controlling how they engage with their surroundings, but they are impaired in their perception of personal (neurological), social (cultural or inter-species), and objective (environmental) relationships. The ecology of Beckett’s work subsequently operates from a range of viewpoints, the majority of which appear to originate within a non-standard mental framework, formulated and narrated via the experiences of an individual with a mentally altered, and often physically impaired, ability to engage with the world.

The figure of the crawler, the protagonist and addressee in Beckett’s 'Company', addresses the social solitude of Beckett’s writing through the formulation of the narrative's minimalistic surroundings, conducted as a result of the necessity of movement, and through the act of crawling itself. The difficulty of formulating a fully-fledged worldview for the central character comes about from their uncertainty regarding the nature of their dark, seemingly empty, surroundings, and the narrator's apparent awareness that it is through the act of reading that the reader allows the crawler to formulate a world to occupy:

Devised deviser devising it all for company. In the same figment dark as his figments. In what posture and if or not as hearer in his for good not yet devised. Is not one immovable enough? Why duplicate this particular solace? Then let him move.[[80]](#footnote-80)

The crawler occupies an environment devised by an ambiguous focaliser: whether it is the crawler creating this world through perception, the narrator via the telling of the text, or the reader through the act of reading remains unclear. The phrase ‘devising it all for company’ suggests that whoever is formulating the text-world may be doing so in order for there to be an occupied environment, in essence creating it so that a second entity might exist with which the crawler might interact. Kumiko Kiuchi notes of Beckett’s writing, the oxymoronic perception of space which operates between the act of perceiving all that is at hand – the darkness of the crawler's environment – and yet failing to perceive the wider landscape as a result of the crawler’s limited sensory efficacy, demonstrates the author’s ‘exploration of ways of acknowledging a rupture between subject and object, as well as an attempt to find a form of expression for this relationship’.[[81]](#footnote-81) Beckett’s representation of the environment is as much situated within what cannot be experienced as what is present-at-hand, and his repeated examples of impaired perception offer an avenue of investigation into his work that examines the problematic relationship between subject and environment in narratives of trauma and impairment which are of use when discussing the implication of this problematised relationship in regards to the perception and signification of landscapes.

The interrogative ‘is not one immovable enough?’ opens up an ambiguity of meaning; whether one immovable body, the prostrate character plagued by ‘the voice’ of the text or the voice itself, is sufficient for the creation of a narrative of place-engagement in the absence of an identifiable place. The answer to this is a negative; for the individual to exist within a narrative world there must be something other than the individual, something that is beyond *Dasein* to constitute an external world – a field, a room, or even imaginary scenes conjured by the mind – so that there can be a relationship between self and world. For the central character of *Company*, the existence of a world beyond that formulated by the mind is established at the outset of the piece: the crawler accepts that he is ‘on his back in the dark’ as a result of ‘the pressure on his hind parts’, and the presence of the voice implies the presence of another from whom it is emitted.[[82]](#footnote-82) This alone is insufficient for worldly experience to take place from a metafictional point of enquiry, as the presence of a third party, the reader, is also required to formulate an imagined space within which the body and voice may exist.

The second possible meaning of the question ‘is not one immovable enough?’ is whether one environment or world is sufficient for its apprehension by the crawler’s to become possible – is it possible to establish the occupation of a place and its significance if, perceptually, there is only the one such environment present-at-hand. As established earlier in this chapter, the presence of an exterior world or landscape is necessary to delineate the boundaries of the occupied region and establish its existence as an emotionally inhabited place. In *Company* this process is problematised due to the region in which the crawler exists remaining devoid of identifiable landmarks, just as unknowable and beyond the range of his interaction as the source of the disembodied voice. The solution reached by the narrator is to ‘let him move’, an admission of the narrator’s power to dictate the mobility and environment of the crawlers, so that he might move between ‘the same figment dark as his figments’.[[83]](#footnote-83) The narrator acknowledges the significance of mental processes in identifying and compartmentalising the landscape, first my conceding that an extended range of movement and perception are required to allow the crawler to interact with and differentiate between locales, and secondly in identifying such places as ‘figments’. The implication of this label is that the establishment of place depends upon the compartmentalising of the landscape, which requires the perception of imagined or enforced boundaries between place and space, and that this process is conducted by the mind. It follows, therefore, that any alteration of the psychological, physical, or perceptual apparatus of the individual may have major implications for the processes of place formation and environmental engagement as a result.

The influence of social isolation and its impact upon the self-identification is also at play in 'Company'; except for the voice, which may or may not be a product of the crawler’s imagination, the central character remains in the singular, as ‘one on his back in the dark’.[[84]](#footnote-84) The voice remains ambiguous in referring to the character as ‘you’; however, with this form of address functioning both as the second person singular and plural, this is perhaps one reason why Beckett uncharacteristically composed the piece first in English, where this ambiguity exists, before translating it into French where it does not.[[85]](#footnote-85) The use of ‘you’ compounds the reader and central character of the text, so that when the voice states, ‘You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in’, the reader is unsure whether they are being asked to imagine themselves experiencing this memory, or whether this is a specific instance of the fictional character’s own biography. The narrator plays with this uncertainty, asking, ‘May not there be another with him in the dark to and of whom the voice is speaking? Is he not perhaps overhearing a communication not intended for him?’, before suggesting that the voice remains ambiguous in this regard so as ‘to kindle in his mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment.’[[86]](#footnote-86) The reader is the implicit recipient of these communications, with these lines displaying a self-referential playfulness that is not acknowledged by the crawler; however, due to the ambiguity of second person speech, it remains unclear whether or not the reader is the individual overhearing another’s instruction, or vice versa.[[87]](#footnote-87) As this combined address of reader and character complicates matters, it also draws attention to the mental basis of landscape perception:

[A] certain activity of mind however slight is a necessary complement of company. That is why the voice does not say, You are on your back in the dark and have no mental activity of any kind.[[88]](#footnote-88)

The realisation of the world as separate to self, and of other bodies as distinct entities, depends upon the mind distinguishing between that which is beyond the body and that which is within. The reader, similarly, must negotiate the borders between the real and fictional worlds as a result of the text’s direct address which may or may not be intended to include them. If the character is, as the text suggests, suffering from mental difficulties (‘Your mind never active at any time is now even less than ever so’[[89]](#footnote-89)), then he will not only have problems distinguishing between the reader and himself, but also between himself and the environments he inhabits. Meanwhile the reader is pushed into a similar state of confusion to that of the character, as their ability to distinguish between the experiences of the character, the narrator, author, and themselves which result from the piece's ambiguous forms of address, is impaired through the text's language. Beckett’s text induces empathy in the reader, urging them to experience the same perceptual confusion as the character. By the same token, the reader, narrator, and crawler are all granted the power to formulate the text-world and environment as a result of this ambiguity. The crawler perceives an environment that is relayed by the narrator, who informs the reader of this perception – at the same time the narrator informs the crawler of the nature of their space ('You are lying on your back in the dark') and the reader of the crawler's experience – all while the reader formulates a mental image of the world through their comprehension of this information, constantly reassessing the roles of the narrator and crawler in the process of world-building.

**1.4 Narrative, Place, Self-Perception**

Both Samuel Beckett’s and W.G. Sebald’s work demonstrate the dependence of worldly perception upon a combination of objective and subjective factors directly tied to the individuality of environmental perception: that is, of the objective world that must be perceived, and the subjective, mental interpretation of that world. In the previous examples, the characters’ experiences of the world are regulated by concrete limitations, as the areas with which these characters engage are subject to perceptual limitations that are formed by the landscape of the area, the availability of light, or other extraneous factors. Macmann’s understanding of the world is further limited by the biological faults of his eyes, another concrete limitation upon his engagement with the world, which functions alongside the limitation that line-of-sight imposes on him. The focalisation of each author’s prose work through characters with specialist worldviews, psychological illnesses, and sensory or physical impairments underlines the importance of acknowledging these factors’ influence upon the perception and representation of the environment in literary writing. The apprehended environment is not an entity that exists as a result of external factors such as social and concrete constructions of place, but is reformulated by the reader based upon the fictional perceiver's ability to engage with the world, and the specific manner in which they are shown to do so by the author. Because the relationship between *Dasein* and its environment is so individual, based upon the perceived relationship between self and world, it follows that the perception of the relationships between self, world and other living entities, the subject of ecology, would be similarly idiosyncratic. To understand ecological representation within these authors’ works therefore requires an understanding of their representation of worldly engagement and the application of this to their demonstration of intra- and inter-species interactions, as well as our own engagement with the environment itself.

Theodor Adorno’s analysis of Beckett’s *Endgame* gestures towards this ecological issue when he writes:

Hamm has himself shoved about by Clov into the middle of that *interiéur* which the world has become but which is also the interior of his own subjectivity.[[90]](#footnote-90)

The passage to which Adorno is referring is that in which Hamm requests Clov to push his chair ‘Right around the world!’ before returning him to the centre of the room.[[91]](#footnote-91) The unification of the subjective mind and the room ‘which the world has become’ is reproduced within Beckett’s play by Hamm’s conflation of the shelter and the world as a whole. The set’s resemblance to a skull further conflates the concept of worldhood with the internalised perception of an occupied space, with the entirety of the world that is currently at hand and perceivable by the characters and audience, existing figuratively inside the mind. However, Adorno’s suggestion that because ‘Earth was never yet tread [sic] upon [by Hamm, he] is not yet a subject’ is not entirely accurate.[[92]](#footnote-92) Hamm’s inexperience of being-in-the-world does not prevent him from having a conception of that which is beyond the shelter’s walls: his imaginative power allows Hamm to create an understanding of the environment outside the shelter within his own psychic geography of the region. The wider landscape acting as contextualising equipment – available to Hamm only as information passed on by Clov – and the shelter which is present-at-hand both exist within Hamm’s conception of his environment, with the building which he occupies providing a shelter from the hell that rages around it. Much like the city outside Sebald's hospital room, the landscape beyond the immediately occupied and present-at-hand enclosure represents only past destruction and the future annihilation of the survivors within the shelter. The outside world, while not ready-at-hand, exists as desolate space in order that it may act as a contextual differentiator, separating the interior place of the shelter from the hellish outside world. Hamm’s subjectivity has not experienced the world, and in this Adorno is correct; however, this has not prevented him from mentally constructing a surrounding landscape for his shelter in order to separate the immediately present-at-hand place from its contextualising equipment, granting significance to the shelter as a place of personal and social historical importance.

Despite this, Adorno’s analysis opens up further analytical opportunities for the ecocritical Beckettian, when he writes:

The condition presented in the play is none other than that in which ‘there’s no more nature.’ Indistinguishable is the phase of completed reification of the world, which leaves no remainder of what was not made by humans; it is permanent catastrophe, along with a catastrophic event caused by humans themselves, in which nature has been extinguished and nothing grows any longer.[[93]](#footnote-93)

The reification of the world, the recognition of all things as ‘other’ by the perceiving individual in that process which forms the basis of worldly perception, has resulted in the elimination of nature and, with it, humanity as one of the many products of a destroyed nature. As Adorno relates the ‘final domination of nature’ through the development of insecticides with the ‘genocidal camps’ of the Holocaust, he links the self-destructive behaviour of humanity with natural evolution/entropy in a way that recognises the possibility of human extinction.[[94]](#footnote-94) Without humans to experience and perceive of actions, objects and relationships between entities and label them as ‘natural’, there is no longer the possibility of a concept of nature. The seemingly destructive processes of nature (extinction, coastal erosion, global warming and cooling) work alongside the destructive actions of humanity to annihilate both humans and their conception of the natural world. As humans accelerate the extinction of other species and, inevitably, of themselves through their environmental impact, they are reducing the number of extant creatures and species capable of perceiving the world; in short, humans are destroying the ability for the world to be perceived by sentient creatures, and are therefore working towards the destruction of both the actuality and the concept of nature. This strand of existentialist ecology also runs throughout the writing of W.G. Sebald, with his discussions of warfare and genocide coinciding with descriptions of natural disasters and the after-effects of human exploitation and destruction of the environment. The human threat to the natural world links the failure of Sebald’s and Beckett’s characters to relate to their environment, with the gradual cessation of this practice as humans destroy the sole means by which it might be carried out.

This is not to say that these two authors demonstrate environmental perception as occurring within a form of ontological idealism, wherein the world depends upon perception in order for it to exist, but rather that they represent the environment’s changing states as constructed through the influence of perceiving minds, and the combination of natural and animal influences. The world does not disappear when beings cease to perceive it (instead ceasing to be ready-at-hand and becoming space); however, the ecosystem in which that species, group or individual plays a vital role (as perceiver, participant and partial orchestrator) can do so. Heidegger argues that, ‘Entities *are*, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed [...] and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained’,[[95]](#footnote-95) but the relationships between entities cannot exist without the influence of some *Dasein* that can formulate and perceive of these relations. The existence of the world is not dependent upon perception, therefore, but ecology, as the interpretation and labelling of animal and environmental relationships, is dependent upon the presence of a perceiving mind.

Despite this, Beckett’s *The Unnameable* problematises this distinction by conflating worldhood and perception into a single existential entity. As the Unnameable says, ‘God and man, nature and the light of day, the heart’s outpourings and the means of understanding, all invented, basely, by me alone’.[[96]](#footnote-96) For the Unnameable to claim that he alone, as the perceptual centre of his own narrative, creates the ‘means of understanding’ is an acknowledgement of the perceptual basis of signification between entities and for the perception of any relationship, such as those around which an ecosystem is based. At the same time it also unifies the world and perceiver as co-conspirators: according to the narrator, it is his perception that has created the world at the same time that his existence in it has enabled his perception of the world, as the narrator confesses:

I’m in words, made of words, others’ words, what others, the whole world is here with me, I’m the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, [...] I’m all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing.[[97]](#footnote-97)

The alignment between the Unnameable’s existence and language creates a dependence upon signification, wherein without the relationship between signifier and signified, represented by the text of the novel, the individual will cease to exist. By suggesting that the narrator is ‘made of words, others’ words’, Beckett’s character acknowledges the collaborative process of reading and the vital part the act of reading plays in fabricating the text's world. This character’s existence is therefore dependent upon the perception of a relational significance between signifier and signified, just as any fictional world is. The Unnameable’s last words, ‘you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on’[[98]](#footnote-98) demonstrate the character's, and text-world’s, dependence upon perception perfectly; as the text ceases, the reader is unable to continue formulating an enduring existence for the narrator, precipitating the end of its existence. The Unnameable’s desire for the reader to continue reading, the imperative ‘you must go on’, is the result of its dependence upon the reader to exist, to be-towards-death: it is in the temporary cessation of the text between readings that the character's being-towards-death is fulfilled. So while previously the Unnameable labelled itself as the sole perceiving creator of its universe, it succumbs to the signifying dependence of language as the ‘others’ it recognises briefly (its readers) run out of linguistic relationships to interpret. Even this relationship between reader and the text-world can be said to have ecological significance, with the Unnameable acting as a perceptual parasite. Just as a biological parasite ‘lives on, in, or with an organism’[[99]](#footnote-99) in order to benefit, the Unnameable parasitically depends upon the reader to exist within their apprehension of the text-world for it to gain its ability to exist within, and perceive of, its own environment. In the acknowledgement of this narratological parasitism, *The Unnameable* becomes an ecological text that reveals the relationship between two entities, text and reader, and the dependence of the former’s existence upon the latter as in a wider ecological system. While this same relationship is required for the reading experience of W.G. Sebald’s writing to function, it is not as central to the overall ecology of his texts as is the world itself. For Sebald’s writing to function as it does, the world must exist prior to both the events described within the narrative and the reading act’s occurrence.

**1.5 (Un)Realism: Social and Private Ecologies**

Unlike the disparate realities of Beckett’s writing, which display only indications of their semblance to our own, for the most part, Sebald’s is a textual environment much like our own. In *The Rings of Saturn* the thirteenth of April, the date Sebald's narrator highlights as the date of the novel's completion, Maunday Thursday, ‘the feast day of Saints Agathon, Carpus, Papylus and Hermengild’, the anniversary of Handel’s *Messiah*’s initial production, the Amritsar massacre, and many other events.[[100]](#footnote-100) All of these events and facts are factually correct and traceable; Carpus, Papylus and Agathonica were martyred together, with their feast day celebrated on April 13th, and Hermengild’s feast, although ‘confined to local calendars’, also occurs on this date.[[101]](#footnote-101) The Amritsar massacre, similarly, is a tragic event in which the British army killed scores of peaceful protestors on April 13th 1919,[[102]](#footnote-102) and the *Messiah* was indeed first performed on the same day in 1742.[[103]](#footnote-103) While this is only a small, and subsequently far from representative, sample of the real-world details referenced, discussed, or part-fictionalised throughout Sebald’s body of work, it demonstrates the dependence his writing has upon the world beyond the boundaries of the text. While the reader may not be aware of these facts, these references to the past demonstrate a dependence upon the world existing beyond the boundaries of immediate perception. Ontical realism dominates Sebald’s writing, and this perspective impacts heavily upon the ecological and environmental aspects of his work.

However, despite the apparently factual basis for much of Sebald’s writing, it must be acknowledged that much of it is also fictionalised: factually correct, but altered by the author before inclusion within the text, often so that it aligns with other events or experiences for literary effect. As Sebald discusses in his interview with Carole Angier, the stories contained in *The Emigrants* are ‘essentially’ factual, yet ‘with some small changes’.[[104]](#footnote-104) The changes range from creating pseudonyms for characters – the composite character Max Aurach was renamed Max Ferber in order to disassociate the English text from the painter Frank Auerbach, for example[[105]](#footnote-105) – to doctoring and creating the photographic ‘evidence’ that is interspersed throughout the text, such as Ambrose Adelwarth’s diary in the final chapter of the book.[[106]](#footnote-106) The implications this has for Sebald’s ecology are twofold. Firstly, it secures the diegetic world to the real one by requiring the factual basis of the fiction to pre-exist it in order for the fictionalisation to occur, and secondly it reveals the individualism that remains at the core of his ecological writing. For Sebald’s work, the portrayal of the world depends upon the individual’s perception of pre-existing materials; unlike Beckett’s writing, which uses the structures of narrative and dramatic performance to demonstrate the egocentric nature of world-creation, Sebald’s constantly appeals to cultural memory by relying upon a world made up of existing artefacts to establish its literary world. Anecdotes, architecture, art, and history are combined in order to formulate a particular world-view for the reader to operate within in order to interpret the relationships between the present narrator and characters, and the environment they have inherited from their forebears.

The ecological decline of the world throughout Sebald’s writing is therefore the result of wider historical and environment decay, with the present examples within Sebald’s texts acting as evidence of the past’s influence upon our engagement with our ecosystems. As the reader is ‘confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past’,[[107]](#footnote-107) retold and reinterpreted by the narrator in relation to his present engagement with the environment, they are exposed to existing evidence of environmental decay that has been shaped in order to demonstrate how it affects our position in relation to the natural world. The influence of pollution and overfishing on sea-life, which is discussed in *The Rings of Saturn*, is used to show how the population of sea creatures that was previously ‘the principal emblem [...] of the indestructibility of nature’[[108]](#footnote-108) has changed the manner in which humans engage with the coastline near Lowestoft. Where previously the area had been vital for the fishing industry, the apex predators ‘the fishermen themselves are dying out’[[109]](#footnote-109) as this ecosystem collapses under the strain placed upon it by human influence; as a result, humans have changed the manner in which they perceive of this area. The result is that ‘no one is interested in [the fishermen’s] legacy’,[[110]](#footnote-110) the remaining fishermen camping along the coast in order to isolate themselves from their community,[[111]](#footnote-111) so that they can remain with ‘the world behind them and nothing before them but emptiness’. In Sebald’s narrator’s relaying of this information he is recasting the fishermen as awaiting the end of the world, having been relieved of their role within the ecosystem as their prey dies out. Many of the environments within Sebald’s fiction are similarly linked to a past or present event that has altered the engagement of the individual with these spaces, with history and the passing of time becoming the principal causes of these perceptual alterations within environments and ecosystems. Sebald’s writing operates within a system of natural and historical decay, whereas the landscapes of Beckett’s fiction succumb to the same bodily and psychological failings as the perceiver, mirroring the characters’ bodily abilities and shortcomings.

In Beckett’s representation of environmental engagement, rather than being directly ecological and representing the sustainability of different ecosystems, it is the ecological relationship between the individual and their surroundings that is the subject of the text. The result of this is that Beckett’s instances of environmental decline are primarily focussed upon the degeneration of one’s ability to engage with the world, and the decaying body as the gradually failing equipment required for this engagement to occur. This difference between Sebald and Beckett’s ecological representations becomes manifest when one compares the perceptual landscapes of Molloy with those of his pursuer, Moran, in the eponymous novel about the former. Molloy informs us that ‘my region was not all forest, far from it. But there were plains too, mountains and sea, and some towns and villages’,[[112]](#footnote-112) and yet Moran discredits this with his own claims in the novel’s second half:

Ballyba, in spite of its limited range, could boast of a certain diversity. Pastures so-called, a little bogland, a few copses and, as you neared its confines, undulating and almost smiling aspects [...] the principal beauty of this region was a kind of strangled creek which the slow grey tides emptied and filled.[[113]](#footnote-113)

The disparity between the two accounts can only be accounted for by the fact that each character has perceived of it in a different manner, formulating their own idiosyncratic versions of the landscape in the process. For Molloy, who has never left ‘the Molloy country’,[[114]](#footnote-114) this region is the entirety of the known world, whereas for the more widely-travelled spy Jacques Moran, Ballyba is only a small region of a much larger country. While Robert Pogue Harrison sides with Moran, writing ‘[his] is the true landscape of Molloy’s forest’,[[115]](#footnote-115) to discard Molloy’s representation of the forest as misguided would be to ignore the individuality of ecological engagement. Molloy’s experience of the forest is determined entirely by his position in relation to the trees of which it is formed; the trees, he writes, tower ‘all about me, and the boughs, twining together at a prodigious height, compared to mine, sheltered me’.[[116]](#footnote-116) We must remember that, at this point in the narrative, Molloy is ‘obliged to stop’ and ‘lie down, in defiance of the rules’, due to his stiff legs.[[117]](#footnote-117) It is from his position lying on the ground that he makes his remarks about the height of the forest canopy; in relation to the prone Molloy, everything will inevitably appear larger than it would to the upright and mobile Moran who can reach and tear branches from the same trees later in the novel.[[118]](#footnote-118)

The issue of mobility is also of vital importance in explaining the widely differing content of Molloy and Moran’s descriptions of Ballyba and its surroundings. While Molloy’s prone position explains the relative loftiness of the trees, it does not, on first inspection, explain how one of ‘a few copses’ that Moran describes may become a forest in the imagination of its native. The speed of one’s movement and the speed at which one can access information about another location are vital aspects of world-view; as Paul Virilio claims of the influence of technology, ‘[it favours] an instant not so much present as omnipresent, in a diminished world that is not so much “contemporary” with some banal history of modernity as *atemporary*. [original emphasis]’.[[119]](#footnote-119) As technology has facilitated an acceleration of travel and the relaying of information, the world has become perceptually smaller; we can experience or at least witness evidence regarding any area of the world in a much shorter space of time now than we ever could in the past. While this theory is primarily applicable to the technologies of travel and data communications, if we apply it to the two characters in *Molloy* it is revealed why the copse becomes a forest. As Molloy’s legs stiffen, his ‘marches got shorter and shorter’, interspersed by ‘more and more frequent’ halts for rest.[[120]](#footnote-120) As the stiffness overwhelms his ability to use his crutches in conjunction with his legs, he turns to crawling, ‘using my crutches like grapnels’ and covering a mere fifteen paces a day.[[121]](#footnote-121) Molloy’s physical degeneration results in his ability to travel becoming impaired, and as such his world, rather than contracting as he becomes aware of greater portions of it, becomes perceptually larger as he becomes incapable of directly engaging with ever increasing amounts of it. This process is illustrated more overtly in reverse by Moran; when his own leg stiffens up, leaving him stranded in a copse of trees, he initially has ‘to stop every ten steps, to rest’, but once he succeeds in aiding himself with his umbrella, and graduating to fifteen, he is ‘no longer confined to circling about the shelter’.[[122]](#footnote-122) Moran ‘radiate[s] from it in every direction’ and gains ‘a knoll’ from which he can see the wider area: in short, the place Moran inhabits (as the area that is immediately ready-at-hand) increases in scope alongside his ability to roam and manipulate it, and as a result so too does his perceptual landscape, with a wider area becoming present-at-hand as he becomes capable of seeing it. The physical degradations of Molloy and Moran limit their ability to engage with the environment and subsequently alter the shape and size of the worlds they inhabit; as Molloy’s country remains large, and is enlarged as he grows incapable of moving, Moran’s shrinks as he becomes immobile before growing in scope once more as he regains his mobility.

Both authors focalise their texts through individual subjects, interpreting and engaging with their world under the influence of psychological distress and physical impairment. The implications of this for a discussion of the ecological and environmental representations of these authors are twofold; firstly the critic should subsequently address these texts with an awareness of the degree of subjectivity involved in their representation of their characters’ landscapes, and secondly that the relationships between the individuals at the centre of these texts and other humans, social groups, and creatures are fundamentally altered by these characters’ non-standard means of engagement with the world. The relationships between humans, creatures and their environments are subsequently represented in a variety of perspectives, ranging from non-human and non-anthropocentric angles to highly self-centred and egotistical viewpoints, wherein the world is perceived as pertaining entirely to the individual at the perceptual centre of the text. Beckett and Sebald therefore cover a gamut of representational techniques to a wide variety of effects, as they demonstrate individual engagement with urban and societal landscapes, rural and natural zones, and the transitions between these spaces alongside their interplay with notions of anthropocentrism and conservationism.

**2 – Social Ecologies and Place Archivism**

The previous chapter of this thesis was primarily concerned with the underlying systems of landscape and environmental perception from the perspective of an individual, as the most immediate concern in the writings of Sebald and Beckett. Due to the makeup of human societies, typified as they are by the gathering of large numbers of individuals into cities, towns, and other settlements, ecology cannot exist uniquely within the individual’s engagement with the world. As Felix Guattari demonstrates, the practice of ecosophy (the social and cultural study of ecology) is a wider philosophical system of thought based upon an analysis of three facets of worldly engagement: 'the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity'.[[123]](#footnote-123) The physical environment, the individual's understanding of their ecosystem, and the relationship between these factors with the social and cultural epoch in which their perception is taking place are the foundations of personal and wider ecologies. As a result this chapter intends to elaborate upon the manner in which Sebald's and Beckett's ecologies re-imagine the societies portrayed within their work, with a view towards establishing a better understanding of how they might influence the interaction of each author’s protagonists, influenced by their societal context, with their environment. The role of social and cultural ideas in shaping the individual's understanding of their environment is a vital one in establishing the sense of 'unnaturalness' and unease that is prevalent throughout both authors' work, especially within urban scenes. Whether the city is an inherently 'unnatural' construction is, within the writing of these two authors, much more dependent upon the individual's understanding of their position within these spaces than any ideas of the urban versus ex-urban as innately natural/unnatural. The existential suffering and sense of alienation that runs throughout these texts is as much the result of ecological factors as it is the personal experiences and cultural histories that are encountered, with both urban and 'natural' spaces exhibiting a similar capacity to be perceived as manifestly unnatural and alien environments within these texts, especially when these factors fail to align with the actuality of a space.

**2.1 Placing Trauma**

The cultural and historical significance of locales, formed by multiple layers of historical and personal meanings and events, is shown to be a key influence upon the individual's engagement with an environment in Sebald's *Vertigo*, when, despite having not taken part in the Battle of Marengo himself, Marie-Henri Beyle (a young, sickly Stendhal) visits the area where the conflict occurred in order to improve his own understanding of his cultural and personal history. The significance of the battle for Beyle is indicated by the onset of his own awareness of his mortality: acknowledging 'the bones of 16,000 men and 4,000 horses',[[124]](#footnote-124) Beyle confronts the scene with an acute awareness of the waste of life and trauma signified by the remains of those who fell in battle. This contrasts with the glorified accounts of warfare that Beyle had previously accepted, rendering him incapable of action following a fit of existential vertigo:

[T]he difference between the images of the battle which he had in his head and what he now saw before him as evidence that the battle had in fact taken place occasioned in him a vertiginous sense of confusion such as he had never previously experienced.[[125]](#footnote-125)

The dominant cultural representation of the Battle of Marengo as a heroic victory for Napoleon had, until this point, been the primary influence upon Beyle's mental image of the field: the socio-historical aspects of the area's significance had been the only aspect of the battle of which Beyle had any previous understanding, and as such it dominated his conception of the event until this point. Once he perceives of the concrete evidence of the battle's occurrence, gaining the opportunity to interpret the events for himself based upon the evidence, Beyle recognises the disjuncture between the cultural representation of the battle and its actuality. The battle's reputation as a strategic victory for Napoleon 'was familiar to [Beyle] from many and various tellings', and yet it jars with the physical evidence of mass death that surrounds him.[[126]](#footnote-126) It is not only the battle itself that creates this misalignment, but the wider historical epoch of which it is a part. When 'thinking back to that September day', Beyle feels 'as if he had foreseen the years which lay ahead, all the campaigns and disasters, even the fall and exile of Napoleon'.[[127]](#footnote-127) Beyle senses himself transgressing the spatio-temporal boundaries of the battlefield, he becomes 'alone with himself, like one meeting his doom'[[128]](#footnote-128) at once disassociated from the society of which he was once a part, and alienated from his own sense of being-in-the-world. In the evidence of past destruction, much like the narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* looking out at the urban landscape from his hospital room, Beyle sees only further destruction and ultimately the annihilation of the human race and the subject as he looks over a landscape which encapsulates the destructive acts of humanity's past.

To return to the previous chapter's discussion of death in relation to this episode, Heidegger argues that in witnessing the death of the other, we experience 'the change-over of an entity from Dasein's kind of Being (or life) to no-longer-Dasein', the move from an entity secured within the world by its relationships with the environment, to 'the same entity *qua* something present-at-hand'.[[129]](#footnote-129) Beyle's metaphysical separation into the witnessing Dasein, and the observed object - 'alone with himself' - allows him to witness this transformation occurring to himself, as if he has become an object, and yet retains sufficient subjective awareness to acknowledge the paradox inherent within this mode of being. As Beyle witnesses himself apparently ceasing to be within the world, he ceases to interact with his environment: his sense of vertigo within this scene is nothing less than the experience of a complete cultural and environmental alienation, culminating in the severance of his being-in-the-world from those objects with which he previously related so as to secure his sense of being as subject. No longer perceptually 'within' the world, he inhabits the same state of being as an object, which can ordinarily only come with the death of the perceiving subject. The scene's contrasting elements - a publicly lauded victory, and the mass of human and animal remains - combine with his subsequent experience of near-death, playing upon a previous trauma of Beyle's. This episode, combined with his own experience of combat at Bard, where the writer was nearly killed in an earlier engagement, compounds the past trauma and experience of near-death into an overwhelming sensation of disconnection from the environment for the subject.

Social and cultural ideas are also shown to be an active influence upon the subject's engagement with an environment in Sebald's account of Beyle visiting Marengo. However, as this example demonstrates, the subjective interpretation of an environment can override, or align improperly with, these cultural ideas. When there is a difficulty in resolving the cultural, subjective, and concrete attributes of an environment into a consolidated interpretation of the space, the individual begins to feel alienated from their culture, society, and even the occupied landscape itself, as Beyle does here. Beyle becomes disconnected from his culture's valuation of the site, feeling that the monument erected on the site fits 'neither with his conception of the turbulence' of the battle, 'nor with the vast field of the dead on which he was now standing'.[[130]](#footnote-130) References to this sense of cultural alienation, as exemplified here through Beyle's vertiginous confusion, run throughout Sebald's body of work in instances whereupon the individual experiences separation from their presently occupied cultural and geographical context. Such moments of social and cultural isolation represent a continuing acknowledgement of the interpretive and cultural influences upon the individual's sense of being within an environment, in relation to both physically occupying the space, and doing so within a particular personal and historical moment.

The haunting of culturally significant place in the writing of both Sebald and Beckett appears to operate according to the conditions identified by Austerlitz:

It does not seem to me, Austerlitz added, that we understand the laws governing the return of the past, but I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher form of stereometry, between which the living and the dead can move back and forth as they like, and the longer I think about it the more it seems to me that we who are still alive are unreal in the eyes of the dead[[131]](#footnote-131)

The double occupation of the landscape by the living and the dead allows for the signification of place to occur more palpably in these authors' work through the dead, whose bodies and actions grant the locus of emotional signification its meaning, continuing to actively occupy and interact with these places. Austerlitz argues that the barrier between the living and the dead, and their simultaneous occupation of place, is more permeable than is often believed; the constant occupation of the urban centre by the dead allows the two to meet and interact through the interpretation of past events and monuments in the present. The constant presence of the dead amongst the living, and the suggestion that Austerlitz has 'no place in reality', but can 'in certain lights and atmospheric conditions' be witnessed and met by the ghosts of the past, gives rise to the underlying discomfort experienced by himself and the other narrators discussed in this chapter when they occupy a historically significant locale.[[132]](#footnote-132) The contemporary haunting of place by the events and personages that grant such locations their cultural significance is also the underlying cause of this discomfort, as it is the ahistorical character of these sites that troubles the Beckettian and Sebaldian occupant.

The haunting of place does not operate in a unilateral manner however; while Peter Boxall argues that the key linkage between Sebald and Beckett in regards to their representation of memory is their 'congealing of time' which externalises the subject from the processes of history so that they might see the full span of the locale's cultural legacy,[[133]](#footnote-133) this approach only accounts for the reflective experience of occupying place. Sebald's and Beckett's collapsing of temporality in these moments means that the individual not only looks back to the rising ghosts of the past, but that the present is also haunted by the future death of the subject just as the past is haunted by the individual in the present who continues to conjure it into re-emergence. In suggesting that the ghosts of the past might also glimpse Austerlitz, Sebald gestures towards the inherent being-towards-death that typifies the continuing cycles of place signification and the futurity of place signification as a means of preserving cultural and personal artefacts. Similarly, Beckett's works that centre upon the collapse of these historical cycles – especially *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* – continue to render the present as a perpetual act of past repetition that inevitably carries with it the implication of the future death of the subject. The experience of historically charged sites in Sebald is that of witnessing the full process of place commemoration as surpassing generations of individual lives in a moment of temporal suspension, just as in Beckett the characters often fall beyond the influence of memory and commemoration through their inability to participate in these narratives due to the arresting of time itself.

This experience of reflexive cultural and personal haunting, coupled with the failure to reconcile social and individual aspects of an environment's perception experienced by Beyle, can subsequently alter the sense of familiarity or comfort that the individual feels when occupying a space; in *Austerlitz*, the visit to Terezín reveals how the two interpretive aspects of environmental cathexis can lead to alternative interpretations of a landscape. For Austerlitz, who believes his mother died whilst imprisoned within the camp, Terezín is a monument to the inhuman deeds of the Nazi regime, the lives of its victims, and his lost parents, and yet for those who live in the town it is now a social hub with a cultural system of signification that is only partly related to that period of the town's past. Austerlitz, unable to reconcile the normality of life after the war with his own understanding of the town's history, relates:

I could not imagine [...] who might inhabit these desolate buildings, or if anyone lived there at all, although on the other hand I had noticed that long rows of dustbins with large numbers on them in red paint were ranged against the walls of the back yards.[[134]](#footnote-134)

The physical evidence of life in the area hints at a cultural conception of the town that is irreconcilable with Austerlitz's interpretation of it as a ghost-town; the fact that people continue to live in Terezín demonstrates the evolving nature of a place's signification, which is far from the preserved cultural archive which Austerlitz hopes to find throughout his research. In Sebald's representation of the town, as Will Stone observes, '[the author] chose not to clarify the separateness of the town of Terezín and the nearby prison', instead eliding the two into a singular entity.[[135]](#footnote-135) This not only ties the motif of towns-as-fortifications into parallel (which is a frequent observation made of the cities Austerlitz visits, discussed later in this thesis) but also demonstrates a singularity of interpretation on the part of the narrator: for Austerlitz, the town, prison, and the ghetto itself are a singular entity associated with the internment of Jews. For the town's inhabitants, however, the town as a present social and physical entity, is not only temporally and ideologically separated from its role in the processing of deported Jews during the war, but also a separate entity from the "Kleine Festung" used as a regional headquarters by the Gestapo during this historical period and its earlier role as an instrument of war.

Those who continue to live in the area have to engage with and renegotiate the town's social and personal contexts over the intervening years through a re-signification of the various areas and buildings it contains, as well as through their familiarity with the area's topography (in identifying, unlike the narrator and Austerlitz, the fortress as separate from the town), rendering the evidence that Austerlitz seeks more difficult to discover. Buildings once used for imprisonment and garrisoning troops now house shops and families, and the fortress where the information he requires lies is not within the town proper, to which Austerlitz restricts his visit. As Austerlitz's visit to the Ghetto Museum reveals, 'not many people from outside the town came to see [the museum]',[[136]](#footnote-136) despite tourists constituting the entirety of the museum's patronage. As the attendant informs Austerlitz, 'the people of Terezín didn't come to it anyway'[[137]](#footnote-137) - the significance of Terezín as a Jewish prison-ghetto is not of interest to the town's permanent residents. Meanwhile, their day-to-day lives, evidenced by the bins outside their homes, the 'tiny grocery store' and the antiques bazaar,[[138]](#footnote-138) are testaments to the town's continuing shift in signification as it is reclaimed as a functioning residential area by the occupants, rendering Austerlitz's expectations unfulfilled. The only connection between the two articulations of the town that Austerlitz is being exposed to is the antiques bazaar; while he refers to it as a 'barracks',[[139]](#footnote-139) delineating the space within its historical function, the shop's modern role is, ironically, selling evidence of past lives. However, this is insufficient for Austerlitz, who continues to perceive of Terezín as a ghost town:

What I found most uncanny [*am unheimlichsten*][[140]](#footnote-140) of all, however, were the gates and doorways of Terezín, all of them, as I thought I sensed, obstructing access to a darkness never yet penetrated, a darkness in which I thought [...] there was no movement at all apart from the whitewash peeling off the walls[[141]](#footnote-141)

Austerlitz imagines the doorways of Terezín leading to abandoned buildings, rendering the entire town a crumbling testament to past events. However, the evidence of its living inhabitants informs the reader that this is not the case; the buildings are occupied, and as such the graveyard is full of living beings. The living and the dead inhabitants of Terezín are equally unreachable for Austerlitz, and yet they occupy the same physical space, creating an uneasy duality of purpose for a town that is evidently haunted, as it seems to Austerlitz, by both its past and present citizens. Much like Beyle, Austerlitz becomes alienated from his surroundings as a result of his inability to consolidate both the past and present forms of the town into one entity, due to the apparent incompatibility of his interpretation of the town with that of the locals' social consensus on the function of Terezín. The result is that the town becomes a palpably haunted zone for the narrator, defying his understanding of normality by existing in both the past and the present. Terezín is unnatural in Austerlitz's apprehension of the environment, not as a result of its being an urban environment, as one would suggest within more traditional conservationist rhetoric, but because of these conflicting significations of the place's historic and cultural roles. Terezín's unsettling effect upon Austerlitz is not unexpected, however - the city's continuing presence within disparate temporal and cultural articulations is an inevitable result of the urban environment's function as a historical archive, as Austerlitz anticipates, and it is only the character's inability to acknowledge the true nature of this function as one dependent upon interpretation by its present inhabitants that causes this disjuncture.

**2.2 Constructing the Archive: Urbanism and Social Memory**

Sebald's wider methodology of landscape and nature representation aligns in many ways with Derrida's discussion of the archive, and in Austerlitz this is no exception: 'the archontic principle [the underlying processes of archive creation] is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together'.[[142]](#footnote-142) For Derrida, the archivist 'aims to coordinate a single corpus [...] in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration' so as to facilitate the preservation of cultural artefacts and conventions. David Darby argues that the narrators of Sebald's fiction all work towards this same process of 'collection and recording on paper [...] of worlds destined to pass beyond personal memory' in order to reformulate history into a cohesive whole for personal and cultural preservation.[[143]](#footnote-143) Where the archive may be seen as a project of preservation and stasis, Sebald's prose constitutes an attempt to articulate a world-view that is typified by a 'melancholy sense of disruption and alienation from a world that was once whole and intact'.[[144]](#footnote-144) By bringing together differing cultural and temporal phenomena within a unified corpus, Sebald's narrator attempts to combat cultural alienation in order to create the 'ideal configuration' of the archive by directly addressing temporal flux through his writing. The archivist's project does not exist exclusively within the collation of ideas in writing, but is also related to the physical makeup of the landscape as it is shaped by humans. As Derrida posits, 'the meaning of "archive", its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address',[[145]](#footnote-145) an observation that accords with Robert Pogue Harrison's writing on the concept of home. For Harrison, the home's cultural and psychological significance is not only traceable back to 'the Greek and Roman house [which] typically featured an altar' dedicated to the ancestors of a family,[[146]](#footnote-146) but it is also dependent upon the house's physical segregation between the natural and domestic spheres:

[A] house differentiates the inside from the outside space in such a way that, in and through such differentiation, it creates a relation between interior and exterior whose dynamic field of interpenetration the dwellers inhabit.[[147]](#footnote-147)

Just as Derrida's archive is impossible 'without a place of consignation' and 'a certain exteriority',[[148]](#footnote-148) the home cannot be inhabited within a human sense (as opposed to merely occupied by a physical object) unless it preserves the legacies of a social group and its individual members:

A fox in its den finds itself in nature, yet we in our houses find ourselves both inside and outside of nature. A mouse that makes its home inside a house is *in* the house in some literal sense, but it does not inhabit the house in the human or humic mode. To inhabit the world humanly, one must be a creature of legacy. That explains why the living housed the dead before they housed themselves, they placed them in graves, coffins, in urns - in any case they placed them *in* something that we call their resting place so that their legacies could be retrieved and their afterlives perpetuated.[[149]](#footnote-149)

For Harrison the significance of the home, and by extension of the urban area, originates within the memorialising function of the constructed environment. By designating an area as 'human' rather than natural, created by the activity of humans not natural processes, the concept of an external nature versus an internalised human world can become engrained within the physical environment. Similarly the continuing existence of a constructed place over time becomes imbued with historical narrative and, as a result, becomes culturally significant to the enclosed society. All of this originates, according to Harrison, within the extension of the dead's influence over the present, an influence which pervades the writing of Sebald. As a result, there are clear parallels between the Derridean archive and Sebald's representation of the built environment, parallels which are also present, albeit less overtly, within Beckett's writing, which must be taken into account in a wider analysis of artistic representations of the urban space *vis a vis* the natural world. In essence, the urban environment, comprised of an expanding body of these personal archives, becomes a network of these archives which preserves the interaction and shared historical signification of these constituent parts in its own right and as a social collective.

Lawrence Buell's discussion of the role nature and ecology play in the establishment of place (those established zones of significance that are delineated from nature by humans) furthers our understanding of this distinction between nature and the urban spaces as a cultural archive.

Up to a point, world history is a history of space becoming place. In the beginning, earth was space without form. Then through inhabitance places were created. But modern history has also reversed this process.[[150]](#footnote-150)

This statement not only resonates with Sebald's aesthetic of environmental decline in the wake of disastrous historical events, but also Beckett's writing in both his exploration of the body's inhabitance of the landscape, and what Buell also identifies as the study of the body as a place within the world which is also inhabited.[[151]](#footnote-151) Just as cities and other construction projects require the delineation of a natural space into a signified place, these spaces are certain eventually to fall, and either be reassigned into new places by another society, or retaken by nature once the occupying civilisation ceases to exist. For Buell, the history of civilisation and the history of nature's interactions with humanity overlap, with the formation of urban spaces exemplifying a significant portion of these interactions as they establish and re-negotiate the boundaries between the human and natural realms. Marc Augé further refines our understanding of the role of place in cultural preservation; it is the 'materially temporal dimension' of place, the acknowledgement of the demarcation's eventual dissolution, that 'creates the conditions for the memory to be attached to certain places'.[[152]](#footnote-152) The attempt to protect these social spaces and the valuable cultural heritage they represent is in part a result of the occupants' knowledge that these structures and the attached cultural information are not permanent, precluding their preservation as representative of a wider struggle to defend one's own culture. As time passes, these shared systems of belief and knowledge not only face the threat of being forgotten due to the dissolution of the place, but can also be altered irreparably by changes in the society that inhabits it, the invasion of another people, or other factors.

For Austerlitz, it is this duality of purpose for the town, as historical monument-cum-archive and current social entity, that brings the morality of historical apathy to the fore. As Stone further elaborates in his analysis of *Austerlitz*:

Terezin's most terrible secret and shame is (as Austerlitz soon discovers) the alarming juxtaposition of a skewed normality in the planned workings of this ghetto town, this civic dummy, with the coordinated extermination of its inhabitants, a fact which causes the mind to perpetually recoil, forever thrown back on itself, straining through the creepers of ever more bestial revelations and paralysing absurdities.[[153]](#footnote-153)

The town's role in the Holocaust was a contradictory one; having been created as a 'civic dummy', an artificial substitute for the prisoners' own societies, the town became a distilled archive that testifies specifically to the existence of Jewish culture. This comes about as an unplanned side-effect of the town's actual function in the process of their extermination, as it is the attempted eradication of the Jewish people that has precipitated this testament to both their existence, and the townspeople's subsequent refusal to dwell upon this chapter in Terezín's history. As Austerlitz flounders in the present day Terezín it is not exclusively due to this disconnection between his idea of the town's ideal and actual function in the present, but because the vestiges of the town's past duality of function create a latent threat of historic repetition - the same concealment of Terezín's role during the Holocaust continues in the present. Instead of creating a façade of normality whilst fulfilling a key role within a genocidal scheme, as the town's outward appearance did in the past, it now conceals a historical wrong, albeit through the growth and reformulation of the town's social spaces than through any concerted attempt to do so by the present occupants. Rather than openly accepting and acknowledging Terezín's infamy, the occupying society has reached a consensus to resume a form of normality within the town, the result being that, while the morality of such changes is a grey area, for Austerlitz it betrays a deeper apathy within the population regarding the atrocities of the Holocaust. It is this duality of past and present deception that intensifies Austerlitz's discomfort whilst visiting Terezín, and Sebald's narrator presents the same challenge to the reader: whether it is the town's function as Holocaust memorial and Jewish archive, or its role as a continually changing social entity, that should take precedence, and whether this distinction necessarily leads to one archontic process obscuring the other.

The haunting of spaces by the living is a continuing theme of *Austerlitz*, as evinced by the narrator's accidental rendezvous with Austerlitz in Zeebrugge. The uncanny convenience of this event, a chance meeting with a recently made acquaintance who, it happens, is also booked to travel on the same ferry, challenges the text's claim to factuality, as the novel's *deus ex machina* reveals itself through yet another 'accidental' meeting with Austerlitz in another country. The episode is then rendered irrevocably fictive when the narrator describes their immediate surroundings as they walk along the coast:

[W]e slowly walked back to the harbour together with the emptiness of the North Sea *on our right* and *on our right* the tall facades of the apartment blocks set among the dunes, with the bluish light of television screens flickering behind their windows, curiously unsteady and ghostly. [my italics][[154]](#footnote-154)

What might at first appear to be a simple error in printing or translation, a number of which are present in the current English editions of Sebald's work, is revealed to be a deliberate move on the part of Sebald. In the German edition, this passage reads *'zur Rechten die leere Nordsee und rechterhand die hohen Fasaden der in die Dünen gestezten Wohnburgen*';[[155]](#footnote-155) the text clearly dictates that both the land, with its apartments lying among the dunes, and the sea are on the right of the narrator and Austerlitz as they walk to the harbour. As the sea is to the North at Zeebrugge, they would have to be walking in a West-South-Westerly direction for it to remain on their right as they proceed towards the harbour, meaning that the only location that the flats could be built on the same side of the narrator as the sea would be the harbour itself, as Zeebrugge is not a natural bay but an artificial harbour built along a straight section of coastline.[[156]](#footnote-156) As such, the sand dunes, the location of the apartments, or both must be represented anachronistically. The characters are occupying a space that is somehow neither the empty sea, which would allow them to have the apartments on their right, nor the same mass of land that is home to the unseen humans; they are within a non-place, which exists neither physically or historically. The impossibility of the scene's geography, with the empty North sea supporting apartment blocks occupied by distant ghosts, concretises the space within both spectral and liminal frameworks. It is along this twilight-lit border between land and sea, at the outset of the characters' return to England, that the ghosts of the apartments and the first hints of Austerlitz's past are noticed by the narrator. Austerlitz appears uncomfortable speaking in English, especially now, as he returns to the country to which he was transported to protect him from the ever-increasing danger of the Holocaust, as the novel reveals the first indications of Austerlitz's heritage.[[157]](#footnote-157)

The haunting of urban place by the living, in addition to its figurative haunting by social and cultural histories, creates a sense of concrete memorialising in Beckett and Sebald but, as it does in *Austerlitz*, this memorialising can also act to undermine the sense of integration and shared cultural place that it ordinarily establishes. In Beckett’s ‘The Calmative’ this sense of a town haunted by its past occupants is reversed, focalised via the apparition; 'I don't know when I died', the text begins, 'this evening I'll be older than the day'.[[158]](#footnote-158) Where the linkage between the ghost and its environment might ordinarily embody the cultural signification of place, here it functions as a means to examine the alienation of the other, with the narrator notably beginning the novella in his grave beyond the city walls. The narrator is not the only haunting presence within the narrative, having risen from his grave at the outset, as the town he explores is filled with characters that remain unseen and unreachable, haunting the protagonist's city whilst still alive, much like Austerlitz's Terezín, Zeebrugge, and London:

[T]he houses were full of people, besieged, no, I don't know. When I stepped back to look at the windows I could see, in spite of shutters, blinds and muslins, that many of the rooms were lit. The light was so dimmed by the brilliancy flooding the boulevard that short of knowing or suspecting it was not so one might have supposed everyone sleeping.[[159]](#footnote-159)

As he wanders the town, the narrator is presented with little evidence of other occupants other than these lights, and except for the other spectral characters he meets, he is incapable of interacting with the living occupants of the town. The narrator is, akin to Austerlitz, only aware of the other people's presence through indirect evidence of their continuing inhabitation of the area, while in the veiling of their windows and the notion of their being 'besieged' there is the implication that they wish to remain inaccessible. The town is depicted as an unnatural space, where buses and trams move 'slow, empty, noiseless, as if under water',[[160]](#footnote-160) and when he does meet others they either remain silent, like the boy and his goat (the '[h]aunter of the waterfront'),[[161]](#footnote-161) or, as the salesman from whom he receives the titular drug, appear and disappear abruptly, and are as disturbed by the narrator's sudden appearance beside him as he is by their (de-)materialisations. The concluding passages of the text, wherein the narrator collapses to the ground amid 'the gradual blossoming of squares and rectangles, casement and sash' into 'bright flowers',[[162]](#footnote-162) demonstrates the continuing disconnection between his personal and the wider societal interpretations of the city. The urban archive is haunted in Beckett's text, occupied by the spectral narrator and the other phantoms he encounters, who continue to roam and inhabit the city long after their deaths, and in this moment the two worlds intersect. The fact that the living who are roaming the streets 'paid no heed to me, though careful not to walk on me' as he lies 'at the feet of mortals',[[163]](#footnote-163) suggests a tacit and widely accepted system of morals, respecting, but not directly acknowledging, the urban space's function as a home for the dead as well as the living. However, we soon lose this glimpse into the living urban environment, as 'reality [wherein the dead and the living cannot meet] was soon restored'[[164]](#footnote-164) and the town becomes depopulated once more - the narrator's 'reality' is that of the haunted city, inhabited only by the purgatorial wanderers whose existence it preserves.

'The Calmative*'* is identified as a supernatural text from the outset, and in accordance with this categorisation the narrator's surreal landscapes contrast with Sebald's tendency to represent unnatural environments within a realistic scene. Whereas Sebald introduces the supernatural in his texts to problematise the realism of his environmental representation, Beckett's text operates in reverse; revealing the point of intersection as the unfamiliar realistic world bleeds into the world of the dead. Beckett's text demonstrates the same disassociation as that experienced by Beyle, induced by misaligning social and individual concepts of a given environment, in the constant social exclusion of the narrator within a spectral state, contrasted by this glimpse of a more naturalistic representation of society. In keeping with this reversal of technique, where Beyle witnesses his own death and the inevitability of the world's slow decline, the narrator of Beckett's text witnesses his previously established state of death realised in the world of the living: Beckett's narrator does not witness his transformation from subject into object like Beyle, instead witnessing the result of others' deaths as underlying the subjective value of place whilst being ostracised himself. The narrator's fallen body, lying 'at the feet of mortals' surrounded by flowers, imbues the location of his fall with relational significance; the living treat the point of his demise with tacit, mutual reverence, neither stepping on the body, nor breaking from routine in order to acknowledge the historical significance of the site.

**2.3 Besieged by Nature**

The elided thought, 'besieged, no, I don't know', in Beckett's text further links the narrator's experience to the urban wanderings of Austerlitz, who also discusses the development of siegecraft and fortifications alongside the changing shape of modern cities and urban development. Buried outside of the city walls, nameless and unacknowledged excepting the final moments of the text, the narrator of 'The Calmative' represents part of an exterior set of memorialising entities: as he approaches the town he observes 'the ramparts [... c]yclopean and crenellated, standing out faintly against a sky scarcely',[[165]](#footnote-165) clearly intended to keep unwelcome visitors away from the memorialising artefacts preserved within. Where Beckett's spectral wanderer is kept at bay by 'shutters, blinds, and muslins' and out of fear, or perhaps in order to preserve the private memorialising of the family home from the influence of wider cultural memes, the inhabitants of Sebald's novels seek to absorb and protect these mass-memories at great expense and personal effort. As Austerlitz informs the narrator:

[W]e feel obliged to keep surrounding ourselves with defences, built in successive phases as a precaution against an incursion by enemy powers, until the idea of concentric rings making their way steadily outward comes up against its natural limits.[[166]](#footnote-166)

Architecture, as the cultural determiner of physical urban form, reveals the underlying concerns and characteristics of an area's inhabitants, as Austerlitz suggests: 'it is often our mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity'.[[167]](#footnote-167) The image created by Austerlitz, of the city gradually swelling outwards as each line is constructed over time, is reminiscent of the ageing and growth of the traditional antithesis of urban construction, that of trees and forests. As the concentric rings of a tree develop, strengthening the trunk and protecting the living layers of tissue within from damage, so too do the outer defences and limits of a city. The suggestion of a 'natural limit' functions in two manifest ways, however: in one instance Austerlitz is referring to the eventuality wherein, as 'fortifications became increasingly complex, [...] as soon as they were finished, if not before, they would have been overtaken by further developments,'[[168]](#footnote-168) much as animals and plants adapt to survive and overcome other species via evolutionary developments, and in the other he is appealing to the notion of the city as a natural defence system.

The emphasis remains on the role played by nature in the development of urban landscapes throughout Austerlitz's elaboration of the craft; he speaks of its 'fantastic nature', and the 'crystallized' plans for trenches, and their derivation from the golden ratio that is found throughout nature. The referencing of these forms brings together fortification and self-protection with two of the most iconic natural formations: the golden ratio, and the quincunx. The latter is a construction of matter found by Thomas Browne 'in certain crystalline forms', the anatomy of many species of animal, and tellingly within 'the creations of mankind, in the pyramids of Egypt and the mausoleum of Augustus' in a manner that 'might demonstrate *ad infinitum* the elegant geometrical designs of Nature [sic]'.[[169]](#footnote-169) The references made to these two particular shapes places urban development and the natural/evolutionary development of substances and beings alongside one another: for Sebald urban development is as dependent upon natural influence as it is human. It is also worth noting that the capitalisation of 'Nature' is not Sebald's, but introduced by the translator, Michael Hulse; all nouns are capitalised in German, so *'Natur'* being capitalised denotes no additional significance in the original. Hulse's capitalisation may result from a desire to emphasise the personification of nature within Sebald's original text, in which the German reads '*Endlos viel ließe sich hier zusammentragen, sagt Browne, und endlos ließe sich zeigen, mit welch eleganter Hand die Natur geometrisiert.*'[[170]](#footnote-170) In the German text nature is much more closely aligned to the figure of a calculating architect, actively crafting deliberate forms - such as the quincunx and golden ratio - out of raw materials rather than adapting new designs almost at random as a result of external influences as evolution allows. Nature and the architect both approach the same task, both granted the same agency and power over the physical form of the environment by Sebald's narrator. Whilst highlighting the flawed logic behind these systems of defence, Austerlitz cannot be said to be condemning the action on ecological grounds; if anything, his choice of language suggests that these developments and the urge to defend oneself and one's society through fortification are the articulation of natural instincts.

The so-called 'natural limits' of the city's defences are not only the point at which they cease to be practical, but also, by definition, the edge whereupon the urban area ends and the surrounding area of natural space begins. It is this very idea of being besieged by nature that runs throughout much of Sebald's writing, and the city's function as an area that protects society from the perceived threat of nature is a recurring aspect of his texts. Harrison's assertion that all habitations are situated 'in a clearing', developed by opening up a forest or natural area to the significations and physical influences of a society,[[171]](#footnote-171) combined with his analysis of the progression of these settlements in the ideological and artistic development of Western civilisations, sheds further light on the nature of this divide. Just as Harrison observes that forests and undeveloped areas of land have appeared 'as an antecedent to the human world' throughout our archival heritage, a 'precondition or matrix of civilization' that predates society and yet fulfils a vital role in creating the circumstances required for the development of society,[[172]](#footnote-172) we begin to see the dualism inherent within the opposition between natural and urban space. For the socially signified space of the town or city to be successfully demarcated there must, on the one hand, be a space beyond against which the newly developed space can be contrasted as 'other', and ideologically there must be an opportunity to develop and preserve a system of thought that prioritises and favours one mode of habitation over the other within this space. Just as the characteristics attributed to villages, towns, cities, and other types of settlements change over time, so too do the characteristics of the natural world beyond. To borrow a single example from Harrison, regarding the natural world as a threatening 'other' is an almost inevitable response:

[I]f Gilgamesh resolves to kill the forest demon, or to deforest the Cedar Mountain, it is because forests represent the quintessence of what lies beyond the walls of the city, namely the earth in its transcendence.[[173]](#footnote-173)

The forests, in their prehistoric grandeur, ability to self-replicate and renew, and subsequent semblance of permanence ranging far beyond the mortal range of humans, represent the wider continuation of natural order, the terrifying insignificance of human life in relation to the wider machinations of nature, and the brevity of human existence in the larger schemes of geological time. It is potentially for these reasons that the city, a fortification designed to protect humans from the influence of nature, exists in its present form as a result of this system of opposition. The defences created by humans attempt to mimic the same attributes that grant nature its permanence in order to preserve the social systems within, perpetuating the cultural artefacts contained within the urban archive in an attempt to allow it to transcend the human limitation that is mortality.

**2.4 Social Conservationism and Violence Against Nature**

The opposition of nature, as the exterior world, and the socially signified place within a cultural clearing, reaches its most concentrated representation within Beckett's *Endgame*. The action occurs in a world where, we are told, there is seemingly 'no more nature' as it has apparently 'forgotten' to affect the characters and their society within the shelter.[[174]](#footnote-174) The fact that, in this regard, the characters are inconsistent in their claims, citing the fact that 'we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!'[[175]](#footnote-175) - all indicative of their natural aging and deterioration - reveals how the characters regard nature: as a gradual destroyer of the flesh and culture. The juxtaposition between the three parts of Hamm's observation, their continuing respiration, the slow decay of their bodies, and the loss of their moral ideals, emphasises the opposition between the natural processes of life (their breathing), the result of these processes (their deaths), and the cultural and social artefacts that allow humans to transcend this process (their ideals). Positioning nature as a direct opponent, as the characters do throughout the play by situating their shelter in opposition to 'the other hell',[[176]](#footnote-176) outside of which awaits their inevitable death,[[177]](#footnote-177) the characters retain the same system of opposition between culture and the world beyond, which pits the group's physical defences (here, the shelter) against the elements. The shelter, true to its underlying function as a collaborative form of archive – created and maintained through the communal act of memorialising carried out by its occupants – preserves a miniaturised isolationist society of its own. There is a power struggle between the idle head of the group and the suffering worker (Hamm and Clov respectively), as well as familial structure tying the group together in Hamm's relations with Nagg and Nell, and the ambiguity of his relationship with, and potential adoption of, Clov. Similarly the many routines and repetitions of the play such as the endlessly repeated 'old questions',[[178]](#footnote-178) the daily ritual of Hamm's painkiller, the prevalence of oral histories as told by the patriarchal Hamm, and other repeated physical activities that run throughout the play, all suggest a rudimentary system of customs and social interactions that are carried out in adherence to a wider consensus between the occupants. When the evidence is taken in light of the group's disdain for the world beyond, and the intrusion of nature into their space, the characters' immediate environment begins to reflect a conservation area of sorts. Striving to remove contaminants such as animals and the uncontrollable influences of nature from their lives, the characters effectively quarantine themselves in order to preserve not only their own lives, but their social structures and rituals.

Nature is invariably regarded with hostility by the characters, not only because it constantly threatens to bring death to the group as they age, but also because the variability of nature's influence means that it cannot be controlled and as such threatens to contaminate the preserved human society contained within the shelter-cum-archive. The two appearances made by non-human animals consist of the arrival of a flea and later the appearance of a rat in the kitchen, both historically plague-bearing pests that threaten the occupants with disease and demise. The immediate response to the flea is one of disbelief, before escalating rapidly into outright hostility:

Hamm: A flea! Are there still fleas?

Clov: On me there's one. [Scratching.] Unless it's a crablouse.

Hamm: [Very perturbed.] But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him, for the love of god![[179]](#footnote-179)

The flea is quickly destroyed with insecticide and nature's first successful breach of the shelter's defences is quashed. Later, a rat enters the kitchen (albeit offstage) and is half killed before Clov is distracted from the task. Hamm responds to this news with the command, 'You'll finish him later. Let us pray to God'.[[180]](#footnote-180) On both occasions, Hamm urges the destruction of these natural invasions at the same time as invoking the power of God; he appeals to an established social/cultural belief system preserved by their microcosmic society in the hope of resisting the advances of the natural world. The group's desire to destroy these animals is the result of their continuing commitment to the preservation of their group and the shelter as a social space, and their subsequent dedication to the resistance of the nature's encroachment as the antithesis of these ideals. The threat of the flea as indicative of the chance for humanity to 'start from there all over again' not only suggests a distrust of the potential resurgence of the human race post-disaster, but also the threat this poses to the group's position. If humanity were to restart, a differing cultural system could be created by those beyond the shelter, and if this should spread the group's role as a preserved specimen would be undermined, and could even be destroyed by a new dominant society from beyond the shelter. As a result the threat to the archive's existence lies doubly within nature: if the group perish, the opposition between the inner social place and external nature will cease to be, along with its preserved society, and yet if nature allows humanity to rise again elsewhere, their function as a preserved specimen will be rendered unnecessary.

Just as the characters attempt to remove nature, in all its forms, from the socially signified space of the shelter, the play itself uses an awareness of its own dependence upon collaboration and social consensus in preserving the dramatic space and the action within it. Metatheatricality acts as a constant reminder of the constructedness of the space observed by the audience, and by extension the actors, as each performs their role in the performance, as do the play's repeated nods to the artificiality of the staging. Unlike the actors, who exist on the stage before the audience, the entities that represent nature (the flea, the rat, the world beyond etc.) exist only as imagined concepts for the audience. Nature is a fiction in *Endgame*, an entity the audience only experiences through oral reports of the world that once was and the barren land beyond the windows. The startling comedy of the moment in which Clov turns the looking glass on the audience and relates seeing 'a multitude... in transports... of joy',[[181]](#footnote-181) a line that prompts unease and humour in equal measure as the fourth wall is broken, is continued when he finishes his utterance 'Well? Don't we laugh?'.[[182]](#footnote-182) Clov’s expectations of the audience's reaction at this point are explicated such that, as the audience have their attention drawn to the artificiality of their participation in the dramatic event, the play also reveals its hand: Beckett's work not only telegraphs the audience's reaction to this direct address, but also engages directly with the audience by asking the rhetorical question. Reading this line as either rhetorical or nostalgic, would have Clov acknowledging the camaraderie of theatre, foregrounding the united purpose of the actors in entertaining the audience, who in turn must also invest in the dramatic event in order to extract pleasure from it. A different reading presents the audience with a further level of metatheatricality: immediately after breaking the fourth wall, Clov asks his fellow players if they too are supposed to laugh at this joke. The actors and audience are shown to be as aware of the constructedness of the play as one another, to the point where potential performance-modes are discussed by the players for the viewers' consideration. The constructedness of the action and the stage set directly relate to the same system of collaborative thought and social norms that facilitate the construction of urban spaces and archives; the same social systems that create the opposition between nature and the 'unnatural'. Furthermore, in acknowledging the role of the audience in establishing the fiction of the drama, the play also acknowledges the collaborative act of preservation represented by socially defined place. Instead of a stage with actors upon it, the actors and audience collaborate to redesignate the space, temporarily, as place – preserving the events of the play from erasure through their reiteration and sharing previous cultural ideas in the repeated performances of a play written in another political and cultural climate only for it to return, once more, to a space ripe for manipulation following the performance's end.

Where these examples demonstrate the underlying processes that determine the formation and preservation of place in Sebald's and Beckett's urban centres, especially in regard to their archontic function, a wider survey of the city and urban geography in these authors' writing will work to reveal the more intricate issues each engages with within these spaces. The overarching questions of the navigation and inhabitation of cities, the geography of these places and their non-places, and the influence of movement upon their perception by these authors' characters remain to be discussed, with the eventual aim of determining each writer's attitude towards the city and its relationship with nature. The following chapter will make moves to achieve this through an analysis of Beckett's urban fiction, building upon the framework established here. By discussing the representation of post-industrial modernity and the proliferating urban centres engendered within it, a greater understanding of the gradual dissolution of place and the interactions between human-made and natural entities might be achieved. This might also allow the critic to better analyse Beckett's wider representations of modernity, as well as the gradual mechanisation of daily life and dehumanising of the body.

**3 – Beckett and Modern Ecology**

In Samuel Beckett's writing, especially his earlier work, there is a specific gravity attributed to the urban centre that is difficult for his characters to resist. *Mercier and Camier*, the author's first major piece to be composed in French, comprises the comings and goings of the two titular characters who, it appears, are incapable of severing their ties to their host city. An ecocritical approach to this period of Beckett's writing provides a breadth of insight into his depiction of early twentieth century urban centres, the impact of developing technologies, and the disconnection between rural and urban life that urban modernity conspired to bring about. *Watt*, composed in English during this same period of Beckett's life, similarly interrogates the relationship between humans, civilisation, and nature in an age ruled by empirical thought and technological order. Between these two works, it becomes apparent that the upheaval in urban life caused by the continual advancement of industrialisation and transport are of great importance to the characters of Beckett's writing, and inform much of the author's wider depictions of mobility and the human occupation of place. Both *Watt* and *Mercier and Camier* centre, as much of Beckett's work does, upon peripatetic narrators who enter and exit urban spaces, but what renders their experiences significant is that their specific experiences of locomotion define, rather than augment, their relationships with their environment, and their experience of being-in-the-world, whilst documenting the advent of the modern city in a way that follows on from the strictly realistic and informs the rest of the author's *oeuvre.*

Beckett's career spanned the most part of the twentieth century, and as a result he was ideally situated, biographically, to witness the influence of modernity's technological and social developments upon the urban landscape and population. It is therefore unsurprising that Beckett's writing not only addresses the present condition of occupying urban landscapes, primarily in his earlier writing, but that even in his later more abstract work, the fate of modern people would remain linked to their relationships with their ever-changing environments. The tensions between urban and rural space, society's technological requirements, and the changing modes of human experience remain palpable through Beckett's writing – the increasing alienation of the cities' human occupants in his writing lead to increasingly marginalised, destitute protagonists such as those found in his post-war *Nouvelles*, characterised by their eroding human dignity and their increasingly grotesque appearance and behaviours. The novel *Mercier and Camier*, written 1946 but withheld from publication until late in the author's career, portrays a vision of an anonymised Dublin that has embraced the modern ethos wholly, while elsewhere the author's vagrant narrators allow the reader to observe an increasingly regulated and mechanised world as it becomes ever more detached from both its human occupants and the wider biosphere. *Watt*, on the other hand, describes the protagonist's temporary escape from the urban centre, returning to a pseudo-feudal settlement in the countryside, only to return to the city and be placed in a facility for the mentally unstable later in his life. Both texts demonstrate a clear distrust of urban modernity and the effect it has upon the emotional, mental, and representative nature of their characters, with the texts' anti-urbanism leading towards the hypothetical bleak, impressionist future environments of his later writing.

**3.1 Enslaved to Science: Modern Humanity's Subordinate Nature**

As technology and research have improved our understanding of the processes upon which the natural world depends, so too has humanity's ability to manipulate and exploit natural resources. This understanding of the biosphere, and the perceived power it has provided humans with over it, has induced an ongoing change in our species' self-appointed role within our ecosystems accompanied by radical changes in our attitudes towards humans, animals, and plants as resources for industrial use. Carolyn Merchant argues that the greatest impetus for change in our understanding of the natural world and women, as those Western patriarchal society aligns most closely with the natural world, has been the influence of Francis Bacon's empirical method upon humans' every-day thought and activity.[[183]](#footnote-183) Merchant's reading of Bacon's grouping of women with nature foregrounds the shifting attitudes for which his work is foundational:

The new man of science must not think that 'the inquisition of nature is in any part interdicted or forbidden.' Nature must be 'bound into service' and made a 'slave,' put 'in constraint' and 'moulded' by the mechanical arts. The 'searchers and spies of nature' are to discover her plots and secrets.[[184]](#footnote-184)

The pursuit of scientific knowledge theoretically grants the human supreme power over nature; the impact of the scientist's interference upon the subject or its ecosystem is of secondary importance to the unveiling of nature's systems to the service of its scientific master. Bacon intended not only to succeed in manipulating the environment 'for the improvement of mankind, but [also] the manipulation of organic life to create artificial species of plants and animals'[[185]](#footnote-185) – nature's previous position as a mystical, sacred power is totally reversed by Bacon's empirical thought, transformed into base materials for human exploitation, with the most fundamental processes of evolution and natural development reined in by its exploiters.

Modernity's current relationship with the non-human world is conceptualised as one in which 'one hypostatized entity – "man" – [seeks] control over another – "nature"',[[186]](#footnote-186) continuing the thread of Merchant's argument, and a system of cultural and historical processes lead from this point towards a state of post­­­­modernity:

Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable 'second nature.'[[187]](#footnote-187)

The contrast between 'modern' and 'post-modern' here is one of philosophical creation and annihilation: in the former perspective, modernity is a process by which a category of being, "human", is recognised as both existing separately to another, the "natural" world, and therefore as capable of subjugating it so that it might be exploited. Jameson's suggestion is that postmodernity, however, hinges upon the total eradication of "nature" as a category of being. For this latter perspective, the hypostatized humanity creates a self-perpetuating culture which goes on to replace the now obsolete nature from which it arose. This nuance is significant in establishing a grasp upon Beckett's representation of nature: his writing evinces a clear understanding of nature as the origin of humanity, both consumed by and utilising human and their constructions in turn. However, where culture is, for Jameson at least, threatening to supplant nature, for the most part, Beckett's characters remain aware of, if not fully engaged with, both the natural and social worlds. Despite the author's writing gradually becoming increasingly mechanical, experimental, even abstract as his career progressed, the natural world remains present within even the most postmodern of his landscapes, and it is the increasing subjugation of nature within Beckett's fictionalised societies that is of key interest to this chapter. Beckett's fictional worlds are therefore irrevocably tied to the modern era: even when their represented scenarios depict post-human and collapsed ecosystems, or worlds that exist purely as mental or conceptual spaces, the existence of his characters speaks of the vestigial existence of nature and its continuing ability to support life.

To trace this thread it is required that we establish the role of the natural world in Beckett's earlier writing, where the interface of the humans and their physical worlds is brought into question. In *Watt* the eponymous character is discovered upon arrival at the Knott estate by the departing Arsene, a servant in the service whose tenure concludes with the arrival of the protagonist. In the process of leaving, Arsene describes his own experience of the hypostatizing process, wherein humanity and nature are split so as to align with Bacon's empirical perspective. Beginning his account of 'a Tuesday afternoon, in the month of October',[[188]](#footnote-188) Arsene describes the revelation of becoming self-aware as originating within the conscious mind: 'I was in the sun, and the wall was in the sun. I was the sun, need I add, and the wall, and the step, and the yard, and the time of year, and the time of day.' Arsene's understanding of this process arises from the illumination of his environment in its apprehension by his human mind, combining the phenomenological mindset with the empirical. Here it is the human mind that formulates the inhabited world – the walls, the yard, and the world are all in and of Arsene's mind – and it is this process of categorisation of those items that are, and are not, *Dasein,* present-at-hand, and equipment that assists the modernist Arsene in understanding his environment. The alteration in Arsene's worldview that comes about is not one that can be observed, but is one that fundamentally alters his apprehension of his position within the biosphere: 'I felt I had been transported, without my having remarked it, to some quite different yard, and to some quite different season, in an unfamiliar country'.[[189]](#footnote-189) Arsene has experienced, he believes, 'the reversed metamorphosis [of the] Laurel into Daphne',[[190]](#footnote-190) the extraction of the human from the natural entity, and its establishment within the human cultural tradition, akin to the myth he references. Arsene's experience appears to corroborate White's argument, with the episode ultimately ending with Arsene's humanity becoming distinct from the natural world that surrounds him. The extraction and categorisation of humanity as separate from nature is complete; however the episode also shows that the postmodern condition has not yet been attained: Arsene's nostalgia, and the group's ongoing relationships with animals and plants as pets and garden ornaments respectively, rather than as pure resources and utilities, suggest that nature remains both emotionally and objectively important for these humans, despite their modern perspectives of the natural world.

It is this continuing emotional and transactional dependence upon the natural world that prevents Beckett's characters from progressing to a state of postmodernity, whilst legitimising their exploitation of these resources in the burgeoning modern epoch.. The condition of human separateness from the natural world is, for Arsene, '[t]he old thing back where it always was, back again',[[191]](#footnote-191) a return to the status quo of human being-in-the-world, and yet the lost harmony with the world remains a fond memory for Arsene, that might hopefully be experienced once more. Culture has not, in this process, begun to destroy the concept of nature; rather, in reinforcing the distinction between the world of humans and the rest of the natural order, Arsene's tale reaffirms the existence of both humans and nature. Later in the novel, in the addenda which follow the body of the text, the laurel returns, this time in association with Watt's eventual successor, Arthur. However, rather than bringing about the existence of humanity through its extraction from the profusion of natural entities, as it did for Arsene, the laurel is perceived as containing a latent humanity of its own – the plant recast as akin to human through the pathetic fallacy of the character's perception. Arthur informs Watt that, having thanked God for making 'him, for the daisies, for the grass' he began to laugh, and leaning upon 'a passing shrub' it also 'joined heartily in the joke'.[[192]](#footnote-192) The imposition of human attributes upon this shrub, previously credited as the birthplace of Arsene's empirical worldview, suggests a continuing degree of affinity between human and non-human entities that would ordinarily be considered incompatible with modernity's segregated human race, whilst also betraying the humans' ongoing desire to see themselves as related to the natural world through their interpretation of the plant's forced shaking as expressing human emotion. Arthur's tale, rather than explaining humanity's difference as originating within our extraction from the natural world, gestures toward the continuing interconnectedness of humans and nature, the human artificiality of the underlying identification of the two as separate, and demonstrates the ongoing human nostalgia for the harmony that was lost as a result of this division.

For Arsene, Arthur, and the other occupants of the Knott estate it appears that humanity as an empirical concept almost inevitably came to be as a result of our capacity for thought. Elsewhere in Beckett however this sentiment is refined, as rational thought is identified as the tool by which philosophical and scientific enquiry enabled humans to identify themselves as uniquely privileged members of the biosphere. In *Molloy* the titular character finds that it is the insistence upon establishing the uniqueness of humanity that defines modern, regimented culture as separate from the chaos of nature: 'What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not.'[[193]](#footnote-193) The definition of humanity by negation, leads Molloy to focus upon the endpoint of human endeavour, the death of individuals and communities alike and the disintegration of their cultural artefacts; in short, to ruins and placelessness. Here, Molloy finds:

[...] only these leaning things, forever lapsing and crumbling away, beneath a sky without memory of morning or hope of night. These things, what things, come from where, made of what? And it says that here nothing stirs, has never stirred, will never stir, except myself, who does not stir either, when I am there, but see and am seen.[[194]](#footnote-194)

Beckett metonymises the condition of humanity via its entropic mode of being, acknowledging the kinship of human and natural entities in doing so. By acknowledging the temporality of human lives, achievements, and influence upon the environment Molloy reveals the inextricable linkage between humans and the natural world from which we arose: as unique as our species may be, our bodies, possessions, and resources are all destined to be consumed once more by the natural systems that govern the biosphere. Ultimately, the activities of humans are rendered unremarkable by the natural degradation of our monuments and bodies, and the distinction between what was created by hand or by natural forces becomes meaningless; the historic significance of these objects is stripped, there never was a history, an event, nor an entity that could be identified as truly divorced from nature.

The underlying transience of human influence carries throughout much of the novel, becoming prominent once again in the effect of Moran's departure upon his home. As he returns, the detective finds the house abandoned and in a state of disrepair, his domesticated birds and bees have perished, and the locks have seized up from disuse.[[195]](#footnote-195) Moran does not choose to reaffirm his ownership of the house and land, as might be expected. Rather, he refuses to have the electricity reconnected, 'clearing out' and selling his worldly goods, and avoids asserting his ownership over the material goods and natural entities that occupy the property.[[196]](#footnote-196) Relieving himself of all equity, Moran declares 'I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more, I shall not try any more'.[[197]](#footnote-197) In Moran's experience, to be human is to assert ownership and superiority over the natural world; however his time in the Molloy country leads him to seek to dispose of this mantle. The final step he takes is to write his report before falsifying the content of the document. By writing a falsehood at the outset of his report, reporting the weather and time of day incorrectly, Moran undermines the act of documentation, and with it the modern sanctity of documentary evidence as legitimising human history, culture, and empirical reasoning. Moran's report becomes a fiction – the novel in the reader's hands – with the 'true' chronology of his actions forgotten, moving towards an undoing of the historical mandate for environmental domination in the process. For Beckett's characters the division of humans from nature is derived from our capacity for thought and self-awareness, however this segregation is by no means final, nor do the characters in these texts seek to rid themselves of their remaining ties with nature. Instead of gesturing towards the postmodern epoch discussed by White and Jameson, Beckett's work from the early to mid 20th century appears to remains within the modern age, with an evident nostalgia for the lost unity of the biosphere. The artificiality of this distinction, and the promise of reintegration within the natural world in *Dasein's* being-towards-death mean that Beckett's modern humans are frequently troubled by the transience of human culture, finding themselves unable to navigate society's relentless drive away from nature and towards increasing mechanisation and urbanisation.

**3.2 Safety in Numbers: Rural Humans and Urban Beasts**

The precariousness of the human/nature distinction, arising from the origin of the former within the latter, gives rise to competing natural and human histories in Beckett's writing, most notably within urban environments. The natural world, in its indifference and power over the human species, operates within a separate chronological scheme to that of humans throughout the author's body of work, both in the juxtaposition of industrial and natural cycles of time, and in the contrasting portrayals of the methods and results of these systems' continuing development. This foregrounds the artificiality of the human/nature trope, whilst also gesturing towards the ongoing processes of place generation and disintegration that occur throughout human landscapes. In turn, this can help the critic better understand the feelings of alienation and persecution exhibited by Beckett's characters when occupying these locales, as the extent of their emotional investment within the landscape is eroded. *Mercier and Camier* portrays an urban landscape that is characterised by its early twentieth-century industrial makeup, occupied by a population who are at once dismissive of one another and of the natural world that constitutes the city's surrounding landscape. *Watt*, in contrast, portrays a smaller settlement who live at a remove from the modern urban centre, an agrarian setting that has more in common with the confined rural locale in which it was composed – the provincial town of Roussillon – than Dublin or Paris. In this novel, a smaller group of individuals occupy clearly defined roles that directly complement one another in an ecologically sustainable mode of living. Nothing in the Knott estate is wasted and no individual wants for a role or sustenance, further maintaining the cohesion required to ensure the group's survival, in contrast to the perpetual *ennui* and wanderlust experienced by the urban subjects of *Mercier and Camier*.

The narrative perspective of *Watt* joins the titular character at the outset of his parabolic journey, as he embarks his train out of the city, concluding with his return via the same mode of transport. This circular movement and narrative belie not only the cyclical patterns of historical and natural modes of being– days, seasons, and years – but also the revolving cast of characters occupying the estate's various roles, including that of Knott himself, as well as the closed loop of resource management and constant recycling carried out by the group. Mr. Knott's estate in the country is an isolated space, self-sufficient and engaging exclusively with local economics when necessary. This leaves the estate dependent upon a range of individuals occupying specific roles, each fulfilling roles unsuitable for the others, forming a harmonious system of subsistence. The house itself is divided into specific tiers, based upon the occupants' comparative period of occupancy: initially, Watt's work is all on the ground floor,[[198]](#footnote-198) while Erskine, as the longer-serving member of Knott's staff, works on the first floor, and directly with Mr. Knott. From Mr Knott, via Erskine, Watt is given 'the slops' from upstairs each morning; however Watt is not to empty this pail 'in the way that slops are usually emptied' but 'in the garden, before sunrise or after sunset, on the violet bed in violet time, and on the pansy bed in pansy time' and the roses, celery, seakale, tomatoes, and on the flowers, vegetables, and fruit 'at the moment of its most need'.[[199]](#footnote-199) This cycle of fertiliser, brought from the head of the household to be disposed of at the bottom, maximises the crop of food grown by the gardener Graves, which is then prepared by Watt, taken to the dining room and consumed by Knott, thus closing the loop.[[200]](#footnote-200) The generation of food by and for the estate is shown to be a constant cycle of organic, locally grown goods, aspects of agriculture that are now known to reduce the environmental damage caused by the growing and transport of food crops across regional and national borders. Even the waste parts of each meal are disposed of via biological means, in the guise of a procession of hungry dogs, cared for by the Lynch family, who also received the worn clothes and other serviceable, yet unwanted, materials of the Knott household.[[201]](#footnote-201) Knott's environmentally sustainable home offers an example of a place where humans live without want nor unnecessary waste, where each has their own predetermined role which they happily fulfil. It is, as the narrator states – a 'haven, calmly entered, freely ridden' protecting those who enter from 'the storms without [and] the storms within'.[[202]](#footnote-202) When read in relation with Beckett's other prose composed within the same period, it becomes clear that these personal storms which have driven these men to take refuge within this commune may well be the combined personal and societal traumas wrought by the advent of urban modernity. To see this in action, one need only compare the relative certainty and self-assuredness of Watt's position within Knott's company with the personal and cultural ennui evinced by Mercier and Camier who remain in the city.

In *Mercier and Camier*, written in 1946, the titular characterspace the streets of a fictional Dublin in the pursuit of a long-forgotten errand, perhaps the recovery of Mr Conaire's dog Queenie,[[203]](#footnote-203) entering and exiting the town several times before parting ways near the novel's conclusion. This task, mostly neglected by the duo, positions the novel within the tradition of the quest narrative: opening in the mode of an oral account, the narrator declares 'The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time' only to downplay the quest itself: 'it was fairly easy going', the reader is told, 'without seas or frontiers to be crossed', the pair moving scarcely beyond their point of origin.[[204]](#footnote-204) Immediately Beckett places his novel in direct contrast to the purposeful adventures of traditional Irish tales, leaving his characters to embark upon their aimless modern adventure which leads them throughout the city and surrounding countryside to achieve very little indeed. The Fiana myth cycle, as comprising a substantial part of Beckett's cultural heritage, is identified by Cecelia Scallan Zeiss as an influence upon the author's early and war-time prose writing, including *Mercier and Camier*.[[205]](#footnote-205) The meandering of Beckett's narrators around their landscapes is compared by Zeiss to that of 'rootless' Fiana, with the author's representation of time, space, and states of being also falling into alignment with that of the Fiana cycle's characteristic 'fluidity of states' typified by the transfiguration of humans into and from animals.[[206]](#footnote-206) The latter's significance will be discussed later in this chapter, while the former's importance for an analysis of *Mercier and Camier* arises from the novel's representation of Dublin's place-hood and historical state.

The Dublin of *Mercier and Camier* is undergoing something of a crisis of place; its urban landscape is the site of hedonistic pastimes – drinking and prostitution chief among those enjoyed by the protagonists and their peers – its occupants lacking a sense of purpose and belonging. As the working day concludes, the citizens of Dublin move from the factories 'towards an unquestioned goal', characteristically 'wroth and weary' as they walk together, yet never conversing with one another or demonstrating an individualist personhood.[[207]](#footnote-207) The working classes lack camaraderie, working towards a series of common, unquestioned goals whilst failing to develop social ties in the process. Later in the novel, these same citizens reveal themselves as falling prey to the fluidity of states remarked upon by Zeiss in Beckett's other short pieces of fiction, as they are figuratively reduced to livestock:

The beasts proper were far on their way already, straggling along the miry back-land roads, to the cries of the herds. Some would come at night to their familiar byres, others to others they knew not of. Bringing up the rear, behind the sodden ewes, a train of clattering carts. The herds held their pricks through the stuff of their pockets.[[208]](#footnote-208)

This passage unites the trading of livestock, as an exploitation of natural resources for the financial benefit of their owners, with the exploitation of the working classes by the middle and upper classes into this slow procession of beasts. The only humanizing factor of the working classes that remains is their masturbatory desire, while their exploiters are able to relax in the nearby saloon.[[209]](#footnote-209) In Beckett's novel, post-industrial urban culture depends upon the exploitation of the working classes as a resource, much as humans exploit the natural world, in such a way as to erode the significance of human and animal lives. The degeneration of the human/nature divide appears to originate within the exploited; this fluidity of states not only affects many of Beckett's exiled narrators, but also those who are subjected to the worst mechanisms of industrial capitalism, culminating in the subjugation of the working classes.

This devaluation of human and natural beings is not only evidenced by the reduction of the working classes to livestock in Beckett's novel, transformed into a source of sustenance for the middle and upper classes, but also in the representation of the wider Irish landscape. The novel's fourth chapter begins with the description of a field, one of many that cover the visible landscape occupied by Mercier and Camier:

In it nothing grew, that is nothing of use to man. Nor was it clear at first sight what interest it could have for animals. Birds may have found the odd worm there. Its straggling expanse was bounded by a sickly hedge of old tree stumps and tangles of brambles perhaps good for a few bramble berries at bramble-berry time. Thistles and nettles, possible fodder at a pinch, contended for the soil with a sour blue grass.[[210]](#footnote-210)

The narrator's self-amendment – correcting 'nothing grew' to 'nothing of use to man' – at the outset of the passage speaks of the valuation of nature in the society described throughout the novel: if the contents of a space are non-human, nor of any monetary value, then the space itself is categorised as empty. This has not, however, prevented the space being demarcated with hedgerows, perhaps so as to facilitate the division of the land among a group of owners or to contain grazing animals, nor is the possibility of its eventual exploitation by humans omitted. The passage concludes 'Some day someone would realize. The builders would come. Or a priest, with his sprinkler, and another acre would be God's. When prosperity returned.'[[211]](#footnote-211) The potential of 'empty' space to act as a resource for place-formation maintains its minimal value for humans – the field is, at present, only valued as something which humans might make valuable, while nature's influence upon the field is regarded as meaningless. Economic growth brought about by prosperity would necessitate the development of the site, with the duly assimilated by a cultural or religious body, however until such time as this becomes necessary the land remains devoid of cultural value. The de-signifying of the natural world, as containing no human indications of value, function, or cultural heritage, is not the only negative result of the ongoing urbanisation of life in Beckett's writing however. Modern technology and urban planning are also shown to be undermining pre-existing place within the city itself, in part as a result of the alienation of its occupants by industry, as this thesis will now examine.

**3.3 Losing Place: the Quest to Dwell**

It is perhaps unsurprising, given his experience of such a close-knit group as the Knott estate, that when Watt meets the protagonists of *Mercier and Camier*, and accompanies them to the pub, he soon explains his feelings regarding the city's negative effect upon its inhabitants. Having left the Knott estate with its established roles and adherence to a great number of routines and traditions, to find himself once more in the city, wherein the individual's value is greatly diminished and the social structures of the collective consciousness are beginning to falter. In the modern city, the individual's identity is increasingly devalued by the industrial processes they live to enact; despite having known both Mercier and Camier since their birth Watt is initially unknown to the pair, 'As you say, I'm recognisable' is Watt's response.[[212]](#footnote-212) Watt is aware of his relative insignificance in a settlement so much larger than the Knott estate, adding 'my notoriety is not likely ever to penetrate to the denizens of Dublin's fair city' as it did in his previous position.[[213]](#footnote-213) The more experienced Watt then attempts to console the floundering Mercier and Camier: 'I too have sought, said Watt, all on my own, only I thought I knew what', identifying the pair's issues arising from their '[seeing] red at the mere sight of green. [...] Whereas the shop-windows, concrete, cement, asphalt, neon' and other common elements of the urban environment placate and soothe them.[[214]](#footnote-214)

The Dublin of *Mercier and Camier* not only actively erodes the significance of the ex-urban landscape, but elides all non-industrial spaces through its restructuring of the environment. The modes of transportation, and the shift from animal transportation to mechanical propulsion, fracture the city in such a way as to lead those who inhabit this space to either resignation to the role of industrial instrument, or exiled wanderer. The dehumanising of the ancillary characters of Beckett's early writing, such as the crowds of *Mercier and Camier's* Dublin, also affects the central characters and narrators of Beckett's work, rejecting their attempts to assert a personal stake in the urban environment. Corina Martin-Jordache writes of Beckett's early protagonists:

If there is a one single common denominator to all Beckettian narrators, that would be their longing for *home*, their need for a place to *dwell*. What they find out, of course, is that such a place does not exist and also that it is wherever they go, ironically again, within and beyond their reach.[[215]](#footnote-215)

Martin-Jordache's argument suggests that the city is at once a space of communal significance, but one that repels the individual's attempts to engage with it, and that it is this tension between homeliness and unfamiliarity which entraps the characters who cannot fail but volunteer to return to the city. Mercier and Camier, and later their companion Watt, all participate in the processes of self-imposed exile followed by a voluntary return to the urban centre – Watt may well have found a sense of belonging in the Knott estate for a time, however as Martin-Jordache suggests, this too was merely the adoption of a different role that overtook his personal identity. While Watt may have lived in the house it remained Knott's property and Watt's role was to prioritise the wellbeing of the master. In the city he finds the beleaguered Mercier and Camier, and the disintegration of the home/city's place-hood, coupled with the rejection of both human and natural entities by an increasingly technological society, leads to his explosive outburst – 'Fuck life' – in the pub, and the common ennui of the trio.

A common contrast between the urban and natural space in Beckett's writing is the means of navigation and locomotion afforded the individual in each. Beckett's urban modes of transport beyond walking are shown to be the bicycle, the cart, the automobile, and the tram or train – vehicles and channels that are limited or governed in some way by the physical manipulation of the landscape by humans. Whether this takes the form of the laying of rails and tracks, or the formation of roads, these vehicles travel only via routes which are dictated by the spaces left between buildings, and along pre-determined and socially sanctioned routes. Not only this, but the roads and railways also connect cities and satellite settlements, allowing the movement of resources, individuals, and ideas between the cultural hub and the surrounding landscape. The natural expanse which surrounds the city, however, can be traversed in any manner the individual sees fit, in any direction: it is by choice that Mercier and Camier walk along the country roads, and it is also their decision to then eschew them in order to walk across the fields. The prospect of navigating the city's network of pedestrian and vehicular highways lends what Debra Castillo describes as a 'labyrinthine quality' to Beckett's cities, a condition that extends not only to their physical form but also to the maze of social norms and interactions that are rendered incomprehensible by the characters' status as exiles.[[216]](#footnote-216) Mercier and Camier's journey is governed throughout by the network of roads and transport routes they follow, and it is their adherence to these routes that causes their wanderings to inevitably lead them back to civilisation. Their journey is not akin to the contemplative dawdling of the flâneur – the characters are, throughout the novel, propelled into exclusively urban environments by the mechanical modes of their locomotion, with ex-urban landscape only becoming available when they choose to escape the city on foot. Despite this, the pair remain constrained by urban systems of transport as long as they remain within the city. At the outset of their journey, Mercier and Camier enter and exit the scene with unnerving regularity, arriving and departing from their rendezvous moments apart at exactly five minute intervals, postponing their initial meeting:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Arr. | Dep. | Arr. | Dep. | Arr. | Dep. | Arr. |
| Mercier | . | 9.05 | 9.10 | 9.25 | 9.30 | 9.40 | 9.45 | 9.50 |
| Camier | . | 9.15 | 9.20 | 9.35 | 9.40 | 9.50 |  |  |

Figure 1 - (Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 4)

The two's movements are regimented by the rhythms of urban life – precise, metrical, and regular – adhering strictly to a timetable that operates in divisions of five, staggered in their to-ing and fro-ing. Beckett's narrator highlights the unnaturalness of this behaviour, and the novel's opening, with a disparaging rebuttal 'What stink of artifice' following the above timetable,[[217]](#footnote-217) the format of the story, the behaviour of its characters, even the modes of expression used are labelled un-naturalistic from the outset. The pair's departure after they meet at 9:50am is immediately constrained by the limitations of urban highways by their being encumbered with a bicycle by the park ranger. The pair, unable to walk any way they please, must progress in single file so as to drive the bicycle along the roads,[[218]](#footnote-218) roads upon which they must remain owing to the bicycle's limited off-road capability. The bicycle is, as Castillo writes 'a pre-eminently urban mode of transportation, seen at its best on the smooth streets of the town [...] a terrifying formalization of the urban world in its cold symmetry'.[[219]](#footnote-219) This formalization of urban life within a mechanical transport device has two implications: the first is the regulation of the individual's movement, which is now constrained by the boundaries of the public highway. The second is that the bicycle encapsulates the modern commoditisation of human lives, with the human acting as the source of propulsion for the machine which is ostensibly built for human convenience. It is the underlying tension between the human's position in this relationship that is of concern here; where the human is at once using the bicycle to improve their own capabilities, they also subject themselves to the machine's need for power. This transitional phase of co-dependence between human and bicycle is a continuing theme of Beckett's fiction, written before the automobile, train, and aeroplane made humans and animals redundant as power sources for vehicles.

For Castillo's reading of Beckett, the brutal perfection of the steel bicycle's form, and its use of an 'imperfect' human as a form of propulsion represents the isolation of the human enslaved to the machine – the individual powering the machine is dehumanized, becoming a resource used to power a mechanical process.[[220]](#footnote-220) Mercier and Camier avoid this fate by not riding the bicycle, merely walking it around the town with them, until it disappears in the night. The bicycle is an encumbrance placed upon the pair by a socially sanctioned figure of authority, and in refusing to surrender their energies to the bicycle's needs the pair are passively rebelling against the modern economic use of human lives as resources used to power machines. When the bicycle is stolen, the pair do not seek it out but opt to 'board the first express southward bound',[[221]](#footnote-221) choosing to head out of the city in order to reach the 'nearest terminus' to travel as far from the city as is possible using this service. Where the roads allow a certain degree of freedom to the pair when walking with the bicycle, the railway marks a decrease in their ability to self-govern their direction and route in exchange for an increased range of movement at an accelerated pace. The pair have steadily lost their ambulatory autonomy to increasingly technological modes of urban transport, and in doing so have transitioned from the most versatile and human method of movement, walking, to the most urban-centric. The train exists only to link settlements at a remove from one another, not to allow the passenger freedom to enter ex-urban landscapes due to its requirement for a station to be constructed to allow alighting and embarking passengers to negotiate the route. Mercier and Camier find themselves losing their agency at every turn as they find themselves co-opted into utilising modern modes of transport, and with the increasing potency of each form of transportation they also find themselves losing the ability to engage with ex-urban and natural landscapes and ecosystems due to these systems' city-centric designs.

The train, and later the aeroplane, were both pivotal in the shaping of the post-industrial worldview towards which Mercier and Camier are being directed, typified by a 'new attitude to time and space' that 'infected' urban civilisations ,[[222]](#footnote-222) a process discussed more recently in light of the development of supersonic travel and instant-communication technologies by Paul Virilio:

In the nineteenth century, Progress meant the *Great Commotion* of the railways. In the twentieth century, still meant more the *Great Speed* of the bullet train and the supersonic jet. In the twenty-first century, it means the *Instantaneity* of the interactive telecommunications of cybernetics.[[223]](#footnote-223) [Original emphasis and graphology]

Not only does the existence of the express service collapse the perceived distance between cities, it also passes remark upon the implied insignificance of the landscape traversed by eliding that which exists between terminals. The wilderness becomes perceptually smaller and of decreasing value to those passing through it at speed, constituting less of the perceiver's worldview as the speed of travel decreases the time spent traversing these landscapes and are less frequently explored due to these areas' lack of transport links. For Mercier and Camier, all that matters is that the train removes them from the city; however, should they remain on board they can only arrive at other human settlements: to disembark, as they do, is the only course of action that will truly liberate them from the city, placing them in the provincial town, even if they do so only to return to their point of departure.

As Mercier and Camier travel out of the city on the train they share their carriage for a time with a syphilitic ex-farm worker who speaks at length of his past trade, an experience that Mercier and Camier find unsettling and which leads the pair to disembark in a provincial town. Describing how the worker failed as 'shepherd, cowherd, goatherd, pigherd' and as a labourer in the fields, it became apparent that this ex-farmer could only succeed in 'the slaughter of little lambs, calves, kids and porklings and the emasculation' of the males within the herd.[[224]](#footnote-224) The ex-farmer represents the impact of modern capitalism upon the human apprehension of nature as it consumes exponentially more natural resources and human lives in order to further privilege the ruling classes. As the urban-centric culture of consumerism continues to devalue animal lives, replacing working animals with machines and transforming them into foodstuffs, this same process dehumanises those who participate in these processes and act as mechanisms for the city's need-fulfilment. The evident glee of the syphilitic ex farmer as he tells of his work:

I have still at home some charming little – well, comparatively little – ram's testes dating from that happy time. In the fowl-yard too I was a terror of accuracy and elegance. I had a way of smothering geese that was the admiration and envy of all.[[225]](#footnote-225)

Keeping trophies, glorifying his work killing and mutilating animals, and gloating that he would enjoy performing these activities the most on animals that 'were still unspoiled, all innocence and trustingness,'[[226]](#footnote-226) the character's profound lack of empathy for the animals he injured speaks of the devaluation of natural entities that typifies capitalist society, and the dehumanising influence of industrial farming upon the individuals involved. The loss of the farmer's nose to syphilis, and his subsequent rejection by his fellow citizens due to his illness and disfigurement, are physical and social responses to the philosophical dehumanising that modern farming practices have upon our interactions with the natural world respectively. The degradation of the farmer into a social pariah with a disfiguring sexually transmitted infection represents a transformation which aligns his inhumane lack of empathy for other living beings with his own physical degeneration into a creature with which other humans refuse to engage. Seeing the impact that industrial approaches to humans and animals have upon the psyche, and the readiness with which humans and animals are discarded by urban society, Mercier and Camier choose not to alight at the same station as the farmer, where 'only the damned alight',[[227]](#footnote-227) choosing to remain on the train until it reaches a provincial stop, and leaving the train at 'a village just one long street' so as to be as far from a city as the train might allow.[[228]](#footnote-228)

The city's influence is shown to be increasingly negative in *Mercier and Camier*; from the decreasing freedom of movement it allows the individual, alongside the devaluing of human and animal lives by industry, and the eventual emotional bankruptcy of those who succumb to these systems like the 'herds' of workers unwilling to speak to one another,[[229]](#footnote-229) and the farmer with a boundless enthusiasm for torturing animals. As Martin-Jordache goes writes 'The sense of belonging to an urban culture brings with it, paradoxically, a strong sense of not belonging: alienation',[[230]](#footnote-230) which arises in Beckett's writing from the technological and industrial makeup of modern cities and their dependence upon the exploitation of natural resources. Not only are the working classes reduced to a state of creatureliness in their exploitation by those in power, but those who reside in the countryside in order to serve the needs of consumer-culture have also begun to fall into a similar role. In his early life, the overt sexual domination of animals by the processes of agriculture, and the manipulation and control of natural resources by humans, lead to the ex-farmer's characterisation as an inhuman beast, and it is his falling in amongst the working class 'cattle' of Beckett's cities that leads him to cease appearing human, continuing his transformation into an inhuman creature. Mercier and Camier's chief success throughout their adventure, is refusing to participate in these systems of exploitation: by shirking the task of finding the dog Queenie, they prevent an animal returning into human service; by refusing to ride the bicycle on the roads they refuse to transform themselves into fuel for a machine; and by seeking to inhabit ex-urban spaces without claiming ownership of them, by remaining voluntarily destitute, they prevent themselves becoming complicit in the systems of nature domination and exploitation upon which industrialised societies depend.

**3.4 Non-Place and Mass Transit[ions]**

It is towards the conclusion of the novel's fifth chapter that Mercier and Camier's exile from their urban society is made apparent: as they part at last, having failed to permanently escape the city, Mercier muses upon the prospect of the life that lies ahead of him now that he is alone:

A new beginning, but with no life in it, how could there be? More manifest in town than in the country, but in the country too, where slowly over the vast empty space the peasant seems to stray, so aimless that night must surely overtake him so far from the village nowhere, the homestead nowhere to be found. There is no time left and yet how it drags.[[231]](#footnote-231)

Mercier envisages a landscape devoid of life, characterised by its underlying urban-centricity, and yet, contrary to expectations, 'vast' and 'empty'. The interrelation of temporal and place perception are made clear in this passage: as the processes of industry continue to influence human experience, Mercier connects the barrenness and emptiness of the landscape between urban centres – the provincial 'village nowhere' and 'the homestead nowhere to be found' – and the abolition of time in the face of technological progress. As the train demonstrated previously, the development of increasingly quick means of communication and transport is erasing the significance of the places between terminals at the same time as diminishing the perceived distance between urban locations, reformulating the perceiver's worldview into one that consists solely of cities connected by ever-diminishing expanses of insignificant natural and rural landscape. The peasant, aimlessly walking through the land between the lost homestead and village, representative of the once-established social and personal places of his past, is left in both spatial and chronological limbo: he can no more reach his place of abode before the night falls than the night itself can fall in the post-industrial wasteland he inhabits. The future that awaits modern society leads, in Mercier's imagining, only to the degeneration of place and time, leaving only the cities surrounded by wasteland with no inherent value or history. The natural rhythms of time, the seasons, days, and hours, have fallen out of alignment with the now-defunct chronological systems of modern industrial society: it remains 'Autumn-tide' regardless of the season, the birds roost and rise at unusual hours of day, and the 'day is over long before it ends'.[[232]](#footnote-232) The process of industrialisation has somehow disturbed the procession of time in urban society, and become divorced from its original basis in and dependence upon the natural world, rendering both irreparably damaged in the process.

Industrial modernity, as the primary mechanism by which the degradation of place is brought about in the hypothetical future, is shown to carry out this function primarily through the erasure of landscapes through mass transit technologies and the growth of non-place. Marc Augé identifies these non-places as public and unclaimed territories characteristic of modern capitalist societies and the decreasing personal claim of the individual's emotional stake in a landscape:

A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions [...] where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing.[[233]](#footnote-233)

Mercier and Camier demonstrate a gradual loss of their own understanding of place-hood throughout the novel, as a result of their continually occupying public and transitory spaces; pathways, canals, unclaimed fields, and public houses all constitute inhabited spaces that have communal function but limited personal relatability in their role as industrial non-places. As they first walk towards the city limits, Camier asks 'Where do our feet think they're taking us?', to be met with Mercier's response 'They would seem to be heading for the canal'.[[234]](#footnote-234) Camier's phrasing omits the agency of the human subject, revealing the habitual nature of their journey and the almost automatic navigation that the restrictive highways of cities enforce upon the subject. Their direction and rate of movement are dictated by factors beyond their control (as demonstrated again by their later relinquishing their choice of direction to that pointed out at random by a falling umbrella),[[235]](#footnote-235) by force of habit, chance, and the influence of the city's geography. The canal they are taken to by their feet functions not as place, a destination with a distinct function or sentimental energy, but as a non-place for Beckett's characters, to follow Marc Augé's philosophy of super-modernity. The underlying transience of these spaces, and the lifestyle that they encourage, even necessitate, in urban dwellers renders them insufficiently concrete and culturally significant to function as place for Augé, and it is here by the non-place of the canal that the beleaguered Mercier and Camier suggest that they might as well commit suicide, as the only guaranteed means of escaping the city.[[236]](#footnote-236) The constant movement of the canal, its distinctly utilitarian purpose, and its resolutely public – as opposed to private – existence render their speculative deaths devoid of memorialising functionality. The pair would, in dying here, be ignored by the city-archive; their graves unmarkable upon the water, their lives and deaths unremarkable, and the stretch of water continuing to serve only a function of utility.

It is the increasing ubiquity of non-place throughout the city, accelerated by the spread of mass transit technologies, which undermines the archontic function of the city as it continues to expand. From the canals typical of the industrial revolution to the motorways and ring roads of the modern city, Beckett's writing frequently traces the progress of super-modernity as it corrodes the placehood of the urban centre. This effect can also be observed elsewhere in Beckett's writing, especially in his post-War play *Waiting for Godot*, which takes place on 'a country road'; a place free of identifying features bar the tree that stands away from the road, and impersonal in its function as a public highway.[[237]](#footnote-237) Vladimir and Estragon's repeated consternation regarding the location of their meeting place highlights the difficulty of delineating place in non-place:

Estragon: We came here yesterday

Vladimir: Ah no, there you're mistaken. [...]

Estragon: In my opinion we were here.

Vladimir: [*Looking around.*] You recognize the place?

Estragon: I didn't say that.

Vladimir: Well?

Estragon: That makes no difference.[[238]](#footnote-238)

Not only uncertain about the whereabouts of their meeting place with Godot, they remain unsure as to whether they have even visited the site a mere twelve hours previously. In the play's second act, occurring, which Vladimir correctly believes takes place in the same location the next day,[[239]](#footnote-239) Estragon has yet again failed to remember the location of their meeting:

Vladimir: The tree, look at the tree.

[Estragon *looks at the tree*]

Estragon: Was it not there yesterday?

Vladimir: Yes, of course it was there. Do you not remember? We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?

Estragon: You dreamt it.[[240]](#footnote-240)

The roadside appears to serve only a cursory function as a marker of personal history for the pair: while Vladimir remembers, although his recollections are frequently doubted by the other characters, the transitory zone they occupy fails to act as a social identifier of place, that is, consensus as to the place's function, history, and significance is never reached. This is the underlying cause of the degradation of place resulting from the influence of non-place: by making a landscape's signification impersonally public, and yet eliding the markers of the place's signification by diminishing the importance of the landscape between the locations connected by the road, the non-place erodes the characters' sense of the stage as a place and the history of their engaging with it.

The experience of Pozzo on the road further reinforces this reading: unlike Vladimir and Estragon, who are unable to invest emotionally in their landscape, Pozzo does not fail to identify the present landscape as belonging to his family. A member of the social elite, he takes issue with the occupation of the current scene by Vladimir and Estragon:

Pozzo: Waiting? So you were waiting for him?

Vladimir: Well you see –

Pozzo: Here? On my land?

Vladimir: We didn't intend any harm.

Estragon: We meant well.

Pozzo: The road is free to all.

Vladimir: That's how we looked at it.

Pozzo: It's a disgrace. But there you are.[[241]](#footnote-241)

The concept of land as a commodity and a resource to be owned, especially among the social elite, allows Pozzo to identify this otherwise un-signified space as his own due to his ancestral ownership of the estate. Even in this space, however, where the possession and signification of the land as historically invested with meaning, the road as a transitory space continues to act as non-place. The land around the road apparently belongs to Pozzo and his family, and yet the road itself is owned by everybody and nobody – all of the characters have a right to occupy the public highway. Non-place is not only capable of erasing recent and personal place identification, but even the long-standing histories established through the memorialisation of the dead and the documentary evidence of this ownership as it is passed down the generations.

The point of intersection with the road's non-place marks an interruption in the archontic function of Pozzo's family estate: the road, as a public tract of land whose sole signification is as a space between places of significance, disrupts the contiguous place of Pozzo's land. By the second act, whereupon Pozzo has lost his sight and the characters' memories (barring Vladimir's) of the previous act's events have been forgotten, the erasure of the roadside's significance has progressed even further, in part due to the characters' failing memories of recent events:

Pozzo: [*Suddenly* Furious] Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he [Lucky] went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? [*Calmer.*] They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.[[242]](#footnote-242)

It appears that the characters' gradual failing to keep track of their shared history is rendering their personal and shared histories less distinct. As he blindly navigates the non-place of the road, incapable of identifying landmarks and notable features along the route, his sense of place collapses along with his sense of history; without the ability to chart his personal and family history through the estate's landscape, and with his memory failing him, his life is compressed into a series of days, each alike except for measurable decay of his body. His personal history becomes a flash of light, which gleams for an immeasurable instant his life events collapse into a singular timeless mass, before the return of the night and his demise.

The scenario depicted in *Waiting for Godot* unites the difficulty of place-establishment and understanding personal and social history with visual impairment, an aspect of Beckett's writing discussed towards the outset of this thesis. Beckett's play also contains a metatheatrical strand in this particular image too, in order to finalise the destruction of Pozzo's estate by rendering it non-place. Not only are Vladimir and Estragon foiled in their attempts to commit suicide each day, preventing the establishment of monumental place at the scene of their death, but the stage itself remains conspicuously dynamic. The artificiality of the stage as an established scene is brought to the fore when, ascertaining that this is indeed the meeting spot arranged with Godot, Vladimir describes the area as 'All the same... that tree... [*Turning towards the auditorium*]... that bog'.[[243]](#footnote-243) After the first act has closed, however, the set has been changed despite Vladimir's assurance that they are in the same place. Either the season has changed overnight, or the tree has been replaced with another during the interval; the only concrete marker of the play's location has been removed or altered between acts. If the auditorium is temporarily transformed into a bog by Vladimir's labelling it as such, and the audience are aware of this and the changeability of the set within which the play occurs, then it follows that they are also aware of the temporality of theatre as a performance. Just as, at the conclusion of the play, the events depicted on the stage will cease to occur, so too will the stage return to being an empty set once the run of performances concludes. The signification of the place occupied by the characters is immediately removed, as the road, and the stage upon which it and Pozzo's estate are built, both function as non-place.

Beckett's writing frequently interrogates the temporality of his characters' and scenes' existence, both within the text world and extra-diegetically. The linkage between the fragility of place within his work functions within the context of the temporality of literary, performance, and human experience. The omnipresence of nature as an oppositional force to cultural archives such as cities, monuments, and estates, makes the interactions of humans and non-human nature a vital area of study if the significance of this trope is to be better understood. The interaction of humans and nature therefore requires further discussion, especially where those interactions centre upon the notion of ownership – whether this takes the form of land ownership, the right to exploit natural resources, or control the lives of animals. Pozzo's assigned role as a ruined landowner, disgruntled by the public's right to cross his estate due to the encroaching non-place of the public highway, resonates particularly well with Sebald's writing and his narrator's repeated visits to decaying country estates, the topic of this thesis' final chapter. The influence of non-place upon the signified urban centre as an archontic landscape, and the impact capitalist ideas of land ownership and industrial commoditisation of the natural landscape and resources, are broadly of an ilk: each undermines the presence of the memorial, the subject's personal relationship to place, and the humanness of those who inhabit them in Beckett's writing.

**4 – Creature Complete: Exiles and Animals**

**4.1 Ecophobia, Society, Religion.**

As urban and social spaces have been shown to be dependent upon perceptual and interpretive functions, the methods of representation used in relation with their traditional antithesis - non-human animals, plant-life, and the environments to which they belong - also require consideration as equally significant factors that shape the representation of human interactions with nature in Sebald and Beckett. Whereas the human actions upon which the creation and maintenance of the urban space depend remain overt, the existence of non-human creatures and entities could be considered evidence of a natural system divorced from human influence, although to what extent remains uncertain. The degree to which these 'unoccupied' spaces can be considered 'natural' is difficult to gauge however, an issue that becomes increasingly complex when the environments at hand are fictionalised representations of these spaces within literary works. Simon Estok constructs a theoretical framework of which the chief aim is to identify and define a theoretical adversary for ecocritical discussion, which Estok dubs 'ecophobia':

Ecophobia is an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism. It plays out in many spheres; [...] it is about power and control; it is what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible. Self-starvation and self-mutilation imply ecophobia no less than lynching implies racism.[[244]](#footnote-244)

Estok discusses the dominant worldview here, rather than his theoretical standpoint, referring primarily to the manner in which social institutions propagate a hierarchy within which humans wield greater power than, and take priority over, the non-human world. Estok's article focuses upon the creation of the 'more definitive structure, methodological definition, and viable terminology' he believes is required to ensure ecocriticism's long-term viability,[[245]](#footnote-245) although not without definitively separating the current state of human culture and society from non-human nature. Due to the fact that '[the manner in which] Euro-Western history has stood in relation to nonhuman animals' has been 'hurtful to the environment',[[246]](#footnote-246) his article argues that those operating within such a society and world view (especially those who willingly consume animal products) may be incapable of proper ecocritical discourse due to their complicity in these systems,[[247]](#footnote-247) unjustly branding a large portion of ecocritical discussion unreliable due to a difference in lifestyle. Although Estok readily accepts that the concept of an external nature from which humans are divorced gives rise to exploitation and conflict, his paper remains operational within the worldview he wishes to reject, labelling acts as simple as the acquisition of shelter as inherently detrimental to the natural world, grounded in fear and the desire to control rather than any basic desire to survive.[[248]](#footnote-248) What undoes much of Estok's analysis of ecophobia in action is that his argument falls prey to the same pitfall as much environmentalist critique; Estok fails to acknowledge that a human's desire to increase its survival chances at the expense of other creatures' welfare can be considered natural behaviour patterns. The critic should seek to take into account the difference between behaviours born of a desire to survive, which may or may not be carried out in a manner that is detrimental to the environment, and actions born specifically of an ecophobic impetus.

There must be a finer distinction established wherein not every action that acts to the benefit of a human is inherently ecophobic. For the purposes of this discussion the term 'ecophobia' will be applied to those actions that are indicative of a groundless prejudice, induced by fear, hatred, or misunderstanding, towards the non-human world rather than to any human-originating event that acts to the detriment of a non-human entity. This is to avoid the generalising seepage that works against Estok's analysis that puts the very possibility of being human and interacting with the world at odds with leading a life that is free from ecophobic behaviour. The problem of distinguishing between actions that have ecophobic intent and human actions that have a negative effect upon non-human nature regardless of their motivation is also aided by distinguishing between humans surviving, and humans actively discriminating against the natural world: for Estok the consumption of animal products is an ecophobic action regardless of the end-user's awareness of animal welfare issues, whereas when the discussion is focussed primarily upon intention, a greater level of analytical control can be exercised. The desire to consume meat is one driven by hunger, and in satisfying this hunger the human is not necessarily behaving ecophobically. However, if the human is aware of the inhumane means by which their meat is reared and slaughtered, and yet chooses to continue to eat meat, or they choose to ignore the fact that their diet requires the slaughter of huge numbers of sentient beings, then their doing so is more easily described as ecophobic. The consumption of unethically sourced meat is therefore not inherently indicative of ecophobic attitudes in the individual, although the representation and fetishisation of meat in the media, sanitising the industry so as to make the consumption of animals appear less harmful, does demonstrate a wider ecophobic attitude towards the slaughter of these animals. By erasing the suffering and terrible conditions in which the animals that are killed are raised, and by rendering their flesh readily available, affordable, and an expected element of human diets, those societies and individuals that knowingly endorse and utilise factory farming practices are perpetuating the ecophobic attitude that animals are a resource to be dominated, exploited, and consumed for the benefit of humans.

Peter Singer argues that the acceptance of this 'humans-first' attitude to the environment is, in itself, indicative of speciesism,[[249]](#footnote-249) as well as of wider ecophobia, especially when it facilitates the suffering of non-human animals. As Singer suggests:

[P]ain is pain, and the importance of preventing unnecessary pain and suffering does not diminish because the being that suffers is not a member of our species. What would we think of someone who said that "whites come first" and that therefore poverty in Africa does not pose as serious a problem as poverty in Europe?[[250]](#footnote-250)

The dominant Western world-view, in which human beings are privileged over nature, is certainly to blame for many ecophobic actions, most obviously the abuse and killing of animals for the purposes of food production and the testing of experimental products. For Singer, the suffering of animals is, on the whole, an unacceptable by-product of these actions, therefore if an action is performed purely for the betterment of a human and causes animal suffering, it is almost certainly the product of an ecophobic influence or individual. However, prioritising the welfare of the social group, and of the species as a whole can also be considered an instinctual behaviour pattern that ensures the survival of many species of animals, including humans: it is, once again, a question of methods and attitudes that need to be considered, as the survival of our species would become impracticable without exploiting some form of non-human life, be it plant or animal. As Estok argues, taking his lead from Lynn White's 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis',[[251]](#footnote-251) it is in the alignment between ecophobia and its justification within the Western Christian belief that nature is a resource created by God for the use of humans that these actions are recast from instinctive to ecophobic behaviours.[[252]](#footnote-252) When, in the book of Genesis, God commands, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth' (Genesis 1:28),[[253]](#footnote-253) the precedent is set for humans to control the earth itself, govern its productivity and the behaviour of all non-human animals. In Beckett's writing particularly, the alignment of humans with this Biblical precedent influences many of the characters' attitudes towards, and interactions with, animals and uninhabited spaces.

**4.2 The Curious Case of the Hedgehog and the Worm**

Determining at what point the action against a non-human animal or plant becomes ecophobic, rather than demonstrating a human's response to natural impulses, is an area that requires some clarification before a discussion of an author's representation of its moral implications can begin. This study does not, by any means, seek to provide a definitive answer to this issue; however, for the purposes of this analysis the example of Beckett's hedgehog in *Company* will help to establish a working model within which this argument might functionally proceed. Beckett's second-person text detailing the life of an immobilised body features an episode where the protagonist, finding a hedgehog and believing it to be in need of aid, attempts to domesticate the animal. What begins as an action born of empathy soon degenerates into a traumatic memory when the hedgehog dies in captivity. The passage beginning, 'You take pity on a hedgehog out in the cold and put it in an old hatbox with some worms' demonstrates human interactions with two other species: the hedgehog, as the subject of a misguided and ill-fated rescue attempt, and earthworms, who are given to the hedgehog for food.[[254]](#footnote-254) The subject of the passage enforces a hierarchy he establishes in his prayers: he submits first to the figure of God, acting as the hedgehog's custodian in accordance with the precedent set forth in Genesis, then the hedgehog who is in turn beneath the human, and finally the worms.[[255]](#footnote-255) By including the hedgehog in his daily prayers, the character is establishing the hedgehog not only as one of God's creatures, but also excluding the earthworms as both unworthy of protection and moral consideration, dismissing them as a necessary loss to preserve the hedgehog's health. The distinction between the hedgehog, as valuable, and the earthworms, as less so, is one that depends upon the individual's judgement of their worth as living beings: as Christopher Belshaw observes, 'only animals that are subjects-of-a-life [as evinced by a semblance of self-awareness and an emotional existence] have this inherent worth, and have, as a consequence, moral rights'.[[256]](#footnote-256) Within this system the earthworms, having no evident 'beliefs and desires, perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future', are not subjects-of-a-life.[[257]](#footnote-257) The human character therefore rationalises that they do no wrong in condemning the animals to death within this utilitarian moral scheme, as their loss is deemed to be of little consequence.

The exclusion of the earthworms from the character's protective care suggests that a system of the sort described by Belshaw is in action within this passage, with this hierarchical attitude towards nature elaborated by Beckett's description of the emotional effects of the rescue attempt. The character wedges the hedgehog’s hutch door open 'for the poor creature to come and go at will', so that it may 'search [for] food and having eaten [to] regain the warmth and security' on offer.[[258]](#footnote-258) The human believes that the hedgehog demonstrates similar desires and aspirations to himself; from the functional (the desire to eat and to be sheltered), to the abstract (the desire for freedom), the character demonstrably includes the hedgehog within the moral community as a fellow subject-of-a-life. The episode's tragic conclusion, wherein the hedgehog is found rotting in the box, demonstrates the differing values attributed to those lives that are considered valuable and those not; where the earthworms are freely killed for the good of the hedgehog, the death of the hedgehog itself is the source of enduring distress:

[N]ot only was the [satisfied] glow spent, but a great uneasiness had taken its place. A suspicion that all was perhaps not as it should be. That rather than do as you did you had perhaps better let good alone and the hedgehog pursue its way. Days if not weeks passed before you could bring yourself to return to the hutch. You have never forgotten what you found then. You are on your back in the dark and have never forgotten what you found then. The mush. The stench.[[259]](#footnote-259)

The 'suspicion that all was perhaps not as it should be' suggests an awareness that unnecessarily taking the hedgehog into care may not have been the best course of action, but a misguided (if nobly intentioned) interference on the part of the human. The human has, by removing the hedgehog from its environment, unwittingly transgressed a moral boundary; not only by inadvertently killing an entity he identifies as the subject-of-a-life, but also by damaging his own moral and emotional wellbeing by failing in his duty of care over the animal. As Belshaw writes, '[w]ere it not for its effects on human character and motivation, then, our treatment of animals, no matter what its form, would deserve no recrimination' within a utilitarian worldview - having failed to carry out a charitable action, as well as misunderstanding the needs of the hedgehog at the outset of their relationship, the character's failure to care for the hedgehog becomes unforgivable.[[260]](#footnote-260) The continuing suffering of the human character as they relive the trauma of their youth demonstrates this reflexive attitude towards non-human nature; the recriminations of interfering with non-human subjects-of-a-life in a way that causes suffering or untimely death are as much self-enforced as they are socially policed.

While the character has violated the moral rights ascribed to the hedgehog in this passage, whether this action could be categorised as ecophobic depends upon the motivation and methods that brought about the animal's suffering. The rescuing of the hedgehog from an absent threat, so that it might die in captivity, is not motivated by prejudice against the non-human world, as indicative of overt ecophobia, but by a misguided conservationist impulse in the human character. The killing of the earthworms may also be forgiven, as the character evidently feels no guilt at their loss due to their categorisation beyond the moral community to which he belongs, although some readers may feel that this action would be a moral transgression for themselves. Rather than lying within the harm done to the animals, the character's ecophobia is inherent within their decision to intervene unnecessarily: by regarding nature as something which cannot continue successfully without human control, and prioritising the preservation of life above the continuation of natural systems of animal behaviour, the narrator damages the ecosystem to which the hedgehog belongs. By adhering to what Estok labels 'an ethically dubious endorsement of a hierarchy of life'[[261]](#footnote-261) akin to the utilitarian Western Christian understanding of an animal's degree of subjectivity, the character is enforcing a worldview that regards the natural world as one that can and should be controlled by humans. The character's actions could still be argued to be acceptable if the hedgehog had exhibited signs of distress, but by seizing control of the creature without reason the character demonstrates an ingrained mistrust of non-human nature, a belief that human knowledge can improve a flawed or unjust ecosystem. As it is not directly born of fear or hatred of the natural world, this scenario would be difficult to convincingly describe as categorically ecophobic; however the presence of this mistrust, and the character's certainty of his position as God's appointed caretaker of nature, shows that he is influenced to some degree by an ecophobic societal pressure. This worldview, with its compression of the natural world into one that consists solely of subordinate beings prior to the introduction of human experience, is the underlying attitude from which any ecophobia within this passage arises.

The designation of interactions with animals and environments as ecophobic, acceptable, or natural is further troubled by the difficulty of ascertaining just what aspects of our environment are to be considered natural, or at the very least independent of an overwhelmingly human influence. William Cronon argues that 'there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny'.[[262]](#footnote-262) For the purposes of this discussion I will primarily refer to wilderness and wild landscapes when discussing areas where human contact may have occurred in the past, but where the absence of signifying marks means that the landscape acts as a contrast to the placehood of human inhabitation. The search for a truly 'wild' space is perhaps futile in an age where modern technologies allow anybody with access to the internet to virtually inhabit the tallest mountain peaks, and rainforests which were once unexplored, and unnamed.[[263]](#footnote-263) Another consideration is the influence of human perception upon wilderness: once the landscape is inhabited or perceived by a human, it is no longer completely without human significance. Even at the basest level, the landscape is now associated with a personal memory of having been visited or witnessed within a personal history, and as a result this degree of significance will be accepted as par for the course in this thesis: it is the labelling of the scene as non-human, as wild or natural in contrast to the human environment, that will establish what constitutes wilderness in this discussion.

As Cronon goes on to argue, the dualism of humans against non-human wilderness inherently supports a hierarchical attitude towards animals, but it also creates an impossible situation for the human species, especially the conservationist:

The tautology gives us no way out: if wild nature is the only thing worth saving, and if our mere presence destroys it, then the sole solution to our own unnaturalness, the only way to protect sacred wilderness from profane humanity, would seem to be suicide.[[264]](#footnote-264)

The best method by which this tautology can be negotiated and by which means humans and non-human nature be allowed to coexist, is the abolition of this particular mode of thinking; nature is not to be regarded as something to be saved which is outside of human culture, but something in which humans are a dynamic participant, from which human culture arose. Robert Pogue Harrison suggests that the primary difference between humans and non-human animals is that 'human beings, unlike other living species, live not in nature but in their relation to nature. Even the belief that we are a part of nature is a mode of relating to it'.[[265]](#footnote-265) The distinction between humans and animals is engendered within humans' awareness of their self-imposed identification as entities who are not animals, although they are not necessarily aware of the artificiality of this separation. This is not the entirety of this scheme of identification, however, as Weller observes. In Beckett's fiction, Weller writes, the animal's otherness is also determined by 'its resistance to sublation (*Aufhebung*)' lying closer to an understanding of the animal as 'the absolutely other'[[266]](#footnote-266) - separated not simply by the perceived distinction between human and animal, but also in the impossibility of establishing a true understanding of the other's inner life, its understanding of the world, and perhaps crucially its understanding of the human as, conversely, 'other' to the animal. Where Weller's analysis is focussed upon Beckett, W.G. Sebald interrogates this same distinction and its consequences for individual and social engagements with non-human nature with an eye towards these same dual divisions, albeit within differing systems of literary representation.

**4.3 Nature Conservation: Custodians and Customers**

Sebald does not restrict his representation of human attitudes towards nature to encounters with animals, but also engages with human influence upon plant life and the physical environment. In doing so, Sebald's writing challenges this same distinction between 'natural' and 'non-natural' in relation to both sentient beings and with entities that are incapable of active participation in the process described by Weller. A common trope in Sebald's work is deforestation as a result of both natural and human influences. In *For Years Now*, Sebald writes:

In Scipio's days

one could walk

all the way

through the north

of Africa in

the shade[[267]](#footnote-267)

The metonymic representation of the trees, present here only within the shade they once provided, mimics the temporality of their previous ubiquity across the region prior to their eradication. The use of shade is particularly laden with significance - shade, as the penumbra cast upon the ground by an object as it reflects a portion of the sun's light, varies in shape, size, and proportion according to the time of day, season, and year. An area that is shaded at one point in time may not necessarily be shaded at another, and as the procession of time has changed so too has the shape of the shadows cast by these trees as their population has dwindled. The forests that once covered this region are only present in Sebald's poem as spectres, with the evidence of their existence demonstrated to be transient. The author's refusal to describe the physicality of the trees, nor to base their description as originating within their relationship with humans, demonstrates an understanding of just how 'other' these beings are. Unlike the animals that permeate Beckett and Sebald's other writings, the trees resist sublation not due to the incommensurability of experience brought about by the differing modes of being and intelligence exhibited by both parties, but because the plant and human represent the height of disparate forms of life. Communication between the two is impossible, and their modes of being are so completely other that the trees do not figure as active participants in Sebald's representation of Africa's history, nor do they appear in the poem as anything more than an incomprehensible third party.

The destruction of these forests, and the ecosystems they sustained in the shade they provided, is further discussed by Sebald in *Campo Santo*:

The degradation of the most highly developed plant species is a process known to have begun near what we call the cradle of civilization. Most of the high forests that once grew all the way to the Dalmatian, Iberian and North African coasts had already been cut down by the beginning of the present era. Only in the interior of Corsica did a few forests of trees towering far taller than those of today remain, and they were still being described with awe by nineteenth-century travellers, although now they have almost entirely disappeared.[[268]](#footnote-268)

Here, Sebald places the destruction of the forests directly alongside the development of civilisation - it is the development of increasingly advanced and populous human societies that brought about the eradication of the trees and the ecosystem they supported. However, the Corsican forests and their inhabitants were not cleared exclusively due to the requirement for building materials and food, but were permanently replaced with an artificial forest once the full impact of human exploitation became apparent; their original form and utility was taken over by a visual, rather than functional, replacement. The forests that remain are not descended from these prehistoric masses, but are in reality 'those planted by the forestry department on the site of the great fire of the summer of 1960'[[269]](#footnote-269) - the forests as they now stand are no more than simulacra for the sprawling forests that once occupied this region. While this may appear to be, superficially, the same ecosystem that covered the Corsican valleys, it conceals a radically altered ecology beneath the canopy, supporting 'not the slightest trace of the wealth of game mentioned by earlier travellers'.[[270]](#footnote-270) In Sebald's description, the designation of these forests as 'natural' is completely undermined by their artifice, as is the moral validity of the human-made erasure of this ecosystem that precipitated this action.

The forests, once the main source of food for the Corsican people, have had their wild animals 'eradicated almost without trace', leaving the ecosystem's biodiversity and sustainability massively compromised.[[271]](#footnote-271) The animals that continue to inhabit the landscape no longer constitute a functional food-source, their populations decimated by previous human endeavours. Instead they now exist purely as game – animals bred and maintained for 'sport', as this euphemistic term for the hunted animals implies – for the self-styled hunters, when 'the fever of the chase still breaks out on Corsica every September'.[[272]](#footnote-272) The deprecating description of the process by which it seems the 'entire male population' participates in this 'ritual destruction, which long ago became pointless', comprises the remainder of Sebald's account,[[273]](#footnote-273) and demonstrates the farcical procedure by which humans not only appear to violently resist nature's incursion into an area, even as others strive to aid its re-establishment, but also attempt to recast the act of casually killing scores of animals as one born of conservation and subsistence. If the recreated forests were truly seeded for conservationist ends the wildlife would be allowed to re-establish itself in the region before they were exterminated by the population, ostensibly so that they might have food. However the population continues to repel nature from the space as it claims to encourage its regrowth. The hunters are repeatedly described as appearing akin to 'Serbian militiamen', 'those Marlboro-style heroes of the Yugoslavian civil war', and acting like 'guerrillas' as they don military garb and wage war on the natural world.[[274]](#footnote-274) Despite the fact that there are few animals left to hunt each year, the inhabitants continue to repeat this process, maintaining their hunting tradition in order to play at subsisting from a nature that is no longer real. The present forest no longer functions as a biologically diverse habitat, but has become a visual replacement for the original's vital role in maintaining the area's ecology, and a place for the men to continue their hunts.

Like Beckett, when Sebald turns away from the Corsican hunt to reflect upon the wider production and consumption of meat by humans, he moves immediately to the biblical precedent for the consumption of animal products via the 'fuss made by the hunters about sprigs of fir, and the palms arranged in the empty white-tiled windows on Sundays' at his childhood butcher's shop.[[275]](#footnote-275) The sudden shift from displaying cuts of game, to the fronds of trees indicates an acknowledgement of the ecological impact of hunting and the moral issues brought about as a result. Not only is the butcher dressing his wares in the trappings of nature, as if to validate the consumption of commoditised meat as a natural behaviour pattern, but this set-dressing also gestures towards a sacred or religious significance. The cessation of the butcher's trade on the Sabbath day suggests not only an adherence to a Judaeo-Christian religious system, and the temporary cessation in his trade is welcomed by the butcher with the same vegetation as Jesus was on Palm Sunday:

[W]hen they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, [they] Took [sic] branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord (John 12:12-19).[[276]](#footnote-276)

This use of religious symbolism to create a natural precedent for the destruction of animals by Sebald's butcher depends upon the image of Jesus' arrival and acknowledgement as the messiah to invoke the act of vicarious atonement, reiterating God's decree that the taking of an animal's life is morally justifiable. Where some faiths regard the consumption of flesh to be morally inadmissible, Christianity does not, but, as Estok argues, propagates the belief that nature is a resource created by God for human use.[[277]](#footnote-277) This linkage between the consumption of animal products as religiously sanctioned, and the eventual sacrifice of Jesus' life to absolve the sins of humanity is not unique to Sebald, also appearing in Beckett, who similarly frames religious iconography in a latent mitigation of human guilt.

Beckett acknowledges this desire for moral absolution within the public's attitude towards the meat industry when in 'The Calmative' the narrator comes upon a butcher's shop. As the narrator enters the town he reports 'Good God it's Sunday' and yet, despite this, the 'trams were running, the buses too' and yet '[he does]n't see a single horse!'[[278]](#footnote-278) The narrator's desire to see the Sabbath observed, betrayed by his contemplating resting for the day and his frustration that others are working on the trams and buses, is immediately placed alongside the question of the horses' whereabouts. The reader may understandably fail to acknowledge the gravity of this query until the end of Beckett's narrative, where these animals are rediscovered:

I crossed over and stopped before the butcher's. Behind the grille the curtains were drawn, rough curtains striped blue and white, colours of the Virgin, and stained with great pink stains. They did not quite meet in the middle and through the chink I could make out the dim carcasses of the gutted horses hanging from hooks head downwards. I hugged the walls, famished for shadow.[[279]](#footnote-279)

Just as Sebald's narrator does in the previous passage, Beckett's narrator also imbues the scene with religious meaning, with the butcher appealing directly to the symbolic colours of the mother of Christ. This butcher, like Sebald's, is not working on a Sunday and has, in fact, already completed his work for the week, as the horses are gutted ready for preparation and sale. The religious justification for this exploitation of these animals is brought into question via the image of the animals' bloodstains contaminating the 'virgin' colours, highlighting the sacrifice and suffering of the animals as undermining that which is, canonically, pure. The portrayed image relies upon this religious justification in order to divorce the products on display, rebranded as 'meat' to aid in this process, from the dead horses, to facilitate the authorised 'use' of animals by humans as laid out in the Bible.

The juxtaposition of the horses' bloodstains and the colours of the Virgin Mary mirror several aspects of Biblical scripture related not only to the consumption of animal products, but also to the concepts of sacrifice and religious purity and observance:

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses [the time following the birth of a child during which the mother is considered 'unclean'[[280]](#footnote-280)] were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Luke 2:22-4).[[281]](#footnote-281)

Mary's bleeding as a rite of purification, the sacrifice of the two animals to God, and later the sacrifice of her son for the betterment of humanity, creates an image of the mother of Jesus as a figure who is at once the conduit through which his forgiveness was brought to humankind and that of personal and animal sacrifice. The use of animals to aid human lives is engendered within the image of Mary's sacrificial birds; it was through the death of these two birds that she hoped to bless her child's life and, by extension, those of all humans whose spiritual lives were improved by Jesus' life and eventual sacrifice. The killing of the horses is recast as a necessary and morally justified act by Beckett's butcher in accordance with his faith, with their flesh being given to sustain human life by God, along with his forgiveness for the taking of the animals' lives. The narrator's incapacity and shame, as he shies away from the true cost of meat production – with the town's entire horse population seemingly destroyed for food - is a result of his having perceived the truth that is both physically and figuratively enshrouded by these legitimising processes. By looking at the animals beyond the curtains, actually through the breach where the two sides do not, in a vicious pun on the English homophone, 'meet in the middle', the narrator acknowledges the problematic morality of rearing and killing animals for food, and becomes consumed by shame, cowering before this realisation '[he] hugged the walls, famished for shadow'.[[282]](#footnote-282)

These attempts to legitimise the destruction of nature, particularly forests and animals, are not limited to the religiously motivated, however: as Sebald goes on to demonstrate, the widespread, latent remorse that is a result of the meat industry is also prevalent in Britain, as articulated through a profane version of the same practice as the Bavarian butcher of his youth:

I saw rows of little green plastic trees hardly an inch high surrounding cuts of meat and offal displayed in the shop windows of a 'Family Butchers'. The obvious fact that these evergreen plastic ornaments must be mass-produced somewhere for the sole purpose of alleviating our sense of guilt about the bloodshed seemed to me, in its very absurdity, to show how strongly we desire absolution and how cheap we have always bought it.[[283]](#footnote-283)

The concession that is made to the concept of 'natural' food, wherein additional natural resources are consumed in order to construct artificial trees, is intended to disguise the questionable morality of contemporary meat production in order to improve sales and salve the conscience of those buying it, and reveals an implicit awareness that the consumption of animal products produced in this manner is often ethically problematic. Further ecological damage is done as a direct result of the butcher's attempts to portray his wares as naturally occurring, imaginatively transporting the slaughtered animals back into the fictional forests from whence they came, imaginatively concealing the factory farms on which they were, most probably, raised and slaughtered. This 'cheap' absolution, as Sebald brands it, is the secular recasting of the German butcher's sacred palm-fronds; both use a visual representative of nature complete with morally positive associations, to legitimise the scale of the destruction they depend upon for their trade. Through a metonymic reconstruction in his window display of the ecosystem that has been damaged by the removal of these animals, and of the massive environmental damage caused by the intensive rearing of food animals, the butcher reveals a similar moral concern to the forestry department of Corsica. Both have created inappropriate and ineffective simulacra for the ecosystems they have destroyed in their attempts to use their resources for food and profit. They then attempt to divorce the suffering of animals and environmental damage caused from the reality presented to their consumers in such a way that it unintentionally reveals the underlying moral issues raised by their actions, primarily through the explicit artificiality of the end products of these processes and the means through which they are portrayed for public consumption.

It is apparent that Sebald and Beckett both demonstrate an awareness of the problematic arrangement that dominates our understanding of human relationships with nature. The Western Christian worldview, in particular, is highlighted as a major influence that shapes the contemporary representation of human-animal interactions and the consumption of animal produce. For these authors this issue leads to differing ends, however; Beckett's characters, as the appointed governors of the natural world, must fill this position whilst attempting to understand the nature of the divide between themselves and animals as they begin to transgress this boundary, devolving, changing form, and alienating themselves from their societies. For the narrators of *Company* and *The Calmative* this awareness is not only the source of emotional trauma, but also acts to further alienate the characters from their fellow humans who continue to enact the domination of the natural world: shortly after witnessing the butcher's window the protagonist of 'The Calmative' faints, before choosing to leave the town for the final time. Meanwhile the use of the, at times accusatory, second person narration in *Company* directs the allegation of animal cruelty and misjudged interference at the reader, and by extension at the society of its readership. While it is unlikely that these texts were written to be expressly critical of the moral framework surrounding human relationships with animals, these critiques are functionally similar to those made explicit in the more openly 'green' Sebald and gesture towards a long-standing and unexplored anxiety regarding this topic in Beckett's representations of modern society. For Sebald, the presence of animals is demonstrative of our historic intimacy and co-dependence, allowing the author to contrast this with the contemporary treatment of non-human animals as lesser inhabitants of the environment, and our changing attitudes towards them over time. This manifests itself in Sebald's writing in the animals' shifting roles from resource to interloper, and from a collaborative relationship with humans into one of hostility and attempted extermination.

**4.4 The War on Terror: Pests and Science**

Sebald's poetic work tells of a humanity that is at once an integral part of the natural world (and vice versa) but that has, over the course of time, positioned itself at an ever-increasing remove from the rest of the biosphere, causing catastrophic environmental damage in doing so. In 'Poor Summer in Franconia' we are told of a poster that 'recalls the yellowed terror // of the Colorado beetle'.[[284]](#footnote-284) The Colorado beetle is an agricultural pest which continues to prove beyond human control through chemical pesticide treatments; as Alyokhin, Sewell, and Choban write, 'None of the control techniques developed since this insect became a pest has provided long-term protection of potato crops' due to its 'remarkable ability to develop insecticide resistance'.[[285]](#footnote-285) Sebald's inclusion of this animal is significant in its foregrounding of the implied boundaries between humans and animals: for humans, the beetles' presence in the world is not inherently problematic, nor is its diet which happens to include a crop we also consume. It is this animal's inhabiting of crops that are cultivated exclusively for human consumption, and its inability to acknowledge this mandate that facilitates its classification as a pest – the phrase 'since this insect became a pest' in Alyokhin, Sewell, and Choban implying a scientific and social re-designation of the animal as such. The seemingly hyperbolic labelling of the beetle as a source of 'terror' highlights the disproportionate, often fatal, reaction humans often exhibit towards pests and non-human animals that are found within areas that are considered the exclusive demesne of humans.

The repeated, and increasingly sophisticated, attempts to defend crops from this, and other, pests is indicative not only of humanity's belief in its right to control and 'own' natural resources and areas of land, but also our willingness to attempt to eradicate any creature that does not submit to this entitlement. The question of whether an animal is considered worthy of moral concern is answered in the negative by default in such instances; in order to ensure the availability of resources for ourselves, humans are willing to eliminate entire populations of creatures simply because they consume the same crops. The battle between humans and animals for control of these resources is intimated in the poem's latter half; while 'an American tank' sits on a nearby hill, ready to do battle, the focaliser's grandfather 'torches the fields'. The proximity of the war machine and the grandfather's destruction of the crops speaks of the extent to which humans will destroy natural resources for their own advantage, here adopting the 'scorched earth' policies of the US military as used in the Vietnam war. Most notably for this discussion, the uses of napalm to eradicate Viet Cong troops hidden in dense foliage, and the catastrophic use of Agent Orange to de-foil the trees, making swathes of jungle barren, rendering ecosystems and human lives ruined by the adverse effects of the chemical.[[286]](#footnote-286) The terror of the Colorado Beetle, and the humans' overzealous use of chemicals in order to attempt to control or eradicate the perceived threat, are drawn into parallel with this controversial historic episode, drawing the continuing use of pesticides and human intolerance of non-domesticated animals into direct relation with the catastrophic effects of warfare upon the long-term sustainability of life within these ecosystems.

Meanwhile the war on the potato beetle is ignored in the poem by the shopkeeper's children while they unwittingly contribute to humanity's environmental impact through the destruction of the aquatic biome outside of their home:

In the backroom behind her

the shopkeeper's children sit glued

to the nation's wooden eye

Windfalls lie leaden in the garden

and blue in the crayfish-stream

flow the suds from the washing machine[[287]](#footnote-287)

This widespread environmental apathy, evinced by the family's enthralment by the wooden television, and the environmental damage that this apathy enables, is central to Sebald's representation of human influence on the environment. When the non-human world is given no consideration by the humans of Sebald's writing, whether deliberately or not, human ideas of entitlement and environmental (in)significance become most apparent. The pollution of the river in 'Poor Summer in Franconia' comes about in a very specific manner: the ecosystem is destroyed via aquatic pollution; firstly through the runoff from agricultural pesticides, and secondly from the effluent of a washing machine. It is by removing the undesirable 'dirt' that adheres to the children's clothes that the shopkeeper pollutes the river: the description of materials as desirable or undesirable, dirty or clean, natural and unnatural, is evidently born of a ecophobic response to natural materials entering the house. The naturally produced dirt, considered acceptable when confined to the 'natural' world, is undesirable within the home, from which all such natural contaminants are barred. Meanwhile the detergents used to remove them are considered desirable and clean within the same context, until they are found in the environment beyond the home, wherein they take on the role of pollutants. It is upon this latter function that Sebald chooses to focus. The waste-polluted water, and the dirt which has been removed from the laundry, are dumped into the river without consideration of the immediate and long-term impacts of the introduction of these chemicals into the ecosystem.

The fact that the water is inhabited, specifically taking the form of a 'crayfish stream' in the poem, is also significant: where the Colorado beetle is seemingly impossible to control with industrial pesticides and chemicals, the crayfish is known to be especially vulnerable to pollution. As Ian Firkins writes in his study of crayfish environmental tolerance, 'the greatest proportion of native crayfish records are allied to Class 1A and 1B [water of high quality, suitable for consumption and use for aquaculture]', and while 'waters of class 3 and 4 [mid-to heavy pollution] are lethal to crayfish', class 2 water which is suitable for many other species of fish and only 'mildly' polluted, rarely supports a breeding crayfish population.[[288]](#footnote-288) The constant pollution of these waterways by human behaviours not only threatens the crayfish as a species, but also has wider ecological implications, as these animals act 'as key energy transformers between various trophic levels within an aquatic ecosystem', with a reduction in crayfish population often paving the way for the eutrophication of bodies of water (the 'blooming' of phytoplankton, eventually rendering bodies of water anaerobic and incapable of supporting life). Sebald's poem draws the reader's attention to both ends of the environmental spectrum; the powerlessness of humans to fully control their impact upon an ecosystem, and the devastating implications of the ecological apathy that industrialised society engenders, to the end that both are shown to be in need of drastic reassessment lest the scale of this destruction lead to the collapse of innumerable ecosystems. Sebald's poem also highlights the problematic system of prioritisation that governs human interactions with nature, with the focus placed upon the destruction of an undesirable species of insect while the plight of other species that are of little concern in regards to a society's daily life is ignored due to the short-sighted emphasis upon actions that benefit humans in the short term.

Sebald's discussion of marine pollutants also extends to his prose work, most notably in his discussion of the impact that industry and other human activities have on the fish inhabiting the Dogger Bank. As the narrator recounts plight of the coastal fishermen as the possibility of catching 'useful' fish diminishes, he observes:

Every year the rivers bear thousands of tons of mercury, cadmium and lead, and mountains of fertilizer and pesticides, out into the North Sea. A substantial proportion of the heavy metals and other toxic substances sink into the waters of the Dogger Bank, where a third of the fish are now born with strange deformities and excrescences.[[289]](#footnote-289)

Not only is the bank bombarded with toxic substances, but these pollutants are inadvertently shaping the development of an ecosystem by mutating the inhabitants. Not only are the animals' survival chances altered by this, but many species of fish are finding themselves incapable of breeding as a result of these mutations.[[290]](#footnote-290) The narrator's phrasing when he describes the present state of the fishermen who once depended upon this lost resource is telling: 'The boats in which the fishermen once put out from the shore have vanished, now that fishing no longer affords a living, and the fishermen themselves are dying out.'[[291]](#footnote-291) The weight of the final phrase is stronger in the German: the fishermen are not simply 'dying out' but '*selber ausgestorben*':[[292]](#footnote-292) becoming extinct. The author represents the interactions between the fishermen and their prey as an ecological dependency: as the prey animal becomes ecologically unstable, and its numbers diminish, so too do the predators. However where normally this would lead to a boom in the prey animal population due to a decrease in predation there has been no such population growth due to the irreparable damage caused by human industry. The ecosystem that Sebald reveals is one that has collapsed; both the fish and fishermen are to go extinct if the pollution of the Dogger Bank continues, and as he continues his discussion it becomes clear that he expects this effect to spread to others as the decreasing catch size leads to food shortages and wider ecological damage to biosphere. As the crayfish of 'Poor Summer in Franconia' function as an indicator for the wider ecological impact of human-made pollutants and environmental damage, the inclusion of the fishermen here functions as a means for Sebald to highlight humanity's dependence upon these same ecosystems and the impact that environmental damage is expected to have upon human survival. As the fishermen are becoming rarer, so too is the foodstuff they produce, and as further ecosystems falter in the face of destructive human influences so too will other foodstuffs and the human race as a whole.

The proliferation of life in the sea, especially that of the herring was, as Sebald recounts, 'always a popular didactic model [...] of the indestructibility of Nature [sic]'.[[293]](#footnote-293) The quantities of herring living in the ocean was said, according to Sebald, to be such that 'vast shoals of herring were brought in towards beaches by the wind and the tides and cast ashore, covering miles of the coast to a depth of two feet or more'.[[294]](#footnote-294) The decomposition of these mass beachings 'afforded the terrible sight of Nature suffocating on its own surfeit';[[295]](#footnote-295) however, as their numbers diminish and the herring cease to breed successfully, the implications are felt across the biosphere: 'What is not eaten at the spawn stage by haddock and sucker fish ends up inside a conger eel, dogfish, cod or one of the many others that prey on herring, including, not least, ourselves'.[[296]](#footnote-296) The herring, like the crayfish of Sebald's earlier poem, can be regarded as a fundamental participant in its ecosystem due to the quantities of food it provides for other species, with the diminishing population already having an effect on the sustainability of those dependent upon it.

Sebald's discussion of the herring does not restrict itself to the immediate ecological concerns raised by humanity's exploitation of this species, but expands to encapsulate the ethical attributes of our historical engagement with them. The development of our scientific understanding of the herring is described by Sebald's narrator as follows:

[A] certain Noel de Marinière, one day saw to his astonishment that a pair of herring that had already been out of the water between two and three hours were still moving, a circumstance that prompted him to investigate more closely the fishes' capacity to survive, which he did by cutting off their fins and mutilating them in other ways. This process, inspired by our thirst for knowledge, might be described as the most extreme of the sufferings undergone by a species always threatened by disaster.[[297]](#footnote-297)

The description of the systematic torture of these animals is accompanied by accounts of other natural historians who 'meticulously chronicled the final throes' of these creatures after deliberately allowing them to suffocate,[[298]](#footnote-298) and not without Sebald passing judgement on the banality of these experiments. All of these experiments, especially those performed by Marinière, are motivated by curiosity; the desire to discover to what degree one can suffocate or injure another animal before it dies, rather than performing experiments that attempt to provide a beneficial outcome for humans or the animals concerned. These experiments are only a source of pain and suffering, categorically ecophobic in type, with no positive outcome to redeem them, and it is perhaps for this reason that 'the natural historians sought consolation' in the relatively small scale of their experiments and 'the assumption that the peculiar physiology of the fish left them free of the fear and pains that rack the bodies and souls of higher animals in their death throes'.[[299]](#footnote-299) As Sebald comments, 'the truth is that we do not know what the herring feels'[[300]](#footnote-300) - it is only an 'assumption' that these animals feel no pain, nor any fear of death, although this assumption has now been proven false.[[301]](#footnote-301)

The difficulty of bridging this division, of understanding the animal's experience and feelings, is a continuing preoccupation of Sebald's, as Peter Boxall argues, the 'gaze of the animal in Sebald, laden as it is with the unthinkable, does not yield itself to ours,' despite our attempts 'to think in [the animal's] language'.[[302]](#footnote-302) Nowhere is this division more apparent that in Sebald's collaborative volume with Jan Peter Tripp, *Unrecounted* - a volume of short poems juxtaposed with portraits of various individuals' eyes. Some are instantly recognisable: Samuel Beckett's characteristic stare is featured, as is a rather dim portrait of Sebald, alongside other famous figures from a range of cultural and historical backgrounds. The significance of these figures, and why they are included, is perhaps easily inferred due to the nature of the text; poetry, and the other forms of literary writing or artistic expression these figures produced, are representative of the author's attempt to communicate another's way of perceiving of, or engaging with, the world. Besides the inclusion of Anna Sebald (the author's daughter), as a personal rather than publicly significant figure, the most apparent exception to this hypothesis is the inclusion of a figure named in the contents as 'Maurice (Moritz)'.[[303]](#footnote-303) Sebald's pet labrador, looks across the page, away from the reader (Figure 1),[[304]](#footnote-304) accompanied by the poem:

Please send me

the brown overcoat

from the Rhine Valley

in which at one time

I used to ramble by night[[305]](#footnote-305)

The juxtaposition between the human modes of expression, poetry and engraving, and the dog's inability to perform these actions exemplifies just how far removed human and animal experiences are in their modes of being. The implication that a dog would ask the addressee to send a coat, specifically one with a sentimental or personal history ascribed to it, is difficult to reconcile with the portrait reproduced on the facing page of the book portraying an animal incapable of writing or speaking in a human language. The choice of animal alters matters further, however, due to the fact that dogs, as culturally and historically ingrained in human history and society as they are, are not only the subject of intense emotional relationships, but are granted the same moral preference and privilege given to those animals considered subjects-of-a-life. For this to occur, to return to Regan's definition, the dog must demonstrate 'memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future',[[306]](#footnote-306) making the suggestion that the creature might recall past walks, attach value to certain experiences or items, and have the foresight to predict further walks of a similar kind more readily acceptable to the reader. The human's ownership of a coat specifically designed to provide comfort for a pet demonstrates a clear preference for this animal over others, a belief that the animal feels discomfort in unpleasant weather, and a desire to prevent the preferred animal experiencing any such unpleasantness; the animal is perceived as capable of physical and emotional responses to external stimuli that are analogous on some level to those experienced by humans. Moritz's gaze does not reveal this inherently, nor is he capable of articulating this himself, but through this poem Sebald acknowledges the possibility of some degree of communication, an empathy for a member of another species, that comes about as a result of the interaction of the animal and the human. This translation of experience between human and non-human entities is prominent in the writing of Samuel Beckett, especially in regard to the transferring of the self between experiential states, from the human mode into the non-human.

**4.5 Self-Observed: Identity and Objectivity in Beckett**

If we regard the subject's awareness of the distinction between the human and non-human worlds of experience as characteristic of the human mode of being, Samuel Beckett's treatment of his characters and their self-perception becomes an examination of the mechanisms upon which ecophobic discourse and behaviour depend. The individual's self-identification as human and the differentiation of 'human' or 'artificial' beings as separate from the otherness of non-human or 'natural' animals, and the implications of this system for the individual's worldview, is exemplified within Beckett's screenplay for 'Film'. Written in 1963, and filmed the following year, *Film* follows the movement of an individual known only as 'O' as he moves through a city and into a flat, pursued by the perceiving gaze of 'E'. The piece's opening set of 'general' notes regarding its performance and recording make clear the author's desire to focus upon the representation and experience of perception as a key theme of the film: 'All extraneous perception [is] suppressed, animal, human, divine', while the protagonist engages in a 'Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception' before 'breaking down in [the] inescapability of self-perception'.[[307]](#footnote-307) The author lists animal perception as equally significant to that of humans, and just as damaging to the protagonist's mission, which suggests an equality of function and significance in the establishing of their being-in-the-world. The film's separation of the protagonist into 'object' and 'eye', the latter pursuing the former as he attempts to escape self-awareness, stresses the importance of perception in the existence of the character in occupying and engaging with the world.

The attempt to escape perception, primarily the self-perception represented by the following 'eye' of the camera, brings Beckett's protagonist in line with Julia Lupton's categorisation of the creaturely entity: 'the Creature [...] measures the difference between the human and the inhuman while refusing to take up residence in either category'.[[308]](#footnote-308) The creature, as an entity that demonstrates attributes typical of both the human and inhuman, not only exists as a state between both positions but also inevitably demonstrates the similarities and conceptual proximity of these states. The implication of this is that the divide is less defined than one might believe, with both humans and non-human animals being capable of assuming attributes ordinarily considered the preserve of their traditional antithesis. The refusal to succumb voluntarily to self-perception, to categorise the self as human, alongside a continuing attempt to avoid the perception of others, creates a protagonist that stands decisively astride the divide between human and non-human. Exhibiting human form and behaviour, the character's 'refusing to take up residence in [this] category', and the impossibility of his adopting non-human status renders the figure he represents that of the narrative creature. As both Lupton and Eric L. Santner elaborate, the 'cringed body' as symbolic of the subjugated creature is a common trope for the individual caught between these modes of being. The incompatibility of the individual's self-identification as non-human, and the societal pressures that demand the creature conforms to human modes of being, causes the suffering articulated by their deformed bodies; not only are their inner beings tormented by their disassociation from society, but their appearance both testifies to and furthers their alienation from others.[[309]](#footnote-309)

The protagonist of *Film* is safe from physical pain, and subsequently does not cringe, when the eye remains within a 45˚ 'angle of immunity' to the rear of the character.[[310]](#footnote-310) It is when the camera risks revealing his face, or the creature becomes aware of his being perceived of as human, that he hunkers down and recoils; when the camera does this the screenplay reads '[the object], entering perceivedness, reacts [...] by halting and cringing aside towards wall'.[[311]](#footnote-311) When this occurs again later in the film, the object 'cringes aside towards wall' as he 'cringes away from perceivedness'.[[312]](#footnote-312) The recurring use of this verb, to cringe, demonstrates the weight of suffering placed upon the character by perception, and transforms the act of perception into an act of oppression perpetrated by the eye upon the body of the creature. Each time that the protagonist becomes aware of his being perceived as human, he becomes wracked with pain due to the incompatibility of this perceived identity with his creaturely mode of being.

The protagonist's cringing, as indicative of his horror at being perceived as a subject, is contrasted throughout by the reactions of other humans as they are also subjected to the eye's influence. Where the protagonist hides his face, cringing away from the source of pain, other humans become fixated by the eye, wracked with pain. The episode in the street at the outset of the film, wherein the object intersects with the 'couple of shabby gentile aspect,'[[313]](#footnote-313) is described in the staging notes as 'a dramatic convenience' used 'to suggest as soon as possible [the] unbearable quality of [the eye's] scrutiny'.[[314]](#footnote-314) Their garb is therefore not to be discounted as incidental, but of vital significance to their role within the piece: the two humans' performance of a short routine surrounding the use of a lorgnon and a pince-nez is of particular significance.[[315]](#footnote-315) As eye remains to observe the couple following the departure of the object, they perform a short mime using their glasses. The issue of visual acuity, as foregrounded by their differing prescriptions (with the man being short-sighted, requiring his pince-nez to view objects in the distance, the woman contrastingly using her lorgnons when viewing objects at shorter distances), raises the issue of differing experiences of visual perception, which contrasts with the experience of self-perception imposed upon them by the eye. The eye that turns upon them is shown to be clear and focussed throughout the film, contrasting with the improper visual acuity of the couple and the protagonist's own blurred vision. This implies that subjective interpretation of the environment is varied and unique to the individual observing an object depending upon biological and physical differences. The opening shot of Alan Schneider's film of this screenplay presents the viewer with an eye, that of the protagonist, which is clouded over with what appears to be a cataract.[[316]](#footnote-316) As the film continues, this difference in perception is reinforced as dictated in Beckett's notes by the representation of the protagonist's vision as 'of different *quality*, corresponding on the one hand to E's perception of O and on the other to O's perception'[[317]](#footnote-317) by the use of an unfocussed, hazy image when the scene is shown from the protagonist's perspective.[[318]](#footnote-318) The separation of self-perception and the experience of being perceived of as an object by another entity into two distinct dramatic events cements the piece's representation of humanness as independent of visual appearance and objective form, but within the self-awareness of being perceived of as a subject.

The presence of the pet monkey in this scene provides a point of contrast: where the couple cringe under 'an agony of perceivedness', the primate, so strongly reminiscent of our genetic lineage within the non-human world, appears unfazed by the experience of perception.[[319]](#footnote-319) As the two humans fail to negotiate their status as subjects under scrutiny of the perceiving eye, the spectator should see the 'indifference of monkey, looking up into face of its mistress'. The camera's role as the perceiving eye of the protagonist, which renders others human through its recognition of them as such, is countered by the monkey's lack of concern at being perceived. This suggests that, in Beckett's text, animals are not only unconcerned with or incapable of recognising themselves as the subjects of perception, and by extension that it is this inability that differentiates humans from animals. As John Berger comments:

The eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary. The same animal may well look at other species in the same way. He does not reserve a special look for man. But by no other species except man will the animal's look be recognised as familiar. Other animals are held by the look. Man becomes aware of himself returning the look.[[320]](#footnote-320)

When the animal looks directly at the couple, they do not become consumed by the same pains as they are when the eye of the camera that turns upon them: it is the experience of being aware of perception that causes them pain.

This is in direct contrast to the behaviour of the film's protagonist and his reactions to the various animals he finds in his mother's apartment. The object-body's interactions with animals places their perceptual influence upon his mental and physical state below that of his self-perception: where he covers the mirror to avoid perceiving himself for the time being, he endures the gaze of animals for the period up until after his reflection is removed.[[321]](#footnote-321) The impact of the dog, cat, parrot, and goldfish upon the narrator is not as severe as that of his self-perception at the denouement, or his perception by other humans, as is reflected in the calm manner in which he conceals/removes the pets from his line of sight in turn as he becomes aware of each one.[[322]](#footnote-322) It is only when the protagonist is subjected to the gaze of 'God the Father' in a hanging print, representative of the biblical underwriting of his society's relationship with the self and nature, and the human subject's perpetual observance by an omnipresent God, that he becomes enraged, tearing the image from the wall and 'grinding it underfoot'.[[323]](#footnote-323) The animals in this scene are divorced of this power, where the societal influences that grant the narrator moral awareness - religion, with its moralistic teachings, the presence of other human peers, and the character's sense of being the subject of a life in accordance with Regan's definition,[[324]](#footnote-324) are the only means beyond the direct perception of the narrator by the eye or other humans that causes him pain. The protagonist's cringing, as he enters the agony of self-perception throughout the film is indicative not only of his creaturely state, but of the impossibility of achieving this mode of being due to the character's human perception of and by other occupants of the biosphere. Beckett's focus upon the creature as the subject and focaliser of his work brings in to question the validity of the human/animal distinction by demonstrating the malleability and flexibility of its barrier, and in much of his fiction this decision to focalise his writing via creaturely personas is vital to our understanding of the human/animal interactions that they contain.

**4.6 Creature Features: Exiles and Animals**

The creature, demonstrative of an entity that occupies both human and 'natural' modes of being simultaneously, is a narrative archetype found throughout Beckett's writing. Beckett's post-War novellas, and their narrator,[[325]](#footnote-325) demonstrate the creature's exile from both human society and the human species in both his physical and social state. The opening of 'The Expelled' establishes the character's status as an undesirable in society when his family violently eject him from the home, after which the narrator describes the house as a typical suburban home that had:

[A] massive green door, encased in summer in a kind of green and white striped housing, with a hole for the thunderous wrought-iron knocker and a slit for letters, this latter closed to dust, flies and tits by a brass flap fitted with springs. So much for that description. The door was set between two pillars of the same colour, the bell being on the right. The curtains were in unexceptionable taste.[[326]](#footnote-326)

The ejection of the narrator from the home, and the 'thorough cleansing' that is undertaken immediately after by those who evict him, align the narrator's presence with the undesirable 'dust, flies and tits' born of nature that are excluded by the door's various protective mechanisms. Where the cultivated geraniums, grown specifically for ornamental purposes and controlled in their growth by their pots, are regulated, and therefore acceptable, forms of nature within the home,[[327]](#footnote-327) the narrator and uncontrolled entities of nature are deliberately excluded. The narrator is frequently made aware of his position in relation to the other members of society; harried by the police as he attempts to cross the town,[[328]](#footnote-328) attacked with stones and confronted by the police again in 'The End',[[329]](#footnote-329) and greeted with hostility from other citizens throughout the texts – he is an unwelcome presence in the town, rejected for not aligning with dominant social idea of human-ness. The narrator is further separated from other humans by the same system of symbolic language that Berger indicates is vital for differentiating between humans and animals: despite being a capable storyteller within the confines of the narrative form, the narrator's attempts to speak to other humans within the text more often than not end in miscommunication and hostility. When describing his ability to speak, the narrator states that he has a 'way of assimilating the vowels and omitting the consonants'.[[330]](#footnote-330) In 'The Calmative' he struggles to generate more than 'a kind of rattle, unintelligible even to me who knew what was intended';[[331]](#footnote-331) whilst clearly capable of symbolic thought and discourse, as evinced by the text, the narrator cannot express these same ideas to humans, perhaps in part due to his creaturely deformation. The narrator of these texts is not an active participant of the same human culture as the rest of the landscape's inhabitants, save perhaps for his old friend who lives in the cave by the sea, who has also been exiled from the city.

The narrator's friend, with whom he is attacked by a gang of boys, is instrumental in establishing the comparative aspect of the text, acting as a naturalistic foil to the urban society he eschews where possible. The attack itself is described apathetically by the narrator, as if the behaviour is expected of the urban inhabitants:

The little boys jeered and threw stones, but their aim was poor, for they only hit me once, on the hat. A policeman stopped us and accused us of disturbing the peace. My friend replied that we were as nature had made us, the boys too were as nature had made them. It was inevitable, under these conditions, that the peace should be disturbed from time to time. Let us continue on our way, he said, and order will soon be restored throughout your beat.[[332]](#footnote-332)

The confrontation between the boys and the two vagrants is not shown to be the result of youthful high spirits, nor outright hostility, but 'natural' behaviour patterns that have been precipitated by their current situation. According to the vagrants, 'It was inevitable, under these conditions' that the boys would attack them as unwelcome visitors, just as it is, by extension, natural that the policeman would intervene in order to aid the city's occupants. It is clear, therefore, that the narrator's friend is similarly divorced from the dominant social group, and describes himself as being so inherently, rather than by choice.

The narrator's friend is shown inhabiting a location described as verdant and lush, with 'hawthorn and fuchsia', 'wild grass and daisies', and surrounded by pasture,[[333]](#footnote-333) and living in a manner that demonstrates his collaborative relationship with the biosphere, the narrator's cabin in the woods reflects his creaturely status in much the same way. Just as the creature is the figure in which the natural and human entities can exist in a state of flux, the shed is a space that contains evidence of prior human signification and natural resurgence; the building itself, the condoms and vomit that litter the floor all suggest that the area has been used for shelter, reproduction, and the consumption of food and drink (to excess, in some cases).[[334]](#footnote-334) The cabin is also used by animals since it has begun to fall into disrepair; not only is there 'both human and animal' excrement littering the floor, but when a cold spell arrives a cow enters the ruin to seek shelter. As the space is a meeting ground for both human and non-human influences, the narrator/creature's presence in this transitional space is unsurprising. The interaction with the cow that follows, wherein the narrator attempts to acquire milk from the cow only to be kicked repeatedly until he is forced to relinquish his grip,[[335]](#footnote-335) leaves the narrator reflecting on the nature of this interaction, and the human-centric attitude that enables an individual to lay claim to the milk of another animal. The narrator is conflicted, troubled by the eagerness with which he attempted to force the cow to do so, concluding 'No, all is for the best';[[336]](#footnote-336) the animal is best left free of human influence, rather than enslaved to the needs of the narrator. The narrator's changing attitudes towards the use of animals for human benefit are indicative of his own ability to oscillate between human and non-human mental states, with the end result being a compassion for both positions: first, he and his companion calmly accept their assault by the city-dwellers as natural, and now he rejects the human position for one that places animal welfare above that of humans. This episode stands as the foremost demonstration of the narrator's entrenched compassion for non-human animals, and his awareness of the problematic relationship between humans and those animals they choose to use for their own benefit, not just exploiting animals as resources, but also consuming them.

The narrator's later consternation at finding all of the horses in 'The Calmative' slaughtered for food, arises from the character's ability to empathise with the non-human position, imbuing these animals with the same moral rights and emotional lives as humans. In 'The Expelled' when the narrator sees a funeral procession pass he notes that the horses pulling the hearse 'were farting and shitting as if they were going to the fair'[[337]](#footnote-337) - the animals' defecation, as something apparently worthy of note, demonstrates the narrator's perspective of these animals. While, as they work in their capacity as carthorses, the humans regard them as a means of propulsion for their vehicle, the narrator sees them first and foremost as living animals who happen to be working within a role assigned to them by their owners, a role they have no way of understanding. The narrator's focus on animals' inability to acknowledge the human code of conduct within the confines of funereal work, as they defecate during a procession ordinarily regulated by strict codes of behaviour, incommensurable gap between human and animal experience. The issue is that, to some degree, as David Shumway argues, '[w]e do not merely own these animals, we bond with them just as we form bonds with family members and other animals';[[338]](#footnote-338) the owners of the cart horses are intimately familiar with their animals, and yet within the working day they are recast in the role of a resource. The inability to communicate or instigate total empathy between animals and humans, here resulting in their defecation during the funeral procession, comes about as a result of a circumstance described by Shumway as 'the partial incommensurability of human and animal worlds'.[[339]](#footnote-339) While humans and animals share physical space, Shumway argues, they also share semiotic language through behaviour patterns, body-language, vocalisations, and so on. The result is that while the human can inform their animal that certain actions are required, such as the driving of a carriage, not every sentiment can be carried across.. The impropriety of carrying out these bodily functions in a situation normally dominated by demonstrations of formality, grieving, sympathy, and respect are not ideas easily expressed to a horse, hence the juxtaposition between the crowd's 'great flurry of hats' as scores of people 'making the sign of the cross' while the animals obliviously continue to act according to their bodies' requirements.

It is not the fact that these animals are being used as carthorses that bothers the narrator, however, but the changeability of the humans' attitudes toward them. Where the animals are, in 'The End', valued enough that Mrs Maxwell funds the construction of a water trough as a gift for them as a result of their pivotal role in the cities' business,[[340]](#footnote-340) they are rendered obsolete by the time that the events of 'The Calmative' occur. The texts' period of composition not only puts the novellas contextually alongside the mechanisation of daily life that the early to mid-twentieth century brought, [[341]](#footnote-341) but the texts themselves are set in or around this period. The narrator of 'The End' finds himself the subject of a public address by an individual 'bellowing' about 'Union... brothers... Marx... Capital... bread and butter... love'.[[342]](#footnote-342) Having also earlier noted that the city he is released into following his time in the infirmary now has 'streets where I remembered none, some I did remember had vanished', '[w]hole buildings had disappeared' or 'changed position',[[343]](#footnote-343) it is apparent that these texts are set during or shortly after the periods of redevelopment typical of twentieth century urban areas. It is therefore of note that 'The Calmative', as set after the narrator's death,[[344]](#footnote-344) is not necessarily representative of an immediately post-war Dublin as the other texts appear to be, but of a potential future landscape. It is against this backdrop that the narrator finds a city where horses no longer abound, with people instead using buses and bicycles to traverse the environment. What the narrator has witnessed firsthand is the gradual transition of horses from an indispensible resource, and occasional companion to humans, into a commodity, as described by John Berger:

In the first stages of the industrial revolution, animals were used as machines. As also were children. Later, in the so-called post-industrial societies, they were treated as raw material. Animals required for food are processed like manufactured commodities.[[345]](#footnote-345)

Beckett's use of the narrative creature in his fiction allows the protagonist of Beckett's texts to observe human behaviour at one remove from the rest of his species, to recognise these changes in our relationship with animals. The horses, having been transformed from wild animals into a resource used in place of manual labour, has become vulnerable to the same fate as all other technologies: redundancy, a fate that was brought forward by the advent of mechanised transport. The intimate relationship that co-dependence fosters, exemplified by the care shown to the horses by the cab driver and Mrs. Maxwell, has subsequently deteriorated to the point where horses have had their role redefined by humans once again, so that they are now best used as food. It is unsurprising that Berger aligns this process alongside the dominant social trend 'by which men have been reduced to isolated productive and consuming units'[[346]](#footnote-346) as a result of the self-damaging nature of this behaviour towards animals, identified by Belshaw. Beckett's narrator, positioned as a creaturely vagrant, is an articulation of this process in action: with animals' lives no longer valued, the dominant social system has begun to accept an increasingly specific model of human life as valuable, with the narrator's creaturely mode no longer falling within this category. It is, perhaps, for this reason, that it is only at the outset of his tale, in 'The Expelled', when any inhabitants of the town take pity on him (most prominently, the cab driver), and by the end of his life, people readily ignore his pleas for help and run over his body with their carts in 'The End'.[[347]](#footnote-347)

The artificiality and malleability of the designation 'human' allows both Sebald's and Beckett's writing to effectively highlight the changing character of our relationship with non-human animals. The co-dependence of humans and animals upon one another, and the problems this co-dependence brings about are central to Sebald's work as a whole, and in Beckett's writing the creaturely mode of being allows the author to interrogate the designation of beings as morally and philosophically human, whilst retaining access to our species' natural heritage . For both authors, the distinction between humans and animals, and their state of being-in-the-world, are much more closely aligned than is commonly accepted, especially in regard to non-human animals' right to an existence free of suffering. The incommensurability of human and animal experience is also broached by both authors; in Beckett via his use of the narrative creature, and in Sebald through his descriptions of our differing relationships with wild and domesticated animals over time. In Sebald especially, this relationship is shown to be pivotal to the procession of human history, and it is the overlapping of natural and human history (if the two can be considered separate), and the extent to which the development of human society is indebted to non-human nature, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Both authors' writing looks towards the development of human society as an underlying influence in the gradual divorce of humans from the natural world through a discussion of our unbridled use of natural resources for our direct benefit. While neither author appears to highlight these actions as inherently ecophobic, it is the motivations behind them, or apathy regarding their implications for non-human entities, that position the societies within these texts closest to Estok's understanding of ecophobia. Finally, it is also of note that neither author directly challenges our attitude towards animals, but chooses instead to subvert our understanding of our relationship with nature in order to cause stimulate a re-evaluation of these interactions. By highlighting human exploitation of the natural world as the key proponent of environmental damage, animal suffering, and human unkindness, they succeed in critiquing our relationship with the natural world and promoting a renegotiation of our self-appointed position within the biosphere.

**Appendix**



Figure 1 - Jan Peter Tripp's engraving of Sebald's dog Moritz; Sebald & Tripp, *Unrecounted*, p. 19.

**5 – Past[oral] Disaster: Landscape and Trauma in Sebald**

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.[[348]](#footnote-348)

The pastoral mode, as a literary and artistic tradition, is dependent upon the representation of humans entering, and then often leaving, a natural or agrarian landscape, and is therefore inevitably problematised in literatures that interrogate the distinction between urban and rural spaces. Terry Gifford defines the genre: 'Pastoral is essentially a discourse of retreat' which may 'either simply *escape* from the complexities of the city, the court, the present, "our manners", or *explore* them' [original emphasis] – highlighting the possibility of pastoral to function within two complementary discursive avenues.[[349]](#footnote-349) The escapist intent of this literary mode, whether articulated through the representation of a physical movement between urban and rural spaces, or through more abstract modes of social self-effacement, allows the individual to renegotiate their relationship with human culture through the process of self-immersion in the natural world. Where the writings of Beckett tend towards the latter, in the form of psycho-philosophical pastoral with a few notable exceptions such as Molloy's country, Sebald's engagement with pastoral is more patently a manipulation of the former, established traditional form. Regardless of the specific techniques used by the author, the functions of pastoral remain the same – to escape, and to explore human and cultural relationships with the environment, other species, and humanity itself through the disengagement and renegotiation of the human cultural identity.

While the strain of pastoral to which Gifford refers as 'historical pastoral' depends upon the depiction of rural scenes and agrarian workers, Sebald's texts focus as much upon the urban and built environment as they do upon their surrounding agrarian landscapes. The version of pastoral most commonly found in Sebald's writing is not strictly of this historical type then, but comes under a second, broader definition of pastoral offered by Gifford. Pastoral is, more commonly, 'an area of content' relating to literatures that 'describe the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban'[[350]](#footnote-350) – texts which may or may not feature a physical movement between urban and rural spaces, but which imaginatively contrast them. Sebald's writing stands as an elegiac reflection of personal and historical traumas and their shaping of the landscape in which humans live, and so it is unsurprising that the natural world with which he presents his readers is not typified by its redemptive and restorative properties. Rather, the redemptive properties of the natural environment are frequently simply not at hand, and at other points this absence further undoes the fragile mental state of Sebald's narrator. Donna Coffey argues that the pastoral elegy and its association with redemption typically renders 'the mourner's grief [as] displaced onto nature [...] nature's cycle from autumn or winter to spring reflects both the resurrection of the deceased and the successful mourning of the elegist'.[[351]](#footnote-351) The redemptive function of pastoral depends upon the natural world's association with regrowth and regeneration, its continuing existence beyond the confines of individual humans, lifetimes and historical epochs. This association can undermine literatures that portray the natural and human worlds as inextricably linked within a system of shared decline, as Sebald's does, as the natural world's regenerative power is removed from the system of pastoral images. Sebald's narrators and characters often imbue their perceived environments with their own suffering as they roam deserted urban spaces and the ruins of past settlements; however the latter phase of Coffey's pastoral arc fails to effect itself due to the absence of a regenerative natural world in much of Sebald's writing. Where the natural world's ability to regenerate does come to the fore in Sebald's writing, it functions more often as evidence of humanity's impending self-extinction and the return of nature to human place than the regeneration of humanity's moral and psychological faculties. The natural world stands to erase human settlements, removing all evidence of past human life, while the marine eco-systems upon which life on our planet is dependent are shown to be permanently damaged as a result of human influence, leading to the slow collapse of the biosphere. Just as the continuing processes of erosion, the destructive sand storm near Orford, the decimation of the nation's forests by disease, and the climactic hurricane that concludes the travelogue in *The Rings of Saturn* demonstrate to the narrator nature's indifference to human well-being and long-term survivability, the reader is made all too aware of nature's incompatibility with the redemptive and healing effects of pastoral in Sebald's work. Nature is in fact highly destructive in these texts, and Sebald's characters are left to occupy a natural world typified by its decay. The use of the pastoral trope in Sebald's writing must, therefore, have an alternative function: one that exists not to salve the pain of his characters, but to demonstrate the complexity of humanity's relationship and attitude towards the natural world as we continue to treat it as an infinite resource ripe for exploitation.

**5.1 Re-Marks Upon the Boundary**

The division between urban and natural space, or psychologically significant space and the natural world, which underpins pastoral is one that Sebald believed to be central to the experience of trauma in contemporary Western cultures. When asked by Eleanor Watchtel about the capacity for humans to survive the immensity of psychological trauma to which they are subjected, Sebald responded:

It is a characteristic of our species, in evolutionary terms, that we are a species in despair, for a number of reasons. Because we have created an environment for us which isn't what it should be. And we're out of our depth all the time. We're living exactly on the borderline between the natural world from which we are being driven out, or we're driving ourselves out of it, and that other world which is generated by our brain cells.[[352]](#footnote-352)

The tension between humans and nature, the urban and rural landscapes, and our understanding of the natural world as a whole, is described here by Sebald in a manner that is at once tautological and incisive: the redemption sought in the pastoral mode arises, it seems, from a desire to reconnect with a natural order that has rejected humanity through its indifference to our existence, and which we have also rebelled against throughout our history. Whether it is through humanity distancing itself from nature through the construction of fortified cities, and the subjugation of all that appears to be 'natural' and therefore 'inhuman', or whether it is nature's course pushing humanity towards its extinction, remains ambiguous in Sebald's fiction. Both cases are presented in the author's work, reflecting the uncertainty present in his answer to Wachtel's question. In *The Rings of Saturn* Sebald writes at length of the destructive course human nature has taken in exploiting nature for its own ends: 'Our spread over the earth was fuelled by reducing the higher species of vegetation to charcoal, by incessantly burning whatever would burn [...] Combustion is the hidden principle behind every artefact we create'.[[353]](#footnote-353) It is through the transformation of natural matter into unnatural artefacts, for human benefit, primarily through the violence of immolation, that the species has distanced itself from nature in Sebald, only to replace the natural world with an environment of our own construction in an attempt to reconnect with a 'lost' nature. Concurrently, the constant threat of erosion in the novel, which has laid waste to Dunwich and much of the East Anglian landscape,[[354]](#footnote-354) shows a natural world that is actively erasing humanity's influence and legacy, destroying the land complete with its imbued human significance in order to reformulate a landscape free of human signification, be it in newly formed sandbanks and landmasses, or the open expanse of ocean left in its wake.

Pastoral is dependent upon the presence of both the unsignified, or 'natural', landscape and the signified human demesne to function, a distinction that depends upon the presence of the re-mark in order to be effective. The re-mark can be both concrete and symbolic: a dry-stone wall differentiates between the pasture of a farm and the fields beyond by presenting a physical obstacle to maintain control of animals within the field or people passing through the region, whilst symbolically demonstrating the end of a human realm curated by the farmer and the beginning of an uncontrolled natural or public space. As Morton explicates: 'a re-mark differentiates between *space* and *place*', it is 'a special mark (or a series of them) that makes us aware that we are in the presence of (significant) marks' allowing the reader to distinguish between the artistically or culturally significant, and the ambience of the fictional environment.[[355]](#footnote-355) Morton goes on to suggest that in nature writing, the re-mark 'either undoes the distinction [between in and outside] altogether, in which case there is nothing to perceive, or it establishes it in the first place, in which case there is something to perceive, with a boundary'.[[356]](#footnote-356) This is a conflict in the function of the re-mark on which John Berger writes in his short critical piece 'Field', giving the example of a field in which a dog happens to be seen running by an individual some distance away. Berger writes: 'It is not only that the field frames them, it also *contains* them'. The existence of the field as a framing concept determines the manner in which the events are perceived by the observer; within the field the act is somehow significant due to their being contained, or staged within an area of human significance and curation.[[357]](#footnote-357) The field's existence, as a delineated area, is a precondition for the labelling of events within the space as significant, having a history, place and meaning ascribed to them by an observer. The re-mark of the field's visible boundaries are, Berger argues, vital to the experience of perception by the remote narrator of his piece. The re-mark, however, also destabilises the boundaries of the field it acts to maintain: the field, having acted as a stage for these events, becomes an 'event in itself' for Berger, as it is perceived as part of the event it contains.[[358]](#footnote-358) The field ceases to be a geographical area, and becomes a part of the perceiver's experience: 'The field you are standing before appears to have the same proportions as your own life',[[359]](#footnote-359) Berger writes, with the perception of the re-mark, the remote location becomes the totality of the observer's perception of the landscape. The delineated zone's propensity to consume the onlooker's attention renders it, and that which occurs within it, the entirety of the observer's perception of the moment. Rather than establishing a limited zone of perceived significance for the spectator, the events and area rendered significant by the re-mark cease to have a significant boundary, having rendered the onlooker unwilling to perceive of that which lies beyond the human-signified area.

This function is particularly important for the discussion of literature, wherein the contrast between that which is significant within the landscape and that which is not becomes ambiguous due to the re-mark concurrently identifying significant zones within the text, whilst rendering the whole landscape as the totality of the reader's perceived landscape by altering focalisation. In the aftermath of the sandstorm, the narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* recalls:

When at last I reached Orford, I climbed to the top of the castle keep, from where there is a view over the houses of the town, the green gardens and pallid fenlands, and the coastline to north and south, lost in the shimmering distance.[[360]](#footnote-360)

The narrator describes the view of his surrounding landscape from a high vantage point, and immediately the presence of the re-mark is evident: the gardens suggest the presence of people tending to specific areas of land, the houses imply human ownership and emotional investment within a place, and the castle speaks to these concepts extending over a larger region of land, and the desire to assert human control over an extended period. The narrator's decision to focus upon these specific features enacts the re-mark's function as a framing device for the significant action which follows, namely a history of the human inhabitation of the area as demonstrated by the presence of the castle and town, and the delineation of the wild fenlands beyond as insignificant beyond their contrasting the human settlement's significance for the narrative. The narrator's focus upon that which is designated significant by humans would ordinarily render their presence and history the entirety of the reader's understanding of the landscape and its history, regardless of the presence of significant marks upon the landscape, due to the reader's inability to look beyond the narrator's limited literary account of the environment. However Sebald's account allows the reader to broaden this focus as the borders between nature and humans begin to waver.

The landscape described by Sebald is framed, ultimately, by 'the coastline to north and south', both 'lost in the shimmering distance'[[361]](#footnote-361); the re-mark is shown to exist beyond the limits of the narrator's vision as it encapsulates the entirety of his field of vision, much as his account of the zone does the reader's imagined view of the scene. This effect is strengthened by the continuing incursion of the sea in *The Rings of Saturn*, with the erosion of coastlines constantly threatening the destruction of Orford, Orfordness, Dunwich, and Benacre Broad in the novel. The malleability of this most fundamental of re-marks, which delineates the end of countries, cultures, and the human world, as it shimmers in the distance is foregrounded by the narrator in the moment of his including a photograph of the landscape, presumably taken from atop Orford Castle (Appendix 1).[[362]](#footnote-362) In it, the reader can now observe those features previously omitted from the text by the narrator; the reader, no longer constrained by the limits of the narrator's focalising, but by the edges of the photograph. In the distance, the irregular coastline and the curved channels of estuaries and inlets where the sea has eroded the landscape can be seen, visually reminding the reader of the variability and temporality of human delineations of significance. Sebald at once demonstrates the re-mark's ability to render the area of significance, identified by the re-mark, the totality of the reader's perceived landscape, and the underlying temporal malleability of these human marks. The re-mark does not simply establish significant place on human terms then, but demonstrates the constant re-negotiation of human signification within the landscape in response to the external influence of the natural world; a negotiation in which humans have little power, reacting to change rather than directing the course of events.

The re-mark therefore distinguishes between the culturally significant and the incidental ambience of the diegetic environment, separated by the intangible distinction drawn between them by the perceiver, whilst also indicating the changeable status of place and space. That which is currently place due to its delineation has once been, and may one day be, space at another point in history, and vice versa. In pastoral literature this has two major implications for the representation of the human seeking absolution beyond the limits of the urban centre's re-mark: firstly the re-mark insists that the rural space to which the individual moves, in being identified as a geographical region, is now a significant place, even if only temporarily due to its occupation by the character. Secondly, the re-mark maintains that the absented city remains significant, due to its contrast with the natural space now occupied, however the boundary between the city and the surrounding rural demesne may now overlap and blur, as both sit within the re-marked region. For Sebald's narrators in particular, this latter point is of importance: the socio-political histories upon which urban societies are founded follow the narrator throughout his periods in the countryside, with the chief concession to a truly pastoral or de-signified experience coming from the reduced density of these significations, rather than from their absolute absence from the narrator's experience. The most imposing, and concentrated, arenas of historical signification in Sebald's landscapes are the estates of the political elite which occupy the countryside of Britain: country houses, and their vast parklands, which impose human order and influence upon vast swathes of the countryside, bringing the influence of the political and economic centres of power into the rural landscape.

Carolyn Merchant suggests that the city can be regarded, in its occupation of the landscape, as *urbs in horto* [the city within the garden], disseminating human signification throughout its vicinity.[[363]](#footnote-363) From this central bastion of civilisation various stages of human influence can be witnessed: agricultural areas, demonstrative of human control over nature, represent a step away from the civilised core, with 'natural' landscapes lying further beyond these.[[364]](#footnote-364) The re-mark cannot, therefore, function simply as a distinguishing feature that determines whether a space is 'natural' or 'unnatural' – rather, and this is particularly true in W.G. Sebald's writing, it allows the viewer to be aware of the varying intensity of human significance a location may have. A greater quantity of significant landmarks or signifiers, or even an individual signifier with a large degree of psychic or emotional energy, identifies an area as 'more human'; not inherently artificial, nor devoid of natural entities, but more identifiably part of a system of human environmental control and perception. The pastoral landscape is defined by its complimentary degrees of natural and human influence, rather than whether it is truly untouched by humans, and in the writing of W.G. Sebald, few landscapes are ever far removed from the imposition of historical account.

**5.2 Redemptive Histories and Self-Effacement**

The characters in Sebald's literary works are, in Heidegger's terms, bound to their pre-ordained being-towards-death; subject to their own mortality, and the certainty that they are living in a social world whose history is defined in part by the cycles of birth and death which act as precursors of the current epoch. It is within the natural world's ability to transcend the limits of humans' relatively short life-spans that the displaced traumatic experience can be undone, or at the very least may appear to diminish in significance, and Sebald's literary project attempts to recreate the suspension of narrative time which facilitates this process within his pastoral scheme. The common experience of Sebald's pastoral is not redemptive as a result of this, but rather one that suspends narrative chronology as a means of preserving the current historical epoch, temporarily slowing the onset of the entropic decline his novels describe. David Darby argues that Sebald's 'redemptive project' consists of 'the collection and recording on paper, fragment by fragment, story by story' pieces of historical and personal information that may contribute to the reconstitution of a landscape that is gradually eroding as geological and historical time cause it to decay.[[365]](#footnote-365) However, Sebald's elegiac writing does not bring about the redemptive experience which Darby argues is self-evident. The pastoral mode and Holocaust literatures, in particular, are incompatible; in part due to the scale of the atrocities committed, but also because 'the language and mythos of the pastoral had been so thoroughly appropriated by the Nazis' in rationalising the inhuman treatment of their victims.[[366]](#footnote-366) Sebald's writing on the Johann Peter Hebel also reflects this sentiment, as he was celebrated by Nazi intellectuals as demonstrative of the German's unique affinity for the rural life and unique connection to their native land. Sebald reasons:

It says something, too, about German intellectual history if we consider what little impact the intercession of these Jewish authors [Kafka, Bloch, and Benjamin] of the 1910s and 1920s had on Hebel's posthumous reputation, by comparison with the effect the National Socialists had when they later laid claim to the *Heimatschriftsteller* from Wiestenthal for their own purposes.'[[367]](#footnote-367)

Hebel's admiration by both Jewish and Nazi commentators places his calendar stories, and the wider tropes of the genre, in the centre of a catastrophic event for Sebald, rendering the pastoral tropes irrevocably associated with the murder of entire segments of society. Sebald's pastoral is not, and cannot be, redemptive, nor is it an attempt to rebuild or rescue a fading historical moment as Darby suggests; it is an archetype used by the author to interrogate the cruxes of personal and cultural trauma, the ongoing processes of decline and destruction, and the influence and role of nature within these processes.

The narrator's account of the life of a Major Le Strange in *The Rings of Saturn*, who led a regiment in the liberation of the Bergen Belsen concentration camp,[[368]](#footnote-368) highlights the linkage between Sebald's variation of pastoral and the degradation of the country estate as a pastoral retreat for the social elite. The reproduction of a picture, depicting the bodies of the dead strewn amongst the trees at the site of the concentration camp in Sebald's novel serves to instruct the reader about the inexpressible psychological damage such an experience might inflict:[[369]](#footnote-369) as Mark McCulloh argues,

Le Strange's reclusion and rejection of the burdensome banalities of everyday speech is also meant to speak for itself; the meaning and effect of what he witnessed was beyond words, even to the point of repudiating language itself[[370]](#footnote-370)

This same incompatibility between the emotional impact of these scenes of atrocity and the limited scope of language unite Sebald, as the implied author of the text who is only capable of approaching the horrors of the Holocaust through images, and the estranged Major. The result is that Le Strange becomes reclusive, and chooses to dine with his cook in absolute silence. The Major appears to relinquish his family's claim to the parkland and grounds occupied by his stately home, inviting nature not only to enter the home, so much so that he soon shares his quarters with a cockerel, and 'all manner of feathered creatures [...] guinea fowl, pheasants, pigeons and quail',[[371]](#footnote-371) but also discharges his family's staff bar the chef. This shift from Augustan opulence to Spartan living also means that 'the whole estate, with its gardens and park, became overgrown and neglected, while scrub and undergrowth encroached on the fallow fields'.[[372]](#footnote-372) Le Strange's behaviour resembles a pattern that arises throughout much of Sebald's pastoral writing; the character, seeking redemption towards the end of a traumatic lifetime, takes to living in near-isolation, here rumoured to be a cave,[[373]](#footnote-373) surrounded by wildlife. This pattern, which appears in *The Emigrants* as well as in other passages of *The Rings of Saturn*, adds credence to the suggestion that the adoption of a pastoral role constitutes an attempt by Sebald's characters to inhabit a position outside of the traumatic history of human society; attempting to immerse themselves in a world that has no analogous sense of history and subsequently hoping to erase the past trauma.

**5.3 Faux-Pastoral: Artificiality and Impotence**

As discussed in sections one and two of this thesis, constructed landscapes act as place-markers which establish a connection between the space as occupied in the present, the individual's worldview, and the historical narrative of the societies that contextualise the space in question. The country estate is, as a marker of historical and ancestral connectedness to a landscape, no different from urban place in this regard except for its propensity to claim control over a surrounding region of 'natural' landscape beyond the walls of the house itself. This difference will be discussed shortly; however, it is upon the historical associations of the country house that this thesis will first focus. Sebald's history of the country estate in England is closely tied to that of Britain's participation in the Second World War throughout *The Rings of Saturn*, and it is where this history intersects with the environmental implications of this upper-class vision of pastoral that Sebald's writing focuses. In *The Emigrants* the narrator and his partner live for a time with the Jewish Dr. Henry Selwyn in a home which is described as 'one of the largest in the village',[[374]](#footnote-374) neo-classical in style, and boasting a number of outbuildings and servants' quarters, situated within an area of parkland.[[375]](#footnote-375) The class of the occupants is evident; even though Dr. Selwyn is himself the son of a poor immigrant family, he is educated, and his wife Elli is of a higher social standing; she retains much of her fortune, rendering the pair financially secure, which combined with the doctor's profession comfortably places them within the upper middle classes.[[376]](#footnote-376) It is in his account of Selwyn's search for redemption in the pastoral state that Sebald's narrator uncovers the inefficacy of this variety of pastoral as a method of healing historical and personal trauma.

Selwyn attempts to free himself from his traumatised condition following the death of his friend Johannes Naegli, the involuntary termination of his career, and the residual memory of the Holocaust. In attempting to escape these traumatic experiences, Selwyn engages in idle pastimes typical of the pastoral figure, 'lying in the shade cast on the lawn by a lofty cedar', 'absorbed in contemplation of the patch of earth immediately before his eyes', 'counting the blades of grass'.[[377]](#footnote-377) Dr. Selwyn and the house's surrounding greenery are of particular importance in relation to Sebald's deconstruction of the pastoral mode; the central figure of the pastoral trajectory is Selwyn himself, who reveals his reasons for seeking refuge in the garden as stemming from his experiences following the Second World War:

The years of the second war, and the decades after, were a blinding, bad time for me, about which I could not say a thing even if I wanted to. In 1960, when I had to give up my practice and my patients, I severed my last ties with what they call the real world. Since then, almost my only companions have been plants and animals.[[378]](#footnote-378)

Selwyn's personal life has been mirrored by the estate in which he lives: not only is the doctor now practically a pauper, but like Major Le Strange the family have discharged every servant bar Ellie, while the grounds and house fall into a state of disrepair. Selwyn's attempt to find redemption within the pastoral mode is a task which must take place in an environment typified by the resurgence of nature: the plants and animals are the only beings that exist within the estate not to have succumbed to the slow decline of privileged society, instead being subject to a rejuvenation as humans gradually relinquish their control over them. Despite moving from the house to the garden, Selwyn's pastoral ultimately fails to salve his pain, with Selwyn taking his own life before the end of Sebald's narrative. Rather than becoming capable of re-entering society healed by his period away from urban civilisation, Selwyn becomes increasingly reclusive as a result of his inability to re-establish his 'ties with [...] the real world'. Pastoral engagement with the biosphere appears to be reducing Selwyn's ability to return to the society from which he sought refuge, leaving him adrift between the human and natural worlds. While not strictly creaturely in the same manner as Beckett's disfigured and exiled protagonists, Selwyn finds himself in a similar position to them: he is unable to re-enter human society due to his self-imposed exile from that traumatic sphere, however pastoral as a human-made trope is similarly incapable of accommodating him in his desire to sever his ties with the human world. Rather, the artificiality of this mode of engaging with nature, and its dependence upon the very human concept of 'nature' as an entity that might be used for self-betterment, renders it similarly laden with the narratives of decline and loss from which Selwyn seeks refuge.

The appeal of the curated nature contained within gardens, such as Selwyn's, and country parks in Sebald's writing arises from the collaborative character of these locales. If the redemptive power of pastoral arises from the purity and regenerative power of a rediscovered natural landscape, then the power of the cultivated landscape comes about through its representing a unified mode of being for both humans and natural beings. Kenneth Olwig argues that 'The garden idea is potent because it has long been a vital symbol in Western culture of a moral society living in "natural", social, and environmental harmony',[[379]](#footnote-379) maintaining a pretence of collaborative, equal partnership between human custodians and their natural subjects. By showing the garden, in which Selwyn is located, alongside the expanses of semi-natural and natural landscapes beyond draws direct comparison between the space in which natural entities 'collaborate' with humans (gardens and farm lands) and the non-human spaces comparatively free of human influence beyond them. The 'collaborative' aspect of this harmony, however, is problematic in that nature's role is purely subordinate: the crops growing in farmlands and kitchen gardens are selectively bred, with undesirable species of plant removed and pest creatures killed in order to ensure that the monocultural plantings remain for human consumption. Selwyn's failure is, in part, a result of his seeking the redemptive influence of nature within the curated space of the lawn – here the regenerative power of nature remains suppressed by human aesthetic choices, privileging appearance over function. In the now-overgrown kitchen garden, the reader finds the overlooked source of nature's true regeneration: 'Leaving the once well-tended garden to its own devices did have the incidental advantage, said Dr. Selwyn, that the things that still grew there [...] possessed a flavour which he himself found quite exceptionally delicate'.[[380]](#footnote-380) The exceptional quality of his garden's produce, and the bounty it provides despite having 'fallen into disrepair', shows nature to be flourishing in what, for humans, appears to be the chaos of an improperly kept garden – it is when allowed to 'fall' from the grace of 'collaborative' harmony under human subjugation that the natural entities are able to fulfill their regenerative potential. Indeed, the apparent neglect of the garden is born of Selwyn's fear that 'Nature itself was groaning and collapsing beneath the burden we placed upon it';[[381]](#footnote-381) the doctor appears to be aware of the negative impact of human control over nature, attempting to alleviate the garden of this burden which has the additional effect of generating a somewhat more natural space for him to inhabit. However, even in the increasingly wild garden the narratives of decline remain present; it is here that the narrator and his wife are given a bushel of 'fairy tale' apples, the finest they have ever tasted, bringing a trace of the biblical fall of humanity from Eden into the garden, undermining the redemptive and restorative qualities evinced by the garden's flourishing without human intervention.[[382]](#footnote-382)

The garden in which Selwyn acts out his pastoral routine also highlights the juxtaposition of natural and cultural territories in such a way as to bring about a resonance with a medium strongly associated with pastoral narratives: drama. As the narrator and his partner first enter the garden, Sebald writes that they entered, 'as if upon a stage', 'a terrace with a stone balustrade overlooking a broad, square lawn bordered by flower beds, shrubs and trees'.[[383]](#footnote-383) The terraced area is, however, not the location within which this drama unfolds, acting only as a viewing platform. The episode's pastoral status is established in its eschewing the constructed stage, much as the protagonists of pastoral writing eschew the constructed city, for its superficially natural counterpart. The lawn's semblance of a natural space is undone by its regular shape and planted borders, products of human control that reflect the wider cultural existence of 'gardening' and 'gardens' as concepts, and yet by rendering the action within this area, Sebald establishes Selwyn's occupation of the lawn at the outset of his pastoral dramatic arc. Rather than taking place in the land beyond the garden where 'the grounds opened out into a park landscape studded with lone lime trees, elms and holm oaks' or even the distant 'undulations of arable land',[[384]](#footnote-384) the constructedness of pastoral as a cultural genre dictates that the drama unfold upon the rectangular lawn, a secondary 'natural' stage maintained by humans. The narrator makes the cultural associations of the stage's ambience explicit: no element of the landscape beyond the garden is free of cultural associations, nor are the spaces beyond the garden truly untouched by human influence. The varying levels of constructedness throughout Selwyn's backdrop act as a foil which serves to highlight the performative nature of his behaviour within this artificial space, while Selwyn's occupation of the stage as he acts out his assumed pastoral role mimics the artificiality of this literary/dramatic genre. The grass, plantings, and borders reveal Selwyn's attempt to engage with nature as originating within a human-made pastoral tradition, with the meticulously crafted parkland, a common feature of Sebald's accounts of country houses, tying Selwyn's dramatic performance to the wider discussion surrounding the cultivation of natural landscapes in Sebald's writing.

The symptom most commonly exhibited by Sebald's characters who choose to seek redemption within the pastoral landscape, a sense of ambiguous contemplation coupled with a distinct sence of foreboding regarding one's past trauma, is one that typifies the pastoral experience throughout Sebald's writing. Not only do Adelwarth, Bereyter, and Solomon all report experiencing this sense of disruption, but Sebald's narrators also experience it themselves: the narrator of *The Rings of Saturn* feels both 'carefree' and yet subject to bouts of 'paralysing horror' as he retreats to rural East Anglia, finding evidence of human trauma and natural disasters wherever he turns,[[385]](#footnote-385) and the narrator of *Vertigo* repeatedly finds himself disorientated, nauseous, and terrified for reasons of which he is often only ever partly aware. The pastoral mode, in its traditional form of a voluntary remove, reflection upon, and return to urban life fails all of Sebald's characters, perhaps in part due to the dependence of this tradition upon artificial archetypes. The concepts of rural and urban space, and the articulation of each in physical space, are the result of human actions and processes and, as Sebald's narrator often finds, even spaces unpopulated by humans reveal traumatic histories and human signification.

The town of Dunwich, destroyed by great storms before the land upon which it rested was completely eroded by the sea, continues to function as a reminder of human fallibility despite its appearance as a natural space of shingle beaches and cliffs. Whilst representing the closest that Sebald's narrator comes to witnessing a truly 'empty' or non-human landscape, its emptiness remains as a testament to the area's past occupation and the history of the landscape's gradual destruction. Once a great trading port:

[I]ts towers, and many thousand souls, [have] dissolved into water, sand and thin air. If you look out from the cliff-top across the sea towards where the town must have been, you can sense the immense power of emptiness[[386]](#footnote-386)

It is this space that functions as a pastoral retreat for the poet Swinburne in Sebald's novel in much the same way that it does for the narrator; however it only serves to remind both individuals of 'the gradual dissolution of life' and the role of nature in reclaiming these spaces.[[387]](#footnote-387) The pastoral found in these locales functions only in the reflective, illuminating function, with no redemptive outcome experienced by any of the characters who embark upon these pastoral journeys.

It is this pastoral effect which typifies the narrator's experience when he visits another site that is no longer occupied by humans in *The Rings of Saturn* – the research base at Orfordness. Just as Dunwich functions as a pastoral landscape in part due to its representing a landscape that is falling out of human signification and returning to a designified state associated with wilderness spaces, Orfordness impresses the narrator in its isolation:

It was as if I were passing through an undiscovered country, and I still remember that I felt, at the same time, both utterly liberated and deeply despondent. I had not a single thought in my head. With each step that I took, the emptiness within and the emptiness without grew ever greater and the silence more profound.[[388]](#footnote-388)

The 'silence' of the landscape the narrator finds himself within, free from the social functions of place-making and the historical events associated with this process, leaves him experiencing the same paradox of harrowed, traumatic liberation that typifies Sebald's wider representation of pastoral. The reason for this, it appears, lies within the narrator's perception of the abandoned landscape, while the empty, corroding facilities create the impression of 'the remains of our own civilization after its extinction in some future catastrophe'. The narrator's experience of Orfordness appears to lie beyond the limits of our contemporary understanding of place and the wilderness beyond it. In the gradual dissolution of human signification throughout this landscape, and the secretive nature of the military base's original signification before this point in time, it might be argued that this environment is, in its desolation, as much a pastoral space as Selwyn's garden: partly human, partly natural, but gradually moving towards assimilation by the latter. The only consolation offered by this place, however, is a reassurance of the eventual undoing of humanity's destructive behaviours by the forces of nature, here demonstrated by their ability to erase the means by which humanity might bring about the total annihilation of life on earth through military action. The narrator only finds complete designification, and a subsequent semblance of solace (albeit terrifying in its implications of human extinction), within the occupation of an imagined future state in which humans no longer assert their dominance over nature.

**5.4 The Catastrophe of the Country House**

A prominent topic of Sebald's concern, particularly in *The Rings of Saturn*, is the fall of the land-owning classes and the subsequent decay of the country houses and estates in which they lived. Christine Berberich argues that, in the history of the United Kingdom, '[t]he decline of the country estate is [...] synonymous with the decline of the upper classes as a political and economic force to be reckoned with',[[389]](#footnote-389) as the events of the twentieth century stimulated major social and economic changes which acted to the detriment of this social stratum, especially in the years following the Second World War. Berberich's thesis is supported by Jan Assman, whose writings on cultural memory support the notion of country homes as representative of social and economic movements which, in their moment of dissolution, represent a far greater shift in the political and cultural life of the United Kingdom. Assman suggests that contemporary cultures, and those individuals who are participants within them, serve 'as a means for distancing people from the turmoil of nature', with the complex interplay of traditional, social, and economic interactions serving to detach its members from primal selfishness and the world which exists beyond the confines of the social group.[[390]](#footnote-390) In this reading of the English countryside, the physical presence of the homes and their estates is representative of a system of 'two-dimensional *memoria*', to borrow Assman's term – a cultural system that seeks to reconstruct and maintain social norms and cultural ideals through respecting and appealing to previous power structures.[[391]](#footnote-391) The ownership of the country house, and the power its owners wield (or once held) is traditionally that earned through the systems of wealth, primogeniture and royal decree; their authority is legitimised by the continuation of the cultural systems they themselves propagate. For Sebald, the historical events that disrupt this system of culture formation are the conflicts that occurred throughout the early twentieth century: the Troubles in Ireland, the First World War, and the Second World War. It is as a result of these events, and the economic shifts that accompanied them, that these country estates, which disseminate and stand testament to the culture of environmental exploitation and classed society, appear gradually to fall into disrepair, new ownership, or even out of use entirely.

In *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald's narrator retells the history of Anglo-German trade along the North Sea coast, specifically in relation to its dependence upon the accommodation and glorification of the gentry. A Sir Cuthbert Quilter is singled out as representative of the nouveau-riche, 'men of middle-class background who had achieved great wealth through industrial enterprise, wanting to establish a legitimate position in higher society' by 'acquiring country mansions and estates'.[[392]](#footnote-392) The estate owned by Quilter resembled both 'an Elizabethan mansion' and 'a maharajah's palace', a building whose construction stood as a physical embodiment of Quilter's 'claim to status', supported by his assumption of an heraldic motto of his own choosing: 'plutôt mourir que changer' [literally, 'rather die than change'].[[393]](#footnote-393) This arrogance is not only evident within his choice of motto, but also within his design brief for the redesigned building: in order to appear both powerful and historically significant, he chooses to design the mansion after an Elizabethan manor, denoting ancestry and permanence over the centuries, and the palace of an Indian monarch, implying international influence and invoking the power of the then-expansive British Empire. These underlying concerns of the landowning classes, the desire for power and influence over time and distance, result in the violence of the two world wars; as politicians and interested parties flocked to Felixstowe to network in the resort, their interests soon conflicted, 'War was declared, the German hotel employees were sent home, there were no more summer visitors [...] The German Kaiser lost his Empire, and the world of Cuthbert Quilter too went into a gradual decline'.[[394]](#footnote-394) Sebald's narrator ties the functions of land ownership on the medium scale, in the form of land-ownership, to the large-scale trade of national territory in order to associate the violence they incite between humans with the violence committed against the natural world and working classes by the country house.

Sebald brackets Quilter's story with the mass killing of non-human beings in the push for political influence: the narrator details how the fields surrounding the estates between Woodbridge and Orford were carefully controlled so as to facilitate the hunting of game. The rank of an estate owner could be much improved if the 'name and rank' of the guests were sufficient;[[395]](#footnote-395) however, the standing of the proprietor was most changed 'in direct proportion to the number of creatures that were killed'.[[396]](#footnote-396) The stranglehold of the country house upon the countryside not only forced many rural civilians to be displaced in the creation of expansive hunting grounds,[[397]](#footnote-397) but is shown to bring about the reduction of regional biodiversity and the slaughter of scores of animals, all of which comes about to further the political career of the estate owner. Quilter's segment of the novel concludes by recalling the corresponding toll on human life brought about by the same desire for power: in the war that followed, 'whole tracts of land were ploughed up by mortar fire, and the death strip between the front lines was strewn with phosphorescent corpses'.[[398]](#footnote-398) The pride of the privileged classes, and their desire for power and the exponential growth of their assets, is demonstrably ill-fated in the narrator's account of the early twentieth-century land-owning class. The irrecoverable damage perpetrated by these individuals out of self interest upon human and animal lives, as well as on the wider biosphere not only functions as a more directly attributable version of the dominion over nature demanded by modern industrial societies, but also undermines the pastoral narrative trope by indicating the country estate's ability to imbue whole tracts of seemingly 'natural' countryside with historical trauma arising from their foundation in the exploitation of other nations via colonial enterprise, natural resources, and the lives of living beings, human or otherwise, considered subordinate by their occupants.

Sebald's narrative leaves Bawdsey manor, the home of William Quilter, at the point of its sale to the British Government in 1936, just short of revealing to the reader a wider shift in the fate of country homes during the two World Wars. Bawdsey Manor, in particular, is famous as the site at which Sir Robert Watson led the research programme which led to the development of RADAR following its sale,[[399]](#footnote-399) although it was not alone in being requisitioned by the government for use in the war. Other halls throughout the country, and especially in the South East (as strategically convenient in its proximity to Germany), were used throughout the Second World War: some as officers' halls and hospitals, headquarters for RAF and Royal Navy bases, German POW camps, and lodgings for evacuees were all established in the grounds of East Anglian country homes.[[400]](#footnote-400) Somerleyton, another estate visited by Sebald's narrator, was the site of a plane crash between pilots training for 'the bombing raids then being launched on Germany from the sixty-seven airfields that were established in East Anglia after 1940'.[[401]](#footnote-401) The gardens, grounds, and surrounding farms were also mostly ploughed up, transformed into runways or additional farmlands to ease the strain upon the nation's food resources.[[402]](#footnote-402) To increase the acreage available for this, and to provide lumber during a period of limited trade, trees were also felled across numerous estates. The result was that, following this difficult period, the owners of country homes often found themselves with a radically altered estate, and reduced means with which to repair and maintain them. As many as one in six country estates were sold off or destroyed in the years that followed the Second World War in the face of the insurmountable costs of the requisite repairs, and the diminishing income offered by these damaged estates.[[403]](#footnote-403) This history of economic, political, and military upheaval is one towards which Sebald's narrator frequently gestures, demonstrating an evident knowledge of these events as critical in the history of the estates he visits, and the landscapes that surround them. The country house acts as a crux, in Sebald's novel, at which the radical social, economic, and political changes of the mid-twentieth century collide with the cultural ideal of the rural escape – the pastoral mode favoured by the wealthy. The dissolution of the country estate represents a weak link in a misguided understanding of the occupier's relationship with the natural world, particularly at the point of contact. The pastoral is, at its core, a mode that seeks to exploit the natural environment as a resource for the betterment of human life, an attitude towards nature that can be traced back to the same capitalist societies which gave birth to the urban centre and country estate as bastions of human dominance over the surrounding environment.

**5.5 The Artifice of Privilege**

Parkland, in Sebald's writing, is the site of the pastoral scenes represented by the country houses to which they are attached, constructed by the land-owning classes and, in the twentieth century, by the *nouveau-riche*. While country houses reassert the human domination of the landscape around them, the parklands often sit within attempt to blur the distinction between natural and constructed space in Sebald's texts in order to offer some hope of pastoral experience for their occupants. Where parkland acts as a visual backdrop for Selwyn's drama, for Sebald's narrator it represents the dominion over nature inherent within the establishment of a country estate, and the subsequent exploitation of the landscape as a visual entity and physical asset. As John Beck writes, the exploitation of nature in *The Rings of Saturn* often stand as examples of 'near-sighted greed as synecdoches of empire-building'[[404]](#footnote-404) – a statement that has a dual meaning for the country estate. Not only does Quilter's manor physically embody the introduction of the British Empire's distant colonies into the English countryside, but Beck's argument also reflects the landowner's attitude towards the local environment. Towards the end of the novel, Sebald's narrator visits Ditchingham Park, and describes in detail the process by which the fashion for country living in the eighteenth century led to work that required decades of planning and labour to refashion the landscape itself. The aim of allowing 'the ruling elite to imagine themselves surrounded by boundless lands where nothing offended the eye' often required 'entire villages' to be moved or destroyed so that the surrounding landscape would appear 'innocent of any human presence'.[[405]](#footnote-405) After 'the felling of tracts of woodlands and the burning of unsightly thickets and scrub that did not agree with the overall concept', the landscapers began 'planting trees as specimens or in small groups',[[406]](#footnote-406) to create a more aesthetically pleasing image of the 'natural' world. Both natural and human-made entities are relocated or destroyed by the wealthy in order for a particular conceptualisation of an 'innocent' landscape to be constructed; one over which the owners wield supreme power, expanding their influence beyond the confines of the constructed environment over the makeup of entire ecosystems and landmasses.

Such was the desire of those establishing these estates to construct an idealised natural space in which they might benefit from the natural world that, having constructed an artificial landscape beyond the confines of their houses, some also welcomed representations of the natural world within the building in order to invoke the pastoral tradition inside the constructed space. When discussing the opulence of Somerleyton Hall, and its reception in society papers, the narrator writes:

In particular, [Somerleyton] was famed for the scarcely perceptible transitions from interiors to exterior; those who visited were barely able to tell where the natural ended and the man-made began. [...] A corridor might end in a ferny grotto where fountains ceaselessly plashed, and bowered passages criss-crossed beneath the dome of a fantastic mosque. Windows could be lowered to open the interior onto the outside, and inside the landscape was replicated on the mirror walls.[[407]](#footnote-407)

The invitation of the natural world into the human's demesne, and the landscape's reproduction within the reflective walls, creates a space that is at once steeped in social history and ancestral significance, and yet is intended to be experienced as one in which the occupier may hope to divorce themselves from the urban/socio-political world. The design of Somerleyton is one that intends to allow the occupier to rest surrounded by a simulacrum of the natural world, without sacrificing the amenities of the privileged classes. Indeed, the narrator reflects that the 'the lawn like green velvet, the baize on the billiard tables, the bouquets of flowers', surrounded by images 'of birds of paradise and the golden pheasants on the silken tapestries, the goldfinches in the aviaries and the nightingales in the garden' all combined to create 'the illusion of complete harmony between the natural and the manufactured'.[[408]](#footnote-408) The nature replicated within the walls of Somerleyton is elevated above the mundane form in which it naturally occurs, with the raw materials it creates transformed into the luxurious wares of the upper classes: billiard tables, decorative tapestries, and exotic plants act as status symbols to which the working classes had no access, whilst also mimicking their natural counterparts in their iconography. The transfiguration of base matter, from raw materials into extravagant versions of their original forms, rebrands the natural world as something that not only exists for human consumption, but stands as evidence of the owner's right to exploit it. 'Capitalism', writes Merchant, 'mystifies by converting living nature into dead matter and by changing inert metals into living money' so that this can then be converted into status symbols and resources.[[409]](#footnote-409) By demonstrating the estate's wealth in such elaborate displays, the occupant's political and economic power is enhanced; however, such displays also undermine the vision of nature portrayed within them by emphasising their origin within the owner's economic wealth and their subsequent fabrication for the purpose of display.

Terry Gifford suggests that a major shift in the subject matter of pastoral texts came about with the Augustan poets, who '[located] Arcadia in the present and in actual country estates',[[410]](#footnote-410) rather than in the open fields, removed from civilisation. These texts, and those influenced by them, reinforce the class divisions implicit within earlier pastoral texts by celebrating the landowner's mastery of nature, independent of servants: 'there are no shepherds in these texts since in these Arcadias nature provides for the deserving', offering its resources to those who dominate it.[[411]](#footnote-411) In contrast, Sebald's pastoral appears to take pleasure in subverting this pastoral tradition, focussing upon the disintegration of these political and economic bastions as nature seemingly rejects their attempts to control it, whether the landowner wishes to relinquish their assumed power or not. The narrator reflects 'How uninviting Somerleyton must have been [...] when everything, from cellar to the attic, from the cutlery to the waterclosets, was brand new, matching in every detail, and in unremittingly good taste. And how fine a place the house seemed to me now that it was imperceptibly nearing the brink of dissolution and silent oblivion.'[[412]](#footnote-412) The decay of these monuments to the landscape’s occupation by the ruling classes, and the cessation of the estate’s dominion and exploitation of its surroundings, are where the narrator's interest often lies. While this economic aspect of pastoral is present in all of the narrator's excursions to these country homes, and his frequent discussion of the circumstances of their decay, the wider political and social implications of their decline are also central to his representation of their place within human perceptions of nature and pastoral space.

The narrator's desire to visit the now overgrown cemetery at Boulge Hall, the resting place of Edward Fitzgerald, and the biography of this writer which follows, further demonstrates the affinity the narrator feels with those like Major Le Strange: the select members of the privileged classes who choose to reject their inherited dominion over nature. Much like Dr. Selwyn, Edward Fitzgerald's life is troubled by the inexpressible love for another man which ends with the subject of this affection meeting an early death. Fitzgerald's disillusionment with his contemporaries becomes increasingly evident as a result of his loss: he refused to participate in his mother's 'sumptuous dinner parties in London', representative in his mind of 'the most abominable of Society's abominations'; he ceased to visit the capital except when absolutely necessary, and declared 'I shall shut myself up in the remotest nook of Suffolk and let my beard grow'.[[413]](#footnote-413) This disavowal of the privileged life, and the declaration of his intent to inhabit a less socially charged space, are foreshadowed by Fitzgerald's previous actions; for fifteen years, we are told, Fitzgerald 'kept himself occupied in his hermitage', a 'tiny two-roomed cottage on the perimeter of the estate' rather than remaining in the country house as his social position dictated.[[414]](#footnote-414) Just as Selwyn eschews the main house for his hermitage in the garden, Fitzgerald similarly alters his position in relation to the cultural signifier, the grand country house, in order to embrace a position of decreased power over nature within a pastoral scene, on the periphery of the controlled landscape.

Fitzgerald expresses a distaste for landscape gardening, about which Sebald writes upon the narrator's arrival at Ditchingham, and in doing so also reveals his distaste for the Augustan ideal of the landowner as the chief recipient of nature's benevolence. The narrator writes:

They are felling all the trees, [Fitzgerald] complained, and tearing up the hedgerows. Soon the birds will not know where to go. One copse after another is vanishing, the grassy wayside banks where in the spring the cowslips and violets bloomed have been ploughed up and levelled, and if one now takes the path from Bredfield to Hasketon, which was once so delightful, it is like crossing a desert.[[415]](#footnote-415)

Fitzgerald's subsequent decision to spend as much time as possible at sea, the result of his desire to be 'where no friends are buried nor Pathways stopt up [sic]' and away from the 'ruthless exploitation of the land, the obsession with private property [...] and the ever more radical restriction of common rights',[[416]](#footnote-416) represents an increasingly fervent desire to engage in a pastoral mode removed from the human traditions of memorialisation and control over nature. Fitzgerald's disgust with the exploitation of the landscape, an activity central to the pastoral concept of the landed gentry, leads him to move as far from human signification as one can –Fitzgerald appears to believe that, as 'no friends are buried' at sea, the oceans are free of human inscription, social regulation, or physical claims of ownership. This claim agrees with Harrison's argument that, 'There are no gravestones on the sea. History and memory ground themselves on inscription, but this element is uninscribable'[[417]](#footnote-417) – water as an element, and the central attribute in certain landscapes, is beyond the reach of the bodily claim to power demonstrated by the interment of one's ancestors within the earth. It is perhaps a latent understanding of this which led Fitzgerald to request that 'his ashes [are] scattered on the glittering waters of the sea', eschewing the 'hideous family mausoleum'.[[418]](#footnote-418) The Fitzgerald family's ownership of the estate is based upon its exploitation of nature and heredity, a fact that is reflected by their gross displays of wealth and ancestral control of the region – the house and mausoleum acting to reinforce the continuing ownership of the family, both the living and the dead, of the region. In attempting to undo this tradition, opting for burial beyond the realms of human occupancy, Fitzgerald is shown to be making a clear attempt to prevent his family's continuing stake on the land from being reinforced .

**5.6 Historical Account, Refuge, and Representation.**

With me along some Strip of Herbage strown

That just divides the desert from the sown,

Where name of Slave and Sultán scarce is known,

And pity Sultán Máhmúd on his Throne.[[419]](#footnote-419)

Fitzgerald's decision to live on the edge of the family's estate, his distaste for flagrant shows of wealth, and his affinity for the open seas, speak of a distaste for the upper classes' domination of the landscape, combined with an awareness of the mechanisms through which this system was upheld. Fitzgerald, like the narrator, appears to attempt to circumvent the Augustan pastoral ideal when engaging with nature in his hermitage; rather than looking to the contemporary world for solace, he seeks enlightenment in the wisdom of previous epochs and non-British civilisations. While Selwyn's pastoral takes the form of a dramatic performance, Fitzgerald's takes a form closer to that of Sebald's – a keen interest in historical writing and biography. As the Augustan form of pastoral, which represented the privileged as the figureheads of a harmonious natural order, located Arcadia within the country homes of the present, traditionally pastoral had spoken of the halcyon days that preceded them:

Perhaps the significant feature of [the Eclogues] for Elizabethans lies in Ovid's association of his golden age with a time before the exploitation of the environment, colonialisation, or urbanisation[[420]](#footnote-420)

It is this retrospective aspect of pastoral, typified by its nostalgic appreciation of the agrarian lifestyle, that differentiates Fitzgerald's retreat from society from the enforced exile experienced by Beckett's protagonists or the voluntarily reclusive Dr. Selwyn. Instead, he takes solace in his study of past writings and cultures and the imaginative escape this affords. The only work published by Fitzgerald within his lifetime, we are told, is his translation of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, a work which Fitzgerald describes as 'a colloquy with the dead man', 'an attempt to bring us tidings of him',[[421]](#footnote-421) and the society of which he was a part. This attempt to seek refuge, and enlightenment, within the writings of a poet who lived before the procession of the colonial and capitalistic follies perpetrated by Fitzgerald's own society, represents a direct attempt to engage with a pastoral mode removed from the overzealous desire to possess and control that is embedded within the country-estate.

The narrator's own pastoral mission, in *The Rings of Saturn* and elsewhere, is limited in its efficacy by its own dependence upon retrospect and historical engagement. Where Fitzgerald's immersion within the work of Khayyam allows him to encounter, at least imaginatively, some form of pastoral escapism, Sebald and his characters find no such relief within a singular historical epoch; there is rarely any suggestion in his novels that any one past event can provide shelter from the social and environmental dangers of the present. Rather, the chief obstacle for the narrator's attempts to escape the traumatic history of human occupation of the biosphere is his inability to enter any landscape, rural or otherwise, without discovering evidence of its past, present, or future occupation by humans and the subsequent devastation of one or both parties. As Sebald responded, to a question regarding his use of photographs as historical documents:

Fiction is an art form that moves in time, that is inclined towards the end, that works on a negative gradient, and it is very, very difficult in that particular form in the narrative to arrest the passage of time. [...] You are taken out of time, and that is in a sense a form of redemption, if you choose to release yourself from the passage of time.[[422]](#footnote-422)

Sebald's narrative project frequently turns its gaze upon the study of one or more, seemingly tangential, historical episodes in order to uncover the truth of a present trauma in the light of these past events. Whether it is Jacques Austerlitz attempting to discover the truth about his family's fate, the narrator of *Vertigo* and *The Rings of Saturn* in his struggle to overcome a troubled mental state, or the narrator of *The Emigrants* searching for meaning within the lives (and deaths) of his Jewish subjects, the study of the details surrounding the text's subjects is always of vital significance. The commonality they all share, however, is that while some enlightenment may indeed be found within these accounts, the suspension of historical time offered by Sebald's version of pastoral also serves to stave off the processes of decline the natural and human worlds are set upon. Indeed, the format of Sebald's novels, assuming the form of a written account of events long passed at the time of composition, renders his narrative project as a form of temporal stalling; prolonging a past moment by expanding upon the events detailed with additionally researched and fictionalised details.

Respite, let alone an overwhelming moment of enlightenment, is rarely to be found in any one historical period or culture, however, with Sebald's narratives often moving between seemingly remote historical and geographic sites in order to demonstrate their latent interrelations. As noted earlier, Darby believes that Sebald's 'redemptive project', consists of the assemblage and maintenance of an archive that may preserve the present epoch;[[423]](#footnote-423) however, this is not entirely accurate. Darby is correct to observe that in the act of narrating and committing his narratives to paper, Sebald is able to create an amalgam of historical revelations and ideas regarding the role of humans within the environment. Much as occupying a rural space allowed the protagonists of Elizabethan and Virgilian pastoral to reflect upon political and urban problems, the narrator of Sebald's texts makes the reader complicit in his pastoral mission, leading them to occupy alternative historical scenes in order to stave off, albeit temporarily, the threat of dissolution posed by the narrative's conclusion. Rather than a physical movement to and from an agrarian space, the pastoral found within Sebald's writing is dependent upon a suspension of historical time, so that the narrator can reconstruct the fragments gathered from disparate epochs and modes of experience into a singular pastoral experience through their unification within the text. This process is perhaps made most explicit in *Vertigo*, where the narrator's incessant focus upon the year 1913, discussing productions of Verdi's opera *Aida*, novels written in, and events that occurred this year – the year before the start of the First World War and the beginning of the course of history that would lead to the Shoah. Failing to make himself at ease in the region surrounding Salo in his own pastoral mission,[[424]](#footnote-424) perhaps due to its association with Mussolini's Salo Republic, the narrator turns to Franz Kafka's own visit to the region in 1913, long before this association was formed.

**5.7 Temporary Joy and Temporal Trauma in *Vertigo***

*Vertigo* follows Sebald's narrator on an ill-fated journey from Austria through to Italy, before the narrator's paranoia leads him to retreat to England having become certain he is to be the next victim in a string of murders by the *Organizzazione Ludwig*. The narrator introduces his account of this first tour of the continent by writing, 'I travelled from England [...] to Vienna, hoping that a change of place would help me get over a particularly difficult period in my life',[[425]](#footnote-425) the implication being that of an unstated agreement with the pastoral scheme of removal and reintroduction as a means of salving psychological and social difficulties. The narrator's later acknowledgement of the 'fraught' and 'imprecise' nature of his account of this journey, as well as his having fled in fear of his life, demonstrates an awareness of the disturbed mental state in which he made his first journey, and the ultimate failure of his journey in improving his mental state. Sebald's text not only details the inefficacy of physical movement between environments and cultural states in providing opportunity for reflection and redemption, but goes on to espouse a pastoral methodology that depends upon historical reflection and amorous escapism. The text's chapters include a biography of Stendhal (Marie Henri Beyle), detailing his misfortunes in love and the development of his career as a writer, and an account of Dr. K.'s (Franz Kafka) travels through the same regions as Sebald in 1913, and the narrator's own journey to his hometown of W; figures and locales imbued with personal and historical significance by the narrator's own experience.

Despite Sebald's acknowledgement that Kafka's notes written in Venice do not disclose how he spent his time in the city,[[426]](#footnote-426) the account both actively speculates about the possibilities based upon further research, and suggests hypothetical situations that the narrator himself encountered that may have presented themselves to Kafka.[[427]](#footnote-427) The result of Sebald's manipulation of fact, fiction, and informed conjecture, is that the narrator's experience overlaps with Dr. K's significantly, in a manner reminiscent of Sebald's discussion of his interest and identification with historical figures:

[The dead] have an odd presence for me, simply through the fact that I may get interested in them. And when you get interested in someone you invest a considerable amount of emotional energy and you begin to occupy this person's territory, after a fashion. You establish a presence in another life through emotional identification. And it doesn't matter how far back that is in time.[[428]](#footnote-428)

It is perhaps as a result of Sebald's 'occupation' of Kafka's biography that the experiences of the two match the most precisely of the three individuals in the novel: both complain of troubled eyesight and headaches, they each have a formative significant encounter with the figure of a hunter (Schlag, for Sebald, and Gracchus, for Kafka), and both experience feelings of intense persecution, and paranoia at the hands of those they meet upon their travels.

Water, and aquatic landscapes, remain a theme of Sebald's writing that links the mental anguish of Sebald's narrator and Dr. K in *Vertigo*: the uninscribable nature of water not only prevents the mechanisms of remembrance and memorialisation from functioning, but also acts as a wider representative of atemporal and exilic experiences. Throughout the novel, water and aqueous spaces are aligned with psychological and emotional trauma, and the nature of the experience of those affected by these events as marginalised by mainstream society. As the narrator succumbs to an overwhelming 'sense of utter emptiness' that renders him incapable of exiting his hotel room[[429]](#footnote-429) – an experience shared by Dr. K – he falls into an uneasy sleep, and envisions himself crossing the lagoon beyond his window: 'I saw the hospital island of La Grazia with its panoptic building, from the windows of which thousands of madmen were waving, as though they were aboard a great ship sailing away', writes the narrator.[[430]](#footnote-430) The isolation of the patients, and their departure from the rest of their society, combines both the images of non-standard experience and the persecution anxiety felt by the narrator, evinced by the asylum's panoptic form, within an aquatic landscape. Similarly, when Sebald's narrator visits a relative with dementia in a care home, the narrator gazes out of the window and writes:

It was like looking upon a heaving sea. The mainland, it seemed to me, had already sunk below the horizon. A foghorn droned. Further and further out the ship plied its passage upon the waters. From the engine room came the steady throb of the turbines. Out in the corridor, stray passengers went past, some of them on the arm of a nurse. It took an eternity, on these slow-motion walks, for them to cross from one side of the doorway to the other. How strange it is, to be standing leaning against the current of time. The parquet floor shifted beneath my feet.[[431]](#footnote-431)

The narrator conflates the experience of being aboard a steamboat with that of his own mental distress and the chronic amnesia of the dementia patient. Incapable of remembering or participating within the wider schemes of cultural history, this aquatic leitmotif highlights the liminality of the patients', and the narrator's, experience. Exiled and yet conversely kept by their society, unaware of the passage of time and consigned to live in the facility awaiting death, the patients are as isolated from the remainder of humanity as the narrator's imagined steamer.

It is therefore doubtful that Dr. K's arrival at the hydrotherapy clinic in Riva by steamboat is coincidental, immediately signifying his own troubled mental state.[[432]](#footnote-432) Similarly, Dr. K's treatment is not only conducted at an institution situated on the edge of an aquatic body, but the hospital itself specialises in hydrotherapy. Love, it appears, is of paramount importance in determining the psychological wellbeing of Marie Henri Beyle and Dr. K; where Beyle is eternally disappointed in love, Dr. K's short-lived acquaintance with a lady from Genoa, the narrator conjectures, may have brought about 'an ephemeral improvement' in his condition, albeit temporarily.[[433]](#footnote-433) When Dr. K and his female companion take a boat into the lake, entering a landscape which isolates them from their fellow patients and the society of the hospital, the narrator relays that:

Dr. K evolves a fragmentary theory of disembodied love, in which there is no difference between intimacy and disengagement. If only we were to open our eyes, he says, we would see that our happiness lies in our natural surroundings and not in our poor bodies which have long since become separated from the natural order of things.[[434]](#footnote-434)

This passage complements an earlier exchange in Sebald's novel, between Marie Henri Beyle and a woman whom he desires, which constructs a complete theory of the relationship between humans and nature, as mediated through love. When professing his own theory of happiness, to Mme. Gheradi, she responds in the negative; she maintains 'that love, like most other blessings of civilisation, was a chimaera which we desire the more, the further removed we are from Nature. Insofar as we seek Nature solely in another body, we become cut off from Her [sic]'.[[435]](#footnote-435) Both Dr. K and Beyle are made aware, through differing means, of an apparent relationship between the love sickness that torments them and the gradual distancing of humans from nature that typifies developing cultures. In the days that follow this conversation, Beyle and Gheradi travel along the coast of Lake Garda before taking a boat to Riva, where Dr. K later receives his treatment. The concentration of these, temporally separate, conversations and the corresponding similarity of their conclusions within the same geographical landscape shows the narrator's compression of time in its full complexity: not only are Beyle and Dr. K both shown to come to these conclusions in the same space, but also as discovering, remotely, complimentary theories of happiness as originating within one's affinity with the natural world.

Where Sebald's narrator attempts to find solace in inhabiting other historical epochs and personas via his fictionalised accounts of their own experiences of similarly traumatic experience, his own pastoral experience remains ineffective due to the same limitations as those found by his subjects. The natural spaces the narrator inhabits are all imbued with the past historical events he associates with them, diminishing the extent to which they signify an experience removed from the traumatic narratives of human occupation and dominion over the landscape. The narrator's only period of respite from the omnipresence of human signification and destruction comes about not through the discovery of love, but in the occupation of an aquatic environment:

I rowed a good way out onto the lake. On the westerly side, everything was already sinking into the shadows that billowed down the steep cliff faces of the Doss dei Róveri like dark curtains, and on the opposite east bank too the radiant evening light climbed the heights, till all that could be seen was a pale pink glow over the peak of the Monte Altissimo. The whole of the darkly gleaming lake lay silently about me[[436]](#footnote-436)

Here we find the natural environment peaceful, and free of the traces of natural destruction that trouble the narrator throughout Sebald's writing. It is in this passage that the narrator finally escapes the oppressive company of other humans, who 'now seemed a negligible disturbance, measured against the massive bulk of the mountain'.[[437]](#footnote-437) The uninscribable character of the aquatic zone the narrator currently occupies, combined with his removal from the society of others bring about a rare moment of quiet in the novel, and while the narrator imagines the mountain 'was inclining towards me and might tumble into the lake the very next moment' there is no evidence of the paranoia or confusion that characterises his earlier bouts of vertigo.[[438]](#footnote-438) Instead, it appears that this is an experience more in keeping with the romantic sublime; the emotional and physical impact of the mountain overwhelming the narrator, dwarfing the town below in its relative impermanence and diminutive size. Sebald's narrator relinquishes control of his movements; he ships the oars, and allows his boat to drift where it may. The narrator recalls, 'I extinguished the lamp, lay down in the boat and looked up into the vault of the heavens, where the stars were coming out over the glowering crags in such vast numbers that they appeared to touch one another',[[439]](#footnote-439) and it is in this moment that the kernel of Sebald's pastoral is revealed. The town, once the centre of the perceived landscape, gives way to the mountain, which gives way to the cosmos; each step decreasing in its degree of inhabitation and exploitation by humans as it increases in scale, and each one closer to the idealised natural state that the narrator seeks. It is perhaps because the narrator perceives of this light, much of it irradiated from its source before the advent of man, that this moment constitutes the most direct preservation of a historical moment in the narrator's journey. This constitutes a Sebaldian pastoral not in allowing the narrator to return to civilisation renewed in body and mind, but in allowing a temporary escape from the grand narratives of human exploitation, control, and the decline of nature.

This moment in Sebald's novel recalls much of the closing passages of Beckett's *The End*; having escaped the town from which he has been repelled throughout the series of novellas, he hides inside a boat, awaiting his death. Hallucinating, he sees himself alone, drifting out to sea without oars:[[440]](#footnote-440)

[O]n the slopes of the mountain, now rearing its unbroken bulk behind the town, the fires turned from gold to red, from red to gold. I knew what it was, it was the gorse burning [...] That night, then all aglow with distant fires, on sea, on land, and in the sky, I drifted with the currents and the tides.[[441]](#footnote-441)

The narrator imagines the fire as uniting the stars, the sea, and the land at once, collapsing the distinctions between the three and highlighting their universality of entropy. The moment of collapse in Sebald, wherein the mountain appears to fall upon the town and narrator, becomes a universal collapse in Beckett; 'The sea, the sky, the mountains and the islands closed in and crushed me in a mighty systole, then scattered to the uttermost confines of space.'[[442]](#footnote-442) Where for Sebald's narrator peace is found within the temporal stasis offered by an ahistorical perception of the environment, Beckett's protagonist finds his own peace in the acceleration of the entropic process. In this 'mighty', potentially final, beat of his heart the distinctions between different environments, categorised and defined by human minds, collapse together and become a singular mass: a universal order of being, in the most literal sense. The echoing of this passage in Sebald's novel, and the agreement between the two, completes the process of pastoral engagement that is outlined in *Vertigo*. For Sebald's narrator, pastoral does not constitute a redemptive foray into a superficially natural landscape for the betterment of human lives. Rather, pastoral is a mode of engaging with the environment in a manner that seeks escape from narratives of human and natural history imposed upon it by humans. In this way, the moment of inhabitation does not impose human influence upon the environment as it might ordinarily; this allows the collapse of the human/nature distinction, perceptually stalling the processes of entropy by rendering everything destined to disappear insignificant, and no longer archontic in function.

******Appendix**

2 – View from Orford Castle, W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 230.

**After Nature: Conclusions and Openings**

The focus of this thesis is located primarily around the representation of two central themes; the manner in which the characters in works by W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett represent the occupation of landscape by both human and non-human entities, and how the changing character of this negotiation over time has affected the representation of human interactions with the biosphere. By combining aspects of phenomenological, ecocritical, and urban theory this thesis has formulated a working model of just this: the manner in which Sebald and Beckett represent humans as inhabiting place, designating it as emotionally and historically significant, and then protecting it from the influence of the natural world. The latter half of the thesis then discussed what the implications of this were for urban humans, their relationships with animals, and the wider environment alongside the pastoral narrative embedded within the rural scene. As a result, it is now apparent that, despite differing in the extent to which their writings concentrate upon ecological matters, Sebald and Beckett render the relationships between humans and natural entities as fluid, influenced by wide-ranging narratives of cultural and personal histories, as well as originating within the self-identification of the human entity. This fluidity of states extends to the designation of place, the experience of its inhabitation, and its gradual disintegration over time, as well as being applicable to the representation of natural landscapes as latently human concepts, often shaped or physically delineated in accord with the human need to categorise and separate the human landscape from this other.

While the analyses resulting from these questions have extended our understanding of how these systems operate within the writing of W.G. Sebald and Samuel Beckett, they also demonstrate the versatility of ecocritical analysis, especially when combined with other theoretical approaches. Doing so allows more diverse and wide-ranging discussion to arise, even when applied to texts not ordinarily regarded as focussed upon environmental debate. The combination of ecocriticism and urban studies in particular seems a promising avenue for future research; both in regard to the representation of the development of non-place within the city, and how this affects the archontic function of the urban centre, and the influence of technology and the accompanying concepts of resources necessary for its function and redundancy as applied to natural and human entities. The further discussion of the representation of these processes from a wider range of literary sources, perhaps originating within and portraying different socio-economic backgrounds and lifestyles, would overcome the shortcomings of the analysis found within this by allowing a more definitive and nuanced understanding of these processes to be ascertained.

An underlying concern with ecocritical research, and one that this thesis has begun to address, is that expressed by William Cronon:

[T]here is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny. Indeed one of the most striking proofs of the cultural invention of wilderness is its thoroughgoing erasure of the history from which it sprang.[[443]](#footnote-443)

While the representation of nature in the texts studied within this thesis often acknowledges this human formulation of the wilderness concept, critical discussion of this literary trope does not always avoid this pitfall within the act of analysis. The need to protect a wilderness in crisis, as opposed to the human landscape which is an imposition upon the biosphere, is a common angle adopted by the ecocritic; indeed, it is due to their arguing from this position that the exchange between Estok and Robisch regarding the definition of ecophobia comes undone. This thesis has sought to discuss and analyse the literary representation of ecological issues from a position that allows both human and animals to live in collaboration by exposing ecophobic and unethical interactions as they arise, or as they are approached by Sebald and Beckett. This does not, however, render the present body of work free from the issue identified by Cronon: it remains indebted to its author's own understanding of what nature is, of what wilderness might consist, and what an ideal relationship between it and humans, as natural entities, might entail. There is little that can be done to avert this in future research, however, except for encouraging other critics, and reminding oneself, that humans are an integral part of the biosphere, and subsequently all environments are, at base, naturally occurring and remain natural for the duration of their existence. While this might initially appear to render future analysis of the urban landscape, as suggested above, obsolete, doing so merely recasts the discussion as cultural critique, and entails identifying the varying concepts of human and natural space that are prevalent within a given cultural and social group at a particular point in history.

Cronon's concern regarding the designation of landscapes as 'wilderness' has implications beyond the approach any future research in this area might take, but also applies to the content of the present thesis: the narrators in the texts discussed in the preceding chapters often demonstrate a desire either to relinquish their humanness, and leave the human landscape, or to engage in a more 'natural' mode of being in which humans are stripped of their self-appointed superiority over other beings. As Cronon argues, the non-human landscape is in actuality a creation of the human mind, and it is as a result of this that these endeavours often fail in Sebald's and Beckett's writing. Mercier and Camier, like Sebald's narrators, find the wilderness peppered with human memorials, roads, and ruins; these are not landscapes free from human signification, but landscapes that have once been, or will one day be, occupied by humans, yet are presently identified as non-human locales. Similarly the pastoral trope is undone in Sebald's writing by the inherent humanness of the rural landscape, embedded with historical narratives by humans. Even natural processes, such as coastal erosion, are transformed by Sebald's narrator into narratives of human loss and impending danger, of a natural world that is seeking to erase humanity's existence. The narrator has, in the moment of perception and representation, reformulated a process without any underlying intelligence or intent into a narrative with human history embedded at its core. No landscape is truly free from human influence, especially when that landscape is represented in literature, and as such there is no natural landscape in which a human might escape the damaging influences of society and industrialised urbanism.

The aim is therefore for this thesis, and the approaches developed within it, to be expanded upon and refined in future research, developing into a more egalitarian strand of ecocritical research that might better facilitate our understanding of how human representations and ideas of our relationships with nature have changed. Not only through time, but also across cultures, social classes, and genders; the ecocritical approach this analysis advocates is one that is based upon observation, and originates from a position of empathy and care for the planet and its inhabitants, not from hostility towards those who do it harm. By interrogating our culture's embedded attitudes towards nature in this way, and becoming more aware of those aspects of our environmental interactions that arise from outdated and ecophobic preconceptions regarding our relationship with the biosphere, the ecocritical study of art and literature might assist in advocating education and change throughout the academy and wider society.

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3. W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Samuel Beckett, 'Rough for Theatre I', in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, (London: Faber, 1990), 265-72, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Peter Boxall, 'The Threshold of Vision', in *The Journal of Beckett Studies*, vol. 20 no. 2, pp 123-48; Barring a fleeting reference to Sebald in David Wheatley's discussion of Beckett and animality in Mary Bryden's edited collection, *Beckett and Animals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 66, my own experience is that such analyses are rare at present –this may hopefully change in future. Bryden also references Boxall's analysis of Sebald and Beckett in the introductory chapter of the collection, but only in order to discuss the piece's implications for the study of Beckett (p. 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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84. Beckett, 'Company', p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Dirk Van Hulle, 'Introduction', in Samuel Beckett, 'Company', p. Viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Beckett, 'Company', p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's discussion of 'Company' discusses this topic further, identifying the separation between the 'voice' and 'narrator' as originating within the use of direct address (*A Glance Beyond Doubt: Narration, Representation, Subjectivity*, (Ohio State University Press, 1996), p. 94). Rimmon-Kenan goes on to argue that the extra-diegetic narrator is the 'devised deviser', speaking about himself in the third person in order to conflate himself with the author. If this is the case, the narrator devises the crawler who is conflated with the reader through the use of the second person. Both these entities then devise the text-world and the narrator-voice in an ouroboros wherein each entity is indeed devising one another simultaneously in order to establish the narrative (p.96). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
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90. Theodor Adorno, trans. Michael T. Jones, ‘Trying to Understand Endgame’, in *New German Critique*, Vol. 26 (Spring-Summer 1982), 119-50, p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
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92. Adorno, *Trying to Understand Endgame*, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
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95. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
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105. Maya Jaggi, 'The Guardian – W.G. Sebald*'*, in *The Guardian Online*, 22nd September 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Angier and Sebald, 'Who is W.G. Sebald?', p. 72 – on the image of Adelwarth's diary Sebald says 'That, however is falsification. I wrote it. What matters is all true [...] the invention comes in at the level of minor detail most of the time, to provide *l'effet du reel*.' [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
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170. Perhaps better translated as 'An endless number of examples could be amassed, said Browne, and be allowed to display indefinitely by which means the elegant hand of nature geometrises.'; (W. G. Sebald, Die Ringe des Saturnes: Eine Englische Wallfahrt, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1995), p. 32). [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
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207. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Corina Martin-Jordache, 'Modernity, Urban Semiology, and the Beckettian Cityscape', in *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 32, 351-68 p. 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Debra Castillo, 'Beckett's Metaphorical Towns', in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 189-200, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Debra Castillo, 'Beckett's Metaphorical Towns', p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Castillo, 'Beckett's Metaphorical Towns', p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilisation*, (London: Routledge, 1947), p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
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224. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Martin-Jordache, 'Modernity, Semiology, and the Beckettian Cityscape', p. 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, pp 61-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-Modernity*, (London: Verso, 1995), p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Beckett, *Mercier and Camier*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Samuel Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', in *Complete Dramatic Works*, (London: Faber, 1990), 7-88, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. The stage directions for act two read '*Next Day. Same Time. Same Place [sic]'* (53). The significance of place and time for the play's action is marked by the capitalisation of each noun in this direction: in the first act standard capitalisation is used, suggesting a lesser degree of significance to the road, and tree as physical markers, as opposed to the more archontic notions of 'Time' and 'Place'. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Simon Estok, 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Spring 2009, 203-225, p. 208. (hereafter 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia') [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Estok, 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Estok, 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Estok, p. 217. - One must wonder at what point this line is drawn – the same argument might be made for dismissing those who travel internationally to attend conferences, or who own private cars. This perspective continues to trouble ecocritical discourse, compounded by S.K. Robisch's response to Estok's piece, which advocates only allowing those who have survived in the wilderness to write about the natural world (Robisch, 'The Woodshed: A Response to “Ecocriticism and Ecophobia”', in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Autumn 2009, 697-708, p. 701). This sort of wholesale dismissal of others' work based upon their present lifestyle is untenable for any critical viewpoint, least of all one that attempts to promote a move towards environmental responsibility and compassionate living – the ecocritic cannot act as an advocate for change if they alienate the non-vegan, urban population. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Estok, 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, (London: Pimlico, 2005), p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', in *Science* 155.3767, (1967), pp 1203-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Estok, *Ecocriticism and Ecophobia*, p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. *The Bible*, King James Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Beckett, 'Company', in Company*/Ill Seen Ill Said/Worstward Ho/Stirrings Still*, (London: Faber, 2009), 1-42, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Beckett, 'Company', p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Christopher Belshaw, *Environmental Philosophy: Reason, Nature, and Human Concern*, p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Beckett, 'Company', p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Beckett, 'Company', p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Belshaw, *Environmental Philosophy*, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Estok, 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 69-90, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Google Inc.'s 'Street View' function, in particular, allows the user to virtually follow the route to Everest Base camp, and even explore the summit of Aconcagua in first person using 360 degree composite photography. <https://www.google.com/maps/views/streetview/the-worlds-highest-peaks?hl=en&gl=gb>, [accessed: 3/1/2015]. [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Robert Pogue Harrison, 'Towards a Philosophy of Nature', in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, ed. William Cronon, (New York: Norton, 1996), 426-37, p. 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
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267. W.G. Sebald, 'In Scipio's Day...', in *For Years Now*, with Tess Jaray, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. W.G. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', in *Campo Santo*, trans. Anthea Bell, (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', pp 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', pp 41-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
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277. Simon Estok, *Ecocriticism and Ecophobia*, p. 210 [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
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279. Beckett, 'The Calmative', p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. The Bible: King James Edition, Leviticus 12:1-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
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282. Beckett, 'The Calmative', p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Sebald, 'The Alps in the Sea', pp 43-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. W.G. Sebald, 'Poor Summer in Franconia', in *Across the Land and the Water: Selected Poems, 1964-2001*, trans. Iain Galbraith, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001), p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Andrei Alyokhin, Gary Sewell, and Raymond Choban, ' Reduced viability of Colorado potato beetle, Leptinotarsa decemlineata, eggs exposed to novaluron', in *Pest Management Science*, 2009, Vol 64, pp 94-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
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295. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
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300. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
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305. Sebald & Tripp, *Unrecounted*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Tom Reagan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Samuel Beckett, 'Film', in *Complete Dramatic Works*, (London: Faber, 1990), 321-334, p. 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Julia Reinhard Lupton, ' Creature Caliban', in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 51 No. 7, 1-23, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
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310. Beckett, *Film*, p. 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Beckett, 'Film', p. 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Beckett, 'Film', p 326; p. 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Beckett, 'Film', p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Beckett, 'Film', p. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Beckett, 'Film', p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. *Film*, dir. Alan Schneider, (Milestone Film Inc.), 1966, 0' 02". [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Beckett, 'Film', p. 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Compare the clarity of image between the images of the flower lady at 2'36"-39" and 2'50"-56", with the former showing the object's view of the flower lady, and the latter revealing the eye's perspective as she realises its presence. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Beckett, 'Film', p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. John Berger, 'Why Look at Animals', in *About Looking*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 3-28, pp 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Beckett, 'Film', p. 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Schneider, *Film*, 7' 20"; 10' 38" [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Beckett, 'Film', p. 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Tom Reagan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, p . 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. While the trio of novellas, 'The Expelled', 'The Calmative', and 'The End' are separate texts, the overwhelming number of similarities in the physical appearance, clothing, possessions, personalities, and activities of the narrator lead me to believe that they are in fact one character. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Beckett, 'The Expelled', in *'The Expelled'/'The Calmative'/'The End' & 'First Love'*, (London: Faber, 2009), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Beckett, 'The Expelled', p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Beckett, 'The Expelled', p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Beckett, 'The End', p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Beckett, 'The End', p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Beckett, 'The Calmative', p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Beckett, 'The End', p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Beckett, 'The End', p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Beckett, 'The End', p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
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338. David Shumway, 'Nature in the Apartment: Humans, Pets, and the Value of Incommensurability', in *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*, eds. Michael Bennett and David W. Teague, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 255-277, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Shumway, ‘Nature in the Apartment: Humans, Pets and the Value of Incommensurability’, p. 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Beckett, 'The End', pp 40-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Beckett had completed a draft of *'The Expelled'* by 13/10/1946 (The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1941-1956, eds. George Craig et al, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 44), 'The Calmative' was started on 23/12/1946 (n. 6, p. 51), and 'The End', had already been half-published in the *Temps Modernes*, having been accepted for publication as early as May 1946 (p. 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Beckett, 'The End', p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Beckett, 'The End', p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Beckett, ‘The Calmative’, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Berger, 'Why Look at Animals', in *About Looking*, 3-28, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Berger, 'Why Look at Animals', p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
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348. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
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356. Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
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358. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Berger, 'Field', p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
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361. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
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365. Darby, 'Landscape and Memory', p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
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415. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, pp 202-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, pp 196-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Omar Khayyam, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald, (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1905), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, p 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Sebald and Wachtel, 'Ghost Hunter', pp 40-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. David Darby, 'Landscape and Memory: Sebald's Redemption of History', in *W.G. Sebald: History, Memory, Trauma*, eds. Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006),265-77, p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 148 [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. For the sake of accuracy, I will refer to the author Franz Kafka by his proper name, whilst referring to the chimera of Sebald's invention and the historical figure as Dr. K, as he is called in Sebald's novel, in order to prevent inappropriately compounding fact and fiction. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Sebald and Wachtel, 'Ghost Hunter', p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Sebald, *Vertigo*, pp 65-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Sebald, *Vertigo*, pp 45-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Sebald, *Vertigo*, pp 91-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Sebald, *Vertigo*, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Beckett, 'The End', p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Beckett, 'The End', p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Beckett, 'The End', pp 56-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness', in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon, (New York: Norton, 1996), 69-90, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)