‘Awake between two worlds’: John Burnside’s Poetics of Ecology (2009-2019)

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Contents

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Abstract

This thesis explores John Burnside's poetic output between 2009 and 2019 encompassing four collections: *The Hunt in the Forest* (2009), *Black Cat Bone* (2011), *All One Breath* (2014), and *Still Life with Feeding Snake* (2017). I argue that Burnside's later poetry develops his longstanding ecological disposition which is now a unique form of post-secular thought in the face of the climate crisis. I point to the wide-ranging intelligence in his poetry, considering his critical prose writing as well, coalescing around his 2019 monograph on poetry of the twentieth century, *The Music of Time*. Through his multiple influences, I claim that Burnside's poetry provides an urgent philosophical perspective on our relationship to the natural world and furnishes an understanding of what could constitute peaceful dwelling. I respond to his writing across a breadth of inherited traditions through which his poetry creates a new interdisciplinary approach to the myriad questions about human relationships with animals, plants, and the nonhuman.

Across the thesis I explore the idea of ecological grief conditioned by a paradox between the breakdown of the concept of 'oikos' in the relationship between economics and ecology epitomised in part by the financial crash of 2008 which fixes the starting point of my engagement. To do this I ground his poetry in the contingent world of late capitalism and the growing anxieties of technology and ecological crisis, whilst at the same time exploring a suspended temporality which encompasses a spilt catechesis, a pagan sensibility, a folkloric cosmology, and the epochal shift of new timescales prompted by the Anthropocene. From this impasse comes a poetry of grace that bridges both public and private rituals of loss and grief and allows for a compassionate openness towards the urgent questions of ecological crisis.

Declaration

I, Owen Gurrey, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Chapter One contains previously published work in a chapter entitled 'Nostalgia and the Sustainable Lyric: John Burnside and the Pibroch' in *Futures Worth Preserving: Cultural Constructions of Nostalgia and Sustainability*, eds., Schröder, Andressa, Völker, Nico, Winkler, Robert A. and Clucas, Tom. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839441220

List of Figures

'Awake between two worlds'[1]: John Burnside's Poetics of Ecology (2009-2019)

> [Life consists of] a quest, a journey, leading away from the social demand for persons and towards the self-renewing continuing invention (*inventio*) of the spirit. For me, poetry is both the account of, and the map by which I navigate my path on this journey and, as such, is an ecological discipline of the richest and subtlest kind.[2]

John Burnside

Introduction

John Burnside was born in Dunfermline, Fife in 1955 and occupies a unique place in contemporary British writing. To date, he has published 15 collections of poetry, nine novels, three memoirs and two short story collections. In 2019 he published *The Music of Time,* a critical monograph on poetry of the twentieth century. For Ben Davies, editor of the 2020 multi-authored volume, *John Burnside: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, which marks a major point in the development of Burnside studies, his writing across the 'various folds, twists and creases' of genre is united by 'ways of seeing and thinking that, though different, are not altogether separate from more "rational", trusted, traditional forms of epistemology and dwelling or *being-in-the-world*.' [3] In this, he 'can be seen as a writer-thinker, a type of poet intellectual.'[4] 'Different' yet 'not altogether separate' seems to be a fruitful way into thinking about Burnside's poetic craft and the philosophies and ideas underpinning his vision. These characteristic traits speak of his writing at some kind of limit; the tangible becoming intangible as it blurs over a horizon into some other ether, 'unreeling into blackness, frame by frame' ('Blue').[5] It is the experience of the ineffable: points of appearance and disappearance at which Burnside's writing is found; one thing becoming another, where mutability is a way of conceiving the interrelatedness of humans, animals and their environment. Of the generation after Freud, growing out of the austere 1950s and coming of age as a writer in the

[1] John Burnside, 'The Lazarus Taxa', *Still Life with Feeding Snake* (London: Cape Poetry, 2017), p.60.
[2] John Burnside, 'Strong Words' in *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2000), p.261.
[3] Ben Davies, 'By Way of an Introduction: John Burnside, Writer' in *John Burnside: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed., Ben Davies (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2020), p.1.
[4] Ibid.
[5] John Burnside, *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, p.20.

1980s, Burnside's visions often psychologically probe the lumber room of the psyche through hallucinations and drug-induced prophesies. Far from any psychedelic retreat into stupefaction, the self in Burnside is an exposed witness, 'countering loss with surrender / decay with gain' (In Memoriam: III')[6], desiring and pursuing a thwarted attempt at peaceful dwelling, 'caught in the perfect lull / between lost and found' ('In Memoriam: IV').[7] This spirit of inquiry, coupled with an interest in the mysteries of the natural world, is brought into the twenty-first century through the growing anxieties of technology and the global concerns of ecological crisis.

My departure point in this thesis is Burnside's poetic output between 2009 and 2019. I will also draw upon previous collections where relevant to shed light on what I take to be his later poetry of the last decade spanning four collections, *The Hunt in the Forest* (2009), *Black Cat Bone* (2011), *All One Breath* (2014), and *Still Life with Feeding Snake* (2017). Building on this is drawing attention to the consequences of market-driven ideas about security by laying bare the crisis of financial capital's ability to arbitrate against the future, culminating to a certain extent in the 'event' of the global financial crash of 2007/8 which temporally fixes the starting point of my engagement with Burnside's poetry. What that crash exposed, amongst other things, was a logic of limitlessness which destabilised notions of home-making and settlement more generally, providing an analogous form in which to say something about how unhabituated we are as a species dwelling on this earth.

Dwelling is a key term in this introduction, and a central concept in the thesis more broadly. I want to show how Burnside has long engaged with Martin Heidegger's conception of the term, first conceptualised in his famous essay, '*Bauen Wohnen Denken*'[8] ('Building Dwelling Thinking'). The first of two epigraphs from Burnside's seventh collection, *The Asylum Dance* (2000)[9] is an explicit quote on dwelling from Heidegger. In Heidegger's conception it is language that 'calls mortals into their dwelling', and this calling-to-dwell constructs our sense of meaning as a primal condition; language and meaning is thus understood as an endless search for a sense of home. Language aims at exactness or perfection but can only ever be an approximation. Heidegger sees this constant search as the 'plight of dwelling', that mortals '*must ever learn to dwell*.' *The Asylum Dance* is anchored by four sequence poems: 'Ports',

[6] John Burnside, *The Hunt in the Forest* (London: Cape Poetry, 2009), p.5.
[7] Ibid., p.9.
[8] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp.143-163.
[9] Martin Heidegger, in John Burnside, *The Asylum Dance* (London: Cape Poetry, 2000).

‘Settlements’, ‘Fields’, and ‘Roads’. This echoes Heidegger’s fourfold (*Geviert*), which encompasses earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. For Heidegger, these four elements cannot be divided in that they form a unity of dwelling in equal parts. This is one way in which my chapters are taken together, combining environs of earth and sky with humans and animals through their spiritual connection. Burnside seems to seek a unity in these four sequences of dwelling places. Part one of ‘Ports’[10], entitled ‘Haven’ opens with ‘Our dwelling place’, and here the poem situates a refuge in the safety of the harbour, bordering the wildness of the sea. Burnside is instituting this border as if to highlight the fragility of our dwellings on the shores of something much vaster than we may give credence to – our proper plight. The boat, named ‘Research’ is out of the water, ‘perched on its metal stocks’, where ‘the workmen / caged in narrow scaffold’ are ‘matching the ghosts / of umber’, the name for the pigment of earth, taking its name from Renaissance Italy (Umbria), alongside ‘*Blanc-de-Chine’*. This history of ocean-going, commerce, empire, and enlightenment is rendered almost Lilliputian by being ‘caged’ as a fragile human history set against the ‘the beauty of wreckage / the beauty / of things submerged’. Here the opening section orbits, or *dances* around the concept of *asylum*, the true dwelling place, here becoming a ‘*Ports innconnus*’ (unknown port’) in the poem’s epigraph from Henri Michaux. The poem steps three concepts as if to demonstrate that reach for surety, which can only ever be a gauge to the unknown in ‘shipping forecasts / gossip / theorems’. Dwelling then, continuing across the opening sequence poem and indeed throughout the collection, remains a thoroughgoing concept underwriting Burnside’s ontology, inspired explicitly by Heidegger’s approach. It may be said that the divine aspect of Heidegger’s project of the fourfold is this sense of the poetic; poetry as a Stevensian supreme fiction. Like a god, it is concealed but provides a phenomenological access to all that surrounds us. It is this spiritual dimension to the philosophy of dwelling where the key to reading Burnside’s poised lyric lies. The word ‘port’ etymologically contains the idea of a door and comes from the idea of an entrance or passage, specifically to carry something across a threshold. This thesis is my engagement with that idea.

‘Awake between two worlds’ points to a rift between different conditions of dwelling, which is the negotiated space between the human and nonhuman, the political and ecological, and the contingent and transcendent. Burnside’s poetry charts the changes in our relation to the natural forces put to work under capitalism. His work discloses an awareness that capitalism is in essence non-anthropocentric. What this means is that the global financial crash exposes

[10] Ibid., pp.1-9.

the decoupling of humans from runaway financial models, whilst at the same time, we seem all too aware of capitalism's ruinous forms of resource extraction that sustain it. To this end, the fault line between two worlds is the split between the knowledge we have about the natural world and what humans do within it. The impasse between the economic and the ecological is challenged in Burnside's writing. His poetry then, offers a plea for redemption and a wholesale renewal of something spiritual within human-world relations. These relations are structured through capital so any attempt at a cleaner future would involve sacrifices akin to an apostasy of capitalism itself.

The significant volume of work that precedes this thesis project necessarily invites and allows for a particular way of approaching the poems as objects in and of a particular time. Yet encountering each successive collection, Burnside creates his own chronology, one not pre-disposed to any given state of flux or stasis. Introducing David Borthwick's contribution to the volume, Davies writes that 'Burnside's texts […] perform hauntings of their own, forming an overall palimpsest of spectral revisitations'.[11] In his poems, the past haunts the present, and the present is stalled by a futurity where change is anything but a linear procedure. As such, any reader of his poems will be compelled by his lyric's constant suspension of the linearity of time as a flow. There is an irregular, leaping quality to Burnside's lines that seem to defy a kind of unity of strict pentameter. His poems range with a perpetual attempt at precision, aware that such clarity is a chimera; things are always on the way to something else. Fiona Sampson situates Burnside in a movement she helpfully calls 'the expanded lyric', and Burnside's wide intelligence finds its form in this open field: at home transcending borders both physical and metaphysical as it is communing with a stillness; the elongated pause of something nonhuman. Germane to this idea, Davies picks up the word 'juncture' in an interview with Burnside that closes his edited volume and expands on this in the introduction. 'The juncture marks a space of joining – the past to the present and the future, as well as past, present and future work. "Juncture" also signals a time of crisis.'[12] This thesis explores a particular 'juncture' of Burnside's poetry in relation to the issue of ecological crisis.

To linger on Davies's observation, and to articulate one of the main ways of reading his poetry, Burnside's writing explores the metaphysical condition of *being* with a compulsion to search for an adequate way in which to dwell on the earth. His poetry meditates on the

[11] Ben Davies, 'By Way of an Introduction: John Burnside, Writer', p.11.
[12] Ibid., p.8.

metaphysics of presence and acknowledges a certain numinous mysticism to our existence, coupled with a creaturely awareness of how thinking with animals entails an ecological, ethical consciousness born from the shared destiny of nonhuman and human beings. There is always in Burnside an eschatological interest in how things come to pass and how we might bear witness to loss. This preoccupation has found special resonance in what Tom Bristow calls 'a post-secular translation of what "is" for "how" things are […] feeling for how animals, plants, humans are coming to be'.[13] If, etymologically, *poiesis* is to do with 'bringing-forth'—concerned with how things are made or brought about—then it is on the other side of that ontological bargain, namely how things come to an end, in which Burnside's poetry delves. Jan Wilm finds the term 'numinous' as a placeholder for Burnside's oscillating between religion and what is in essence the capacity of private wonder:

> Even if poetry abandons religion in its organized manifestations, the need for spirituality might remain, often in the self's hunger for wonder and contemplation. […] The central struggle between spirituality and secularism, posed as a question in Larkin's 'Church Going', is staged in nearly every poem by Burnside – without naïve idealizations of religion and without producing poems of religious edification.[14]

At the forefront of his poetry is a preoccupation with the ongoing enclosure of the natural world, and he offers, by way of a critique, a poetry of revelation which combines a deep-rooted spiritual conditioning which fuses religious transcendence with a reverence for the spirit of life both human and nonhuman. In the introduction to this thesis, I carry this concept of dwelling across three central theoretical threads by which I frame his poetry: ecological grief; limits, in terms of both scientific data and language couched in terms of the Anthropocene; and lastly, the effects of a stressed change in our experience of time prompted by new ideas and evidence of anthropogenic climate change.

Literature Review

Burnside's poetic output alone is prolific, and, as his work has developed, critical acclaim has followed. His 2011 collection, *Black Cat Bone*, is one of only two to have won both the T. S. Eliot and the Forward Prizes (the other being Sean O'Brien's *The Drowned Book* (2007)). Scholarship on John Burnside continues to grow. In Davies's volume, contributions focus on

[13] Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Person, and Place* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), p.48.
[14] Jan Wilm, 'John Burnside's Numinous Poetry' in *John Burnside: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, p.31.

the full range of Burnside's output, including responses to his poetry, fiction, and memoirs. What seems particularly apposite is the way his writing speaks to the increasing anxieties over the fate of our planet and the question of our habituation, our dwelling. There exists no single monograph on his work but there have been 15 book chapters and 30 articles where Burnside is featured as a major literary figure, with all but two coming since 2008. This growing interest in Burnside's writing underlines his status as a major figure in twenty-first-century literature.[15] In addition, there are six PhD theses which devote substantial chapters to his writing, and one in which he is the singular focus. As a poet he may not be considered canonical in the way Simon Armitage or Carol Ann Duffy are, yet the growing field of Burnside studies suggests that there may be more academic work appearing in the next decade or so, and that his literary status will inevitably change. Perhaps one way to understand the relative paucity of critical work so far is that his work does not sit neatly into any definitive category. Nonetheless, in his poetry, one way of conceding this is to see a certain rejection of prevailing trends or popular forms. Marjorie Perloff finds clues in his reading of other poets, most notably in *The Music of Time*, where she observes his 'short shrift to poetic form or sound […] favouring the phenomenology of experience.'[16] He is then, as Louisa Gairn says in an interview with him, 'frustrated with the British "attachment to the craft" side of poetry', the ironic undertone is that as a Scot, he is criticising the parochialism of the English academy.[17] As ecocriticism has increasingly become much more central to the study of literature, and the urgency of environmental questions is more readily part of lived experience of the twenty-first century, the condition of dwelling in a compromised world in Burnside's work seems ever more pertinent to the prevailing winds of culture more generally. Timothy Clark's 'The Future of Ecocriticism' in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* points to a new orientation in literary studies, one by which Burnside's work will come to be ever more central to the literary canon: '[s]ince it emerged as a self-conscious movement in the 1990s, ecocriticism has transformed itself from a relatively minor body of work characterised mainly by a close relationship to environmental non-fiction, into a plural school […] vastly extending its scope and reconsidering its basic concepts.'[18] The fleeting image may be a leitmotif in Burnside's poetry, and in that ineffability lies the key to

[15] Ibid., p.150-3.
[16] Marjorie Perloff, 'From Confusion Sprung', review of John Burnside, *The Music of Time* in *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), 14 February, 2020.
[17] John Burnside, interviewed by Louisa Gairn, 31 March 2004. Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p.157.
[18] Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.202.

understanding his poetic art. Gathering clues left over from our all-too-human encounters with the natural world deepens the mystery by which we can endow ourselves with a reverence for what lies beyond logic and reason. His poetry is a metaphysics of wonder which prompts us to live with a more respectful disposition towards the natural world.

For some, his work has been taken up as evidence of a relatively new field of post-devolution Scottish ecologically-minded writing. Louisa Gairn, in her 2008 study *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, groups Burnside with Kathleen Jamie with a renewed attention to ecology in Scottish writers going back to the mid-nineteenth century, tracing a developmental path back via George Mackay Brown, Nan Shephard, John Muir and Robert Louis Stevenson. For Tom Bristow, Burnside's work sits alongside Alice Oswald and John Kinsella as 'Anthropocene Lyric', which 'asks us to think of the human as one part of the *More-than-human world*, which is to think of us not within the world but of the *World*.'[19] This lyrical turn away from 'human instrumentalism' is anchored by what he calls 'Anthropocene emotion' which 'bring the unique qualities of human feelings into a new framework […] Thickening our sense of time, process and scale'.[20] Gairn's study is guided by a cultural assemblage of Scottish influences whereas Bristow is drawn to the world-disclosive idea of the Anthropocene. What they both share is the preoccupation about new forms of personhood in relation to place. Both political and environmental responses in their own ways, they draw a neat conclusion about the politics of environmentalism and how literature responds to these questions.

One of the main ways of reading Burnside's poetry is through this interlinking nexus of the human and nonhuman, the historical and the mythic as one linked cosmological ontology. Helen Mort recognises in Burnside's poetry what Sampson has called 'chain-link imagery'[21] when she says that 'what critics often identify as the "elusive" or "mysterious" in Burnside's work actually stems from a kind of hyper-connectivity.'[22] Mort's thesis finds a correlation between this hyper-connectivity in Burnside's self-diagnosed apophenia—a condition in which one sees meaningful patterns and connections between arbitrary data—to studies of 'patternicity' in Neuroscience. Mort's original take is interdisciplinary, arguing that 'neuroscientists and poets are often concerned with the same questions about human

[19] Tom Bristow, The Anthropocene Lyric, p.2.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Fiona Sampson, *Beyond the Lyric: A Map of Contemporary Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012), p.251.
[22] Helen Mort, '"*Something else, then something else again*"*: Neuroscience and Connection-Making in Contemporary Poetry*', Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D), The University of Sheffield, March 2015, p.30.

consciousness'[23] It points to the elements in Burnside's poetry of a sustained interest in altered states and the condition of the unconscious in the process of meaning-making.

Alexandra Campbell has recently explored Burnside in relation to his Irish contemporary, Derek Mahon (1941-2020) to describe what she terms their 'unhomely lyrics', an idea which troubles notions of belonging and identity formation by delineating new boundaries that go beyond their respective coastlines, becoming archipelagic. She is borrowing the term 'unhomely' from postcolonial studies, finding their poetry 'tempered by an overwhelming sense of otherness, strangeness, and difference.'[24] She picks up Julika Griem's essay on 'John Burnside's Seascapes', accepting her invitation 'to reconsider the relationship between questions of literary form and environmental conflict'[25] where Campbell writes that 'the littoral zone often emerges within modern Irish and Scottish poetry as a space of transformation, allowing poets to conceive of more pluralistic and protean forms of cultural identity in line with the shifting contours of the coast.'[26] Campbell sees the coastal zones in Burnside's poetry as environs of change, open to weathering, erosion, decay. In this, his poetry emerges 'from a disconcerting and unhomely sense of being neither here nor there'[27]

Belonging neither to one realm nor to another is a way to read the influence of poets away from the UK and Ireland in Burnside's work. For Bristow, whose PhD thesis was entirely devoted to his work, 'Burnside's poetry distinguishes itself from a British framework through its engagement with phenomenology and American post-Romanticism' positioning him 'alongside his contemporaries, Jorie Graham, Jane Hirshfield, [Kathleen] Jamie, Michael Longley, [Mary] Oliver, [Alice] Oswald, and Charles Tomlinson.'[28] As much as we find the tectonic reckoning of Hughes's influence or Heaney's sense of the North, we also find the American inheritance of the transcendentalists and the modernism of Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost. Burnside's 2019 Monograph, *The Music of Time,* reveals an even more 'unhomely' admixture of influences, many of whom receive scant attention in critics' work, including Eugenio Montale, Giacomo Leopardi, Rainer Maria Rilke, Albrecht Haushofer, Marina Tsvetaeva, George Seferis, Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, Robert

[23] Ibid., p.3.
[24] Alexandra Campbell, *Archipelagic poetics: ecology in modern Scottish and Irish poetry*, Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D), University of Glasgow, 2018, p.130. https://theses.gla.ac.uk/8902/.
[25] Julika Griem, 'John Burnside's Seascapes', *The Beach in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures: Reading Littoral Space*, ed. by Ursula Kluwick and Virginia Richter (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp.87-107, (p.88).
[26] Alexandra Campbell, *Archipelagic Poetics*, p.163.
[27] Ibid., p.163.
[28] Tom Bristow, *A Cultural Study in the Poetics of Ecological Consciousness: Prolegomena to the Poetry of John Burnside*, Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D), the University of Edinburgh, 2007, p.30.

Lowell, Lucie Brock-Broido, the poetic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the philosopher of dwelling, Martin Heidegger. What has been overlooked in Burnside studies to date is his longstanding interest in particular artists and the ekphrastic poems that stem from this aesthetic engagement.

My contribution to these debates relates to the idea of dwelling, which I see as a post-secular rehabilitation of a world view which begins by articulating a corruption in the human relation to the natural world. Burnside's poetry seeks to find some redemptive knowledge which works against the orthodoxies of late-capitalist realism. In this, there is a sense of beginning from a thwarted and bereaved position. Late-capitalism's ruinous effects on space and environment are most clearly felt in and on peripheral zones, towns and conurbations that once served industrial heartlands. There is, in their post-industrial decline, a heightened sense that they are the places where the ruin of human activity haunts the imagination. But they are also sites at which to find an ecological register which stands against neglect, to find a poetry that refuses an instrumentalised view of place. In this, his poetry moves away from the party-political. As Colette Tulin Osgun has astutely observed, 'Burnside's poetry is concerned with the display of his unease about processes of capitalist enterprise […] the draining presence of capital is most keenly felt in its ability to denature and deconstruct place.'[29] The decline of social and economic systems is of a piece with the emergence of an ecological conscience that serves to reinstate the boundedness between human activity and the sustainability of the natural world. Burnside's work opens up these questions as they loom large for us in the twenty-first century. As with the epigraph, my aim is to read Burnside's poetry partly inspired by his own approach, as an attempt to conceive a way out of what he calls 'the social, the descriptive, the partisan-political pronouncement – that closed form of writing'.[30]

I will first begin, in the next section, to explore the concept of ecological grief, drawing on Burnside's own ideas about how a bereaved disposition has emerged as a new kind of collective conscience. The section on the Anthropocene will then extrapolate on this idea showing how that grief comes to be defined historically as a political and economic reckoning, and how it prompts a particular urgency in reading a twenty-first century poet's ecological wager. From here I will introduce some ideas from Bruno Latour and his Facing Gaia hypothesis. Latour points to how the Anthropocene is in one sense a suspension of the

[29] Colette Tulin Osgun, 'The Sense of Space in a Small Country: Nature, Nation, Self in the Writing of John Burnside, Robin Robertson and Kathleen Jamie.' Doctoral Thesis (Ph.D), Department of English Language and Literature, University College London, September, 2018.
[30] John Burnside, *Strong Words*, p.260.

ways in which time used to pass, now that humans have a new scale at which think of themselves as a destructive planetary force. The conditioning of a new way to look back to these destructive practices and how we might then be able to see a way forward allows my argument to take shape that Burnside's poetry offers a temporal and spatial reorientation of our question of belonging to the natural world. The final section here introduces the idea of limits and how this allows for a discussion of on the one hand, the limits of language, how his poetry points to this ceiling, whilst on the other acknowledging that scientific data couched in terms of climatic change have given us a scale on which to think about the limits of anthropogenic activity.

As I have said, my study will centre around Burnside's poetic output from 2009-2019, a decade which set the highest record for average global temperatures since records began.[31] In summary, this introduction will theorise the three-fold failures of religion, the market, and ecological care to speak about how John Burnside's lyric responds to these crises by parsing the ideal and the contingent of our shared world as an act of poetic redemption.

Ecological Grief

In a British Academy Lecture from 2017, which I will use as a touchstone in this introduction, Burnside begins by recounting the swell of public feeling in the days following the death of Princess Diana in August 1997, and how, as he drove from Orkney to Glasgow and then on to London a few days later, he was struck by such public spectacles of mourning. What soon dawned was the idea that 'that *public* grief was becoming denatured.'[32] This is not to deny the sincerity in these spectacles, but to draw a distinction between public rituals of loss, framed through our reaction to singular events, and the private space of grief towards a more intractable, encroaching sense of loss for something more incorporeal. Cleaving this distinction, it was, he says

[31] 'Every decade since 1980 has been warmer than the preceding decade, with the period between 2010 and 2019 the hottest yet since worldwide temperature records began in the 19th century. The increase in average global temperature is rapidly gathering pace, with the last decade up to 0.39C warmer than the long-term average, compared with a 0.07C average increase per decade stretching back to 1880.' 'Last decade was Earth's hottest on record as climate crisis accelerates' in *The Guardian*, 12 August, 2020, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/12/hottest-decade-climate-crisis-2019? [Accessed 3 September, 2020].

[32] John Burnside, 'Soliloquies of suffering and consolation': Fiction as Elegy and Refusal, Lecture on the Novel in English', read 23 May 2017, University of St Andrews. *Journal of the British Academy*, 5, pp.251–270, p.252, available at: https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/005.251 Posted 4 November 2017.

> A real loss, pertinent to all; a national tragedy for which the death of an English Rose became symbolic and, at some private level, synchronous with the loss of a greater soul. The soul of the country, the soul of the land, some essential Britishness that, worn down by twenty years of a dog-eat-dog morality, was finally beginning to crumble, like our sea coasts, or the tilth of our over-farmed soil.[33]

Here, Burnside observes how our sense of loss finds collective articulation; that, at bottom, there is an indication here about what forms grief can take and how they are manifested both publicly and privately. This is to locate a loss, not just towards something physical or representative (such as a figurehead many thought challenged the dynamic of monarchical, and as a result, established power structures in Britain), but to a corruption in our moral sense, one which is defined by the state of the substance of the realm in which we live. He is pointing to a stressed and diminished change in our collective conscience, one which puts us not only at odds, but also forces something of a flight from any responsibility towards the natural world. This is a foundation for Burnside's poetics more broadly, a sense that there is a deeply damaged relationship emerging from an instrumentalization of everything natural.

A loss of a sense of home, of belonging and communing with the natural world, are all part of the fracture of late-capitalism: the tentacular arms of the market finding their way into all aspects of our lives. This finds special resonance in the 2008 financial crash which at bottom laid bare the promise that 'making a home' is now a tradable asset for profit. Occasionally, Burnside's poetry is explicit in this critique, as the opening from 'Peregrines' (2014)[34] demonstrates:

[redacted]

The poem's opening is interrupted by parenthesis, as if the observation is part of some continued enclosure, before it tracks the coming silent spring as

[redacted]

[33] Ibid.
[34] John Burnside, 'Peregrines' in *All One Breath* (London: Cape Poetry, 2014), p.67.

The transformation of green money into grey matter alchemises the process of what mortgaging the land does to its environs, turning it from use into speculative value. The vault of money is banked, stored up for future returns but without the eponymous birds of prey. But the poem's strength and its optimism come from the line 'while we stand and wait', a direct allusion to the final line of Milton's sonnet 19, 'When I consider how my light is spent'.[35] As Milton's sight is failing, he recalls the parable of the talents from the book of Matthew where the servant's one talent is buried underground. If the worth of the land was free to all, not speculated and banked for profit, there would lie the chance for a true abundance. In Burnside's poem it is only the falcons who freely inhabit land and sky, 'so close to sweet'. As Milton's talent is buried, he requires patience to say it is other beings who 'post o'er land and ocean', and that 'they also serve who stand and wait'. At the close of Burnside's poem, the 'flicker of sky in our bones' is that joy, that abundance; his talent alight, mirroring the peregrine's 'flight'. There is a crucible here, a debt versus gift in a momentary suspension in which we are offered the opportunity to go in any direction. That suspended state is a key theme in this study, as if Burnside is telling us that Nature abhors imbalance, that humanity is poised at a critical juncture in its moral and spiritual manner of dwelling. In this poem, Burnside highlights how in losing animals we lose part of our selves as humans. The self, as in so many of his poems, is cast out into an instrumentalized world and must find a creaturely locus for a transformative poetry of rescue.

In the 2017 lecture he articulates this encroaching process of loss more concretely:

> For me, and many others, this sense of loss is predicated on the knowledge, both formal and experiential, that, since the Second World War and especially since an era of entirely cynical deregulation was initiated during the Thatcher era, this land—Britain, my home lands, my habitat—has been and continues to be ruthlessly

[35] John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed., Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), p.168

> degraded, denatured and even, in a meaningful sense, destroyed. [redacted]

I want to dwell on this exacerbated grief and see how Burnside's poetry intones this disposition through his later poetry as a kind of facing up to those moral and spiritual obligations towards the nonhuman. That sense of being denied 'a communal performance of mourning worthy of its seriousness' is at once a call to the literary arts to express that desire, but moreover it is to find a public register for ecological grief, a grief which in the second decade of the twentieth-first century has gone through its latest, perhaps most defining stage of exacerbation. That is why this study takes as its starting point the admission that loss is a condition of living in a compromised world. My aim is to see how in Burnside's poetry of the last decade a powerful voice has developed which stands against a pecuniary anthropocentrism which, as a process, undermines a stable relationship to other life forms and ultimately weakens and diminishes our sense of justice in multiple forms.

Burnside continues:

> There is even more to this, however, than the land alone. I, and many others, privately grieve for *us*—for a people that has become similarly denatured, greedier, more venial, less spontaneous and, at the same time, more anxious and hideously more susceptible to our machinery.[37]

To this, Burnside turns to show how some works—including Graham Harvey's *The Killing of the Countryside* (1997), Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) and Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* (1992)—have sought to create a model 'for consolation, and also, more importantly, for an informed refusal of the lies that we have been sold.'[38] This is to begin with a political bent towards reading his poetry, but I think to begin to think about Burnside's poetry as ecological, or ecocritical, is to seek out what Jonathan Bate sees as a pre-political matter of urgency in the making of space, as he says, 'Ecopoetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling place—the prefix eco—is derived from the Greek

[36] John Burnside, 'Soliloquies of suffering and consolation', p.252.
[37] Ibid., p.252-3.
[38] Ibid., p.254.

oikos, 'the home or place of dwelling.'[39] As if to usher in a new century's poetic concern and to situate Burnside's poetry in a tradition of ecological inquiry, Bate has said that Burnside's *The Light Trap* (2002) 'stakes out the ground for "a green poetry" that will be essential to our century as Stevens's luminous mediations were to the last.'[40]

This thoroughgoing theme of dwelling runs through all of Burnside's work; indeed, he has written about this prefix eco- as a term in which to aggregate the loss between capital and Nature more broadly. He argues that political positions are so far removed from any genuine project of resistance to capitalism that it is on us in the twenty-first century to validate a kind of post-political standpoint, akin to a new kind of ethics couched in a truer fulmination of the eco. In an interview from 2003, he writes:

> The most urgent problem facing us is environmental degradation: lack of good water, air pollution and global climatic changes. Political left and right are irrelevant now for any thinking person. What matters now is the poetry of 'we': preserving the environment and studying how we, human beings should dwell on the earth without destroying it.[41]

To re-establish that link between economy and homemaking, Burnside continues:

> I'm reading a book by Jane Jacobs on the nature of economics. She looks at the etymology of the words 'ecology' and 'economics', both of which come from the Greek root *oikos*, meaning house or dwelling place. She's saying that economists should study ecology, they should study the natural world. […] Many economists and most people in power have misconceptions about the natural world.[42]

There is a sense here of a fateful blind spot at work in the understanding of how economy is linked with ecology, and Burnside's appeal is to the straightforward idea that if economy for the Greeks was fundamentally tied to dwelling, then an economics which is essentially based on degradation and the marketization of dwelling represents a broken relationship to any sustainable conception of living peaceably. As Bate makes clear with reference to Wallace Stevens, Burnside seems to inherit a tradition of poetry that seeks an ideal state to write about

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[39] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p.75.
[40] Jonathan Bate, 'Eco Laurels', review of John Burnside, *The Light Trap* in *The Guardian*, 23 November, 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/nov/23/featuresreviews.guardianreview8
[41] Attila Dósa, 'Poets and Other Animals: An Interview with John Burnside' in *Scottish Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2003. (St. Andrews and Edinburgh, 18 September, 2001), p.13.
[42] Ibid., p.17.

the conjunction between the natural and the human-made world. In the dim light of the many democratic failures of the late twentieth century, Burnside's poetics situates a fall out vis-à-vis the natural world, and the concomitant damage wrought on human relationships by an instrumentalised process of continued enclosure. His writing is based on an acknowledgement of loss: loss of land, despoilation of flora and fauna, but also a deeper sense of loss which he points to in his lecture, one that threatens to privatise the emotional response we share towards the fate of other living things and the planet. The sense is that his writing is in some way a form of recovery, tarrying with a worldview which implies a host of mythic and pagan sensibilities. From ritual to incantation through forms of elegy and blues, to visions of the sublime permeated by dread, there is an appeal to a world-making cosmology that is both metaphysical and political. 'Oikos' then, operates as a poetic taproot in the construction of a lyric space in poetry to access a sensibility that is not determined by material distinctions of value. It is, to bring in Martin Heidegger's understanding of an ancient continuum, that 'If mortals dwell in that they save the earth and if poetry is the original admission of dwelling, then poetry is the place where we save the earth.'[43]

To bring this idea into the twenty-first century, for Franco Berardi, the 2008 crash represented a 'crisis of social imagination', one which fundamentally exposes the 'economic dogma' of 'three decades'.[44] He sees one answer to this crisis in 'a poetic revitalization of language'[45] which may bring about new questions about the concept of dwelling in a post-crash world. Another way in which the global financial crash triangulates with theories of ecology and environmentalism is in the way we imaginatively approach 'events', and whether the ability to explain them comes after the fact of their appearance, thereby revealing a profound blindness on the part of global economics to foresee the consequences of its functioning as a whole. In short, there has been a massive disaggregation in terms of scale in the way the global system of capital works. As a result, the revitalization of language must attend to questions of embodiment, (dis)placement, distance and perspective when dealing with a posthuman theory of Nature and how that subtends our damaging extraction of natural resources. Burnside points to a paradox at the heart of what he calls 'the accepted environmental/climate change narrative', that 'we are both sinned against *and* sinning'.[46]

[43] Martin Heidegger, cited in Michael Peters and Ruth Irwin, 'Earthsongs: Ecopoetics, Heidegger and Dwelling' in *The Trumpeter*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2002), p.5.
[44] Franco Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Semiotext(e), 2012), p.7.
[45] Ibid., p.8.
[46] John Burnside, 'Soliloquies of suffering and consolation', p.253.

This impasse is the result of what he sees as 'degrading the quality of public debate'[47] and that we should not accept the charge that 'we are all equally guilty.'[48] We all share the same world, yet our access to it is singular and personal. This self-responsibility can be found in Burnside's observation taken from Paul Eluard that '[T]here is another world, but it is in this one.'[49] My aim is to show how Burnside's poetry offers access to this *autremonde*, that his poetry is deeply important in cleaving open that perceived paradox of shared material loss and guilt.

The Anthropocene

'It gets late early out here' [50]

In the years since 2008—a resounding year of failure on the scale of humanity's global economic activity—the term Anthropocene has been invoked more frequently as a marker for the erosion of a reciprocal ecological basis for humanity's survival, evidenced by global warming and a disrupted, terraformed earth.[51] The appearance of the term and its rapid uptake across disciplines is not inconsequential to the onset of cyclical financial catastrophes that lay bare the precariousness of the relationship between capital, labour, production and consumption: in short, the whole global flow of capital from people, food, resources, goods and infrastructures. The Anthropocene is an attempt to consider the contemporary moment historically. The Anthropocene is a triumph for interdisciplinarity and offers a way of emboldening the movement towards more intricate and nuanced discursive models for knowledge production. For Timothy Clark,

> its force is mainly as a loose shorthand term for all the new contexts and demands—cultural, ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and political—of environmental issues that are truly planetary in scale, notably climate change, ocean acidification, effects of overpopulation, deforestation, soil erosion, overfishing and the general and accelerating degradation of ecosystems.[52]

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[47] Ibid., p.253.
[48] Ibid., p.253.
[49] Paul Eluard, '*il y a un autre monde, mais il est dans celui-là*', cited in John Burnside, 'Travelling into the Quotidian: Some notes on Allison Funk's 'Heartland' poems', *Poetry Review*, Jan 2005 p.60.
[50] John Burnside, 'Travelling South, Scotland, August 2012' in *All One Breath* (London: Cape Poetry, 2014), p.51.
[51] Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015); Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016).
[52] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.2.

Its greatest potential might be that it also points towards a future critique which moves beyond humanism to the agency of nonhuman action, allowing for a new kind of historical force to make its mark. It is part of my reading of John Burnside's poetry over the last decade to understand a movement from a scientific age to a new environmental epoch, one which reconditions the subject/object relationship.

Broadly speaking, the term de-centres human agency in that it becomes difficult to perceive other entities and organisms as mere objects. This is to carry Bruno Latour's understanding of the Anthropocene where there becomes an implicit personalising of all other living beings which is salutary, driving home a deeper sense of responsibility toward the planet. By pointing to a human-dominated era, the emergence of the idea of the Anthropocene shows how social systems and ecosystems could be managed holistically. As a result, the Anthropocene provides a summons. I want to argue that through Burnside's poetry there is a space for new forms of ritual to inculcate a secular reverence for the biosphere. When thought begins to cluster around a new term, its interconnectedness or its reflexive affectivity begins to reverberate across different patterns of thought. Pertinent to themes found in Burnside's poetry, Marjorie Levinson, writing in 1995 before the term the Anthropocene found its foothold, highlights the randomness of 'weather anomalies, new diseases and epidemiological behaviours, genetic mutations' in seeking to delimit the boundaries between 'the human and the natural, the biological and the physical, the organism and the machine, the mind and body'.[53] In doing so, she is calling for a movement that is poised between a pre- and post-dialectical materialism. This seems to be a very fruitful fault line in thinking about the co-dependency of forms in a human and nonhuman world.

One of the more contentious ideas is that the Anthropocene is decidedly non-anthropocentric and it is the fruitfulness of this paradox that is crucial to understanding the nonhuman turn. As Richard Grusin observes, '[E]ven the new paradigm of the Anthropocene, which names the human as the dominant influence on climate since industrialism, participates in the nonhuman turn in its recognition that humans must now be understood as climatological or geological forces on the planet that operate just as nonhumans would, independent of human will, belief, or desires.'[54] This critical juncture of the nonhuman turn and the Anthropocene provides us with a convenient truth about the large-scale effects of our supply chains: 'As a

[53] Levinson, Marjorie. 'Pre- and Post- Dialectical Materialism: Modelling Praxis without Subject and Objects', *Cultural Critique*, No.31. The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II (1995), pp.111-127.
[54] Richard Grusin, ed., *The Nonhuman Turn* (Minnesota University Press, 2015), p.vii.

driver of global change, humanity has outstripped geology.'[55] This paradox puts the human at the centre of a negotiated space and provides an orienting function where we find ourselves like 'Lazarus, awake between two worlds' ('The Lazarus Taxa').[56]

Facing Gaia: Forward or Back?

In Bruno Latour's opening statement of his Royal Academy Lecture in the Humanities and Social Science in Copenhagen in February 2014, 'The Affects of Capitalism', a talk which, alongside the Gifford Lecture series at the University of Edinburgh a year earlier formed the basis for his 2017 title, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, he quoted a slogan painted by Greenpeace.[57] It read, 'If the world were a bank, it would already have been bailed out.' Latour employs this phrase to echo the tragic realism of Frederic Jameson's famous quip that 'nowadays it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is the end of capitalism.'[58] Something in these two statements emphasises the corruption of one particular world model over the ineluctability of another and that our relational status to these notions needs radical reorientation. The phrase is also used as the title of the first chapter of Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, in which he says that 'capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable.'[59] For Fisher, the 'realism' is a form of foreclosure of any alternative to capitalism. Yet, the financial crash also forced capitalism back on to the state 'to shore up the banking system'.[60] Just when capitalism seemingly shuts down any sense of collective responsibility to a shared world, when threatened, it also opens the gap between itself and something that may provide the basis for an alternative. For Burnside, such alternatives are not offered in the political sphere. When reflecting on the Independence Referendum in Scotland, Burnside is explicit in this, 'On the one hand, the Happy Together Party assumes that anyone who doesn't want to be ruled from Holyrood wants to be ruled from Westminster. Trouble is, I don't want to be ruled at all.'[61] Burnside's rejection of the political

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[55] Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Harvard University Press, 2015).
[56] John Burnside, *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, p.60.
[57] Bruno Latour, 'The Affects of Capitalism', The Royal Academy Lecture in the Humanities and Social Science. 28 February, 2014, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i-ZKfShovs [Accessed 10 December, 2016].
[58] The exact quote is not a claim of Jameson's, only that in muddying the authorship of this idea, it becomes a suggestion about the universal incompatibility of two distinct 'worlds': 'Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.' Frederic Jameson, 'Future City' in *New Left Review*, vol. 21, May-June, 2003.
[59] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, Zero Books, 2009), p.8.
[60] Ibid.
[61] John Burnside, 'Reflections on the Independence Referendum' in *London Review of Books*, vol. 36, no. 17, September 11, 2014.

choices on offer moves away from the regressive idea of politics as a form of capitalist management, in so doing he points towards what I discuss here, a way of thinking through such an impasse towards a more affective disposition which tarries with a spiritual condition through ecology. Both Latour's opening remarks and Burnside's repudiation of political choice point to a stressed change in that affective position vis-à-vis the world. In the lecture, Latour makes a distinction between first nature (the world we live in) and second nature, capitalism—one in which we are fully arbitrated, or to stay with the trouble, 'naturalised.' What these sentences are saying is that it is second nature that is more solid, more reliable, less perishable than the first. He goes on:

> no wonder the transcendent world of beyond has always been more durable than the poor world of below. What is new in our all too human world is not that this world beyond is full of salvation and eternity but that of economic matters. As Karl Marx would have said, the realm of transcendence has been fully appropriated by banks.[62]

The affective dimension of life under capitalism is explored precisely because, as an anthropologist and sociologist, he sees a contemporary, regressive apathy at work in the way capitalism structures our way of life, leaving us displaced and disoriented in the face of climate crisis. If it is in the immutability of 'laws' of economics that limp on after their abject failure, then it appears that this second nature surpasses the laws of natural science which have given us the ability to see ourselves as more and more a part of Nature, yet pushes us further and further away from the reality of its appearance.

The mutability of natural phenomena meets the immovable ideological god of Mammon in the twenty-first century and in Latour's first and second nature formulation it is an impossible and unnecessary war:

> We cannot pile the laws of second nature on top of the first. Apparently, climate scientists are using the laws of physics to register what happens to first nature, while climate deniers are pitting the laws of economics governing second nature against the laws governing the earth.[63]

Not only are corroborated facts being flatly denied on the grounds of conflicted personal interest, he is implying that a charge is also laid at the door of natural scientists from such denialists; it is as if scientific research has become a subversive ideological weapon of *anti-*

[62] Bruno Latour, 'The Affects of Capitalism.'
[63] Ibid.

freedom or *anti*-progress in the case of highlighting the fundamental facts about anthropogenic climate change. This prophetic revelation has a historical precedent when we remember that it was George H.W. Bush who famously pronounced at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 in response to protestors' claims that the US was the world's biggest polluter that 'the American way of life is not up for negotiation.' Latour's address is part of a larger project which aims to articulate why this political and ecological nexus has been able to develop, not least the politicisation of erstwhile objective 'facts' emanating from the natural sciences, but the changing affective register with which humans are spiritually and emotionally conditioned to and by their relationship to their environment. In Burnside's terms, posed as a question, he asks 'can we […] think we already know / what matters when we see it?' ('At the Entering of the New Year: Homage to Thomas Hardy').[64] This impasse points towards the idea from Latour, that pathological changes in our attitude towards first nature are derived from the massive stupefaction that occurs in the face of second nature.

Latour imports James Lovelock's enigmatic figure of Gaia to stand as a workable term for a world that 'can no longer be said to be neutral toward our actions, now that we are obliged to define the Anthropocene as the multiform reaction of the earth to our enterprises. Gaia is no longer 'unconcerned' by what we do.'[65] This 'unconcern' is part of the Gaia hypothesis by which the earth is not conceived as some single or super-organism because there is no single Providence within which we can singularly arbitrate ourselves. As Latour states, there are 'as many Providences as there are organisms on Earth.'[66] Gaia comes to expose the massive disaggregation between humans and nonhumans and points to urgent questions about agency and ontology—'things do not act because they exist, they exist because they act' as Latour's Actor-Network-Theory asserts.[67] This gulf becomes visible to the extent that it discloses feedback loops between species on a scale which dwarfs our previous perspective.[68] Ecologist David Abram explains how Gaia becomes a conditioning concept, that its appearance and our relationship to it 'might come to be experienced not merely as an

[64] John Burnside, *All One Breath*, p.21.
[65] Bruno Latour, Facing Gaia, p.238.
[66] Ibid., p.100.
[67] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
[68] 'Feedback Loops' are a crucial metaphor in Latour's work, analogous with the term 'geohistory', as a fusion between geography and history where one intrudes on the other but ultimately becomes finally fused. 'It is as though every limit, every border, every boundary marker, every encroachment—in short, every feedback loop—has to be simultaneously and collectively recounted, traced, replayed, and ritualized. Each of the loops registers the unanticipated actions of some external agent that comes in to complicate human action.' Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p.276.

objective set of facts, but as a felt reality—as a vast and enigmatic presence whose life both pervades and exceeds our own.'[69] This felt reality is the main focus of this study, to see how in Burnside there is a conditioned response in a poetics which asks what it feels like to live in what is the great paradox of the age: how to delineate a negotiated space between ourselves and the maintenance of the natural world, a maintenance which increasingly we have come to understand is an interdependent symbiotic relationship with all living things with which we share the planet.

Limits

Taking a line from Wyn Thomas's review of *Black Cat Bone* (2011), Helen Mort writes that '[t]he phrase "tour de force of liminal expression" could almost be a motif for the critical reception of John Burnside's work as a whole.' [70] This at first seems like a paradox, how to say and not say at the same time. To some critics, this liminality is at best a conscious withdrawal into mysteries at the heart of the human condition, at worst it is, in the words of Graeme Richardson, a 'sentimentalised unknowing.'[71] I would argue there is nothing sentimental about Burnside's lyric. Instead, that form of 'unknowing', as I have tried to explain, is a primal condition; it acknowledges a limit to rational thought, becoming instead a philosophical principle. I want to explore this more directly here, how the idea of limits applies to Burnside's poetry. I am interested in tipping points, or vanishing points, points at which one thing becomes another; how mutability is a way of conceiving the interrelatedness between humans, animals, and their environment, to show how Burnside's poetic style is found at the point of dissolution. Writing about Wittgenstein, Burnside has said that

> when Wittgenstein points to 'what we cannot speak about', he is drawing a limit to *thought*, and specifically rational thought, not *perception*. I feel that this is important because it is easy to forget that one of this philosopher's principal achievements, in this early stage of his work at least, is in drawing such limits. That act, that setting of limits, creates a space for other forms of experience.[72]

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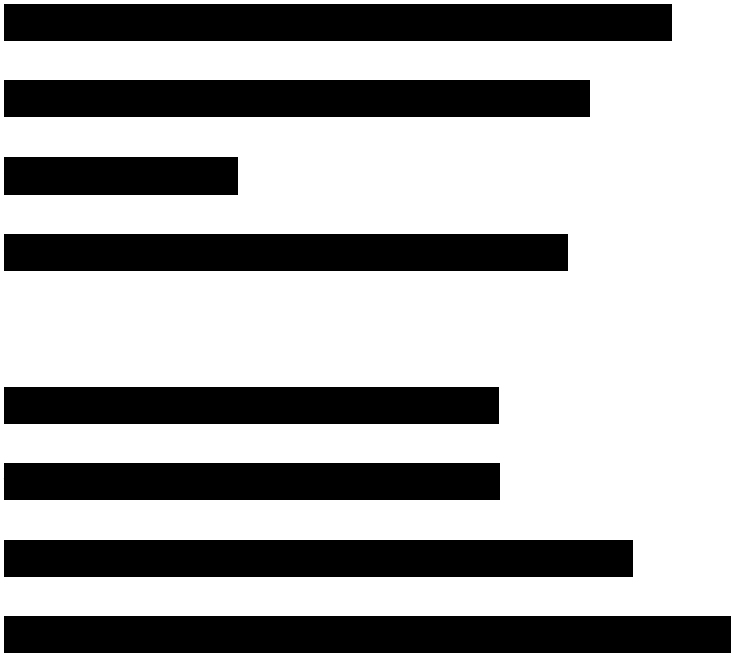
[69] David Abram, 'In the Depths of a Breathing Planet: Gaia and the Transformation of Experience' in *Gaia in Turmoil: Climate Change, Biodepletion, and Earth Ethics in an Age of Crisis*, eds., Eileen Crist and Bruce Rinker; (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010), p.3.
[70] Wynn Thomas, review of *Black Cat Bone* by John Burnside in *The Guardian*, 6 September, 2006, available at: www.theguardian.com/books/2011/sep/06/black-cat-bone-john-burnsidepoetry-review [Accessed 17 June, 2017].
[71] Graeme Richardson, 'No Ideas But In Somethings' in Arete Magazine, Winter-Spring, 2002, available at: www.aretemagazine.co.uk/10-winter-spring-2002/john-burnside/ [Accessed 8 July, 2019].
[72] John Burnside, *The Music of Time: Poetry in the Twentieth Century* (London: Profile, 2019), p.86.

Creating a space for other forms of experience is what Burnside's poetry allows. He seeks to see how we navigate an existential divide between being and non-being in the form of a revelation, a revelation he cites in Eugene Montale's poem:



Burnside finds an apposite spirit to this void in Jean-Paul Sartre's famous dictum, 'nothingness haunts being'; describing what he calls a 'negative epiphany' is the Rubicon over the Romantic stream, an utterly modern sensibility he finds in poets such as Montale, the philosophy of Wittgenstein and the work of Italo Calvino. It is as if only that famous figure in Caspar David Friedrich's 'wanderer in a Teutonic fog' could turn around and see 'the nothing at my back, the void behind'.

Burnside uses the last lines of Montale's poem as an epigraph in the poem 'Discard' from *All One Breath* (2014).[74] The speaker is forced to consider this gap between self-knowledge and 'the void behind'. The poem is about a not uncommon private experience of finding some old snakeskin in the woods. But there is just enough of an imaginative leap into thinking 'it alive' which recalls 'the child in me // awakened to the old / forebodings of his tribe'. The speaker finds recourse to an almost prelapsarian state to locate this discovery in a kind of pagan wonder, knowing such a find would mean something to those who once would read such clues in the landscape. That skin is the second self we see so much of in Burnside as his speakers—here I follow Borthwick—are adept at self-removal, slipping off a modern, hard-

[73] Eugenio Montale, 'Forse un mattino', Ossi di sepia (Milan: Mondadori, Milan, 2018).
[74] John Burnside, 'Discard' in *All One Breath* (London: Cape Poetry, 2015), p.50.

wired, precarious form of material security to a sensibility which imagines a parallel life on terms with the natural world. The child, as so often in Burnside is guided by a mystery, what for Burnside could be the beginning of 'a lifelong openness to grace'.[75] The child's wondering gaze becomes lost to the adult, forced into an enclosed perspective: 'I half-believed // that nothing would be there', cursed with a secret, his secret 'amongst men who don't look back.'[76] Looking back is an orienting function, but it also calls forth some distant past, as if we are created by the voids we leave behind in regret or error. This turning to face *and* a retreat into the solitude of that summons is a crucial orienting theme in the development of Burnside's dark register. In this, his lyric forces something like an ecocritical disposition upon us.

Introducing the Chapters

I have chosen to structure the thesis as three main chapters, each with their own accompanying shorter provocation chapters. These interlinked chapters explore how Burnside's poetics grasps the fundamental relationship between language, ecology, the fate of the animal, and the consequences of our technologies which distance us from living sustainably within the natural world. It is an interdisciplinary assemblage of posthumanism, ecology and phenomenology which triangulates with the nonhuman turn in the humanities.

In Chapter One, entitled 'Reverberation', I explore the contemporary duelling of nostalgia (a Romantic trope) and sustainability (ecology's materialist concern) to show how it is commensurate with new questions about identity and belonging in the face of global warming, and to a crisis in that relationship. Chapter One is a sustained close reading of an uncollected 2017 poem, 'Pibroch'. In calling forth a traditional instrument and simultaneously placing it in the landscape as an abstract inference, the poem allows the speaker to contemplate the way in which the Highland clearances became the site for a Romantic construction of a distinctly Scottish sensibility, one which clings to Celtic, Pictish, and pagan ancestry as a way of locating what that inheritance might mean today. The speaker interprets the sound not as some nostalgic fall-back, it as if the sound comes to presage what is to come and in that there is a continuum which, despite being far removed from the origin of the classical bagpipe, allows the speaker to inhabit an assured, gnostic knowledge that is

[75] John Burnside, 'For he himself has said it: Englishness and Masculinity, from 1945 to Brexit', talk given at the Alpine Fellowship, Fjällnäs, Sweden, 15-18 August, 2019. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfw8g2dkx8&t=812s&ab_channel=AlpineFellowship [Accessed 10 February, 2020].
[76] John Burnside, 'Discard', p.50.

'beyond our understanding and autonomous in its perfection.'[77] In the shorter Chapter Two which accompanies the 'Pibroch' chapter, entitled 'A Reverie of Bees', I offer a reading of Burnside's poem 'Ahimsa Bee Sutra' (2009) and seek to explore how bees form part of the growing understanding of their importance to global agriculture and their spiritual place in the maintenance of peaceful human dwelling. Like the Pibroch, bees can be seen as fusing the mythological with the political. I read the poem alongside other well-known bee poems to offer a brief comparative reading of bee poetry. That bees, especially honeybees, have been invoked as metaphors of a range of human polities signifies their importance to the human imagination. From sex and reproduction, food, burial rites, rituals and traditions, to myths of the origin of monarchies, the sound of their buzzing in our midst is now a precious reminder of the rootedness of our world to theirs. Bees may be on their way to becoming a new form of totem creature, providing an index to the heath of the planet, and the delicate balance of the seasons.

Chapter Three, entitled 'The Shadow of the Forest', explores Paulo Uccello's famous 'Hunt by Night' painting as a way of understanding Burnside's orienting poetics where a symbolic exchange between the hunter and the hunted, like Acteon, shows the boundedness of man's mortal being. I argue that there is some eternal quest in the hunt for the sublime, an ecstatic revelation where man somehow confronts Nature over and over. This of course is the impossible reach out of which spring irony and allegory and all the versions of reified distance from the fate of what is there before our eyes, unspeakable to the degree that it would horrify us. Beginning to untangle the idea that we somehow possess the world involves untethering the hounds, sounding the horn and beginning the hunt. The hunt, then, is a compulsion to flee as it is to pursue. As with Montale's poem, do we know what we are chasing? From what we are fleeing? Is something catching up with us? This question of placing oneself in relation to the hunt is where attending to art can orient us and place us 'at the meeting of parallel lines' ('The Hunt in the Forest')[78] to give depth, breadth, material, light, colour, animism, symbol and landscape a fuller articulation. With the idea of a universal pursuit into that realm, Burnside momentarily shows how the roles and rules of the hunt have been reversed, Gaia becomes a monstrous force that wages war against humans, and this is because, as Latour says, 'geohistory must not be conceived as a great irruption of

[77] John Burnside, *The Music of Time*, p.177.
[78] John Burnside, 'The Hunt in the Forest' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.2.

Nature finally capable of suppressing all our conflicts, but as a *generalized state of war*.'[79] By obscuring all hitherto human conflicts as internecine, the encroaching silence of geohistory will become deafening as finally, Birnham Wood comes to Dunsinane; it is the landscape itself that has 'joined the fight.'[80]

Accompanying the forest chapter, in Chapter Four, entitled 'Blues for Badger', I turn to the ancient woodland creature. They too, like bees, have come to be seen as emblematic of debates about the health of the British countryside. As vectors carrying Bovine tuberculosis (bTB), the fate of badgers is entwined with arguments about the industrial slaughter of cattle. The badger's place in the cultural imagination is part of the mythology of pastoralism, and given that as many as 50,000 are killed on our roads each year, Burnside's poem 'Uley Blue', about a car striking a badger speaks to the technological invasion of the landscape as a new form of inadvertent hunting. I read the poem after introducing badgers from children's literature, namely Kenneth Williams's *Wind in the Willows* and Beatrix Potter's Tommy Brock, and then bring these depictions into the present with an overview of the debate about the culling of badgers as an acute environmental concern.

In Chapter Five, entitled 'The Water's Answer', I turn to the theme of water in Burnside's poetry. Burnside's evocations of water in all its forms conditions the landscape in which our memories take hold. Across Burnside's poems, water pulls us back to the wellspring of the natural world, what he calls, quoting Randell Jarrell the 'dailiness of life'[81], a conceptual centre on which we can draw our fates as tied to something that doesn't observe delineations or borders. This is evidenced in the rise of Blue Humanities and hydropoetics. It is an attempt to configure the blue element as central to human ontology. As the editors of a recent journal special issue observe, in turning to water, scholarship in this burgeoning area seeks out an alternate world-making sensibility, one that 'can oppose strategies of imperialist containment and hegemonic enclosure.'[82] In close-reading poems which feature water as a conditioning element, 'Learning to Swim' (2009), 'The Myth of the Twin' (1994), 'Brother' (1988), 'A

[79] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (London: Polity, 2017), p.73.
[80] Ibid., p.73.
[81] The line comes from the last line of the poem, 'Well Water' by Randall Jarrell and provides the epigraph to John Burnside's *The Music of Time*. Burnside writes, 'We feel incomplete without a sense of origin, a source, and we locate it, wilfully, in the past, or in some ideal history'. For Burnside, it is the present, not some far-off place where the real world lies, 'if only we could abandon such illusions.' To drink from Jarrell's well is to be reminded of the stuff we are made from. *The Music of Time*, p.397-8.
[82] Alexandra Campbell and Michael Paye, eds., 'Water Enclosure and World-Literature: New Perspectives on Hydro-Power and World-Ecology', *Humanities* 2020, 9, 106, 8 September 2020, p.1

Dead Hare in the Drive at Over Kellie, 15th October, 2015' (2017), 'A Swimming Lesson' (1995), 'Old Man, Swimming' (2009), 'Hendrick Avercamp: Standing Man Watching a Skating Boy' (2017), 'Pieter Breughel: Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap, 1565' (2011), 'A Frost Fair' (2015), my aim is to make, again through Burnside's ekphrastic poems, a direct link between the enclosure of capital, captured in Dutch golden age paintings during the Little Ice Age to the onset of our degraded ecosystems precariously balanced between the poles. Such a return, or reorientation, to the enduring power of water to shape environments and carve the course of history is inextricably linked to the development of human action over the centuries.

My final provocation, Chapter Six, entitled 'Water Management' takes its cue from the close of the final chapter of Burnside's 2019 monograph, *The Music of Time.* In a casual observation watching the rain pour down from a window in Nanyang, Singapore, he observes that '[water management] is rooted in the same damp corner of my psyche where poetry takes hold.'[83] Water acting as a kind of poetic wellspring betrays an idea about origins and ends. That water in all its forms is such an ongoing presence in Burnside's poetry, I wanted to linger on the idea of water as a hyperobject, something so large as to be unclassifiable except in its local forms in the same way that weather is observable phenomena of something more ineffable such as climate. It nevertheless allows access to a way of thinking about water as life-force which sustains and regulates the health of the planet. I close with a reading of the poem 'Erosion' (2014), which charts the effect of land mismanagement and the consequent effects of flooding which exacerbates the process of erosion and hastens arguments about the importance of understanding the power of water to a sustainable form of agriculture.

All six chapters serve the wider arguments introduced here— mythologies of place and belonging, animals as totems of human suffering and corruption, forests as environs of mutability, air pollution, industrial agriculture, flooding—with a greater emphasis on the current context of environmental debates to show how poetry, understood in this sense as ecopoetry allows for and prompts us to think about the health of the nonhuman, from insects to animals and finally to water. What is new and original about this thesis is the idea that Burnside's poetry of the last decade ushers in a sense of ecological grief conditioned by growing evidence of anthropogenic climate change. My aim is to acclimatise a reading of Burnside's later poetry to the urgency of environmental questions which now dominate any

[83] John Burnside, *The Music of Time,* p.456.

discussion about the future of dwelling peaceably on the planet. Ecological decline prompts new questions about our relationship to the natural world and Burnside offers a threshold lyric poised in the end of times. Our experience of living in a compromised world allows for renewed attention to the environs of change to which I turn my attention in Burnside's poetry, an attention which dethrones the centrality of human activity to find a balance between humans and nonhumans. 'Awake between two worlds' is to come out from sleep, but it may also be a calling, to hold a wake for the ways in which time used to pass, helping us accommodate ourselves to a new lease of Nature.

Chapter One

Reverberation: John Burnside and the '*Pibroch*'

What we need now is distance and local tradition;
the *breve* of italic; the *minim* of untold love;

a new vocabulary
of now-or-never:

names for the things we have lost,
so we know what to mourn.
'Amour Vincit Omnia'[1]

The main focus of this chapter will be the first of two poems originally published in the *London Review of Books* in September, 2017. This poem, entitled '*Pibroch*', will be contextualised through some of the pertinent themes in Burnside's work up to and beyond the reverberation of the Scottish Independence referendum held in 2014. The reading will emerge from my theoretical grounding of the poem in recent scholarship on ecocriticism and the nonhuman turn. Initially, I will outline and historicise the connection between ecocriticism and modern Scottish identity, before picking up a thoroughgoing theme in Burnside's poetics, one which connects the displacement of the Gaelic language to the overlapping and coextensive idea of political and ecological thresholds in the contemporary moment. That connection between culture and ecology finds a link between older oral practices and the sustained prescience of the contemporary lyric in charting this inheritance. A deep aspect of Burnside's poetics engages what I call a metaphysics of access to the inner and outer self; a self, poised at the border between ontologies of the human and the nonhuman, with which the ecocritical turn is concerned. The departure point of '*Pibroch*' is the moment when the concrete question of belonging as a political issue becomes a mediation on place and language more broadly, documenting the disinheritance of a commodified oral culture

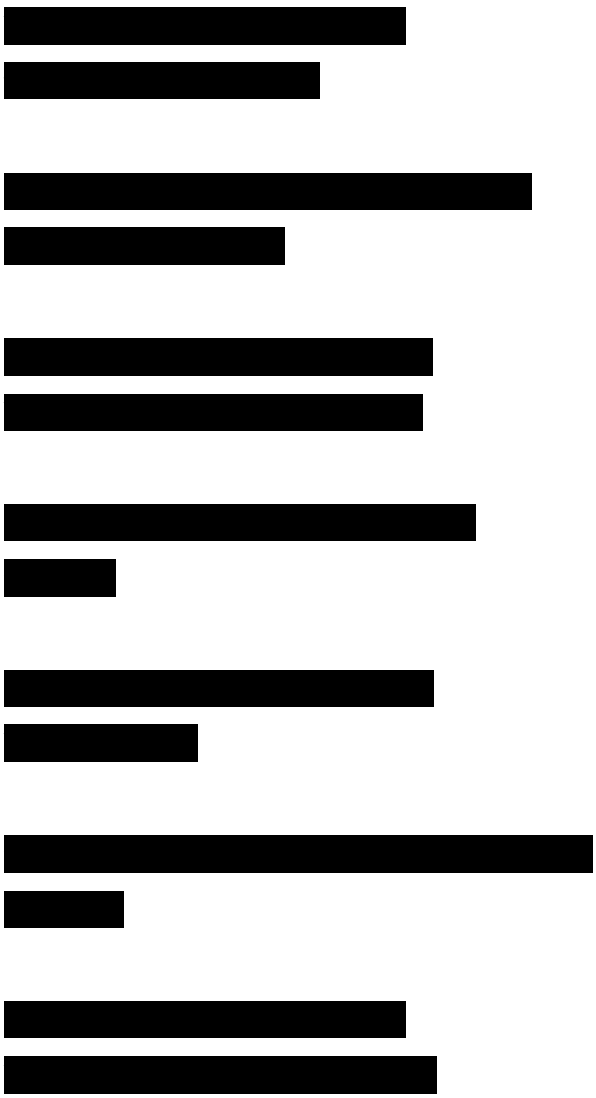
[1] John Burnside, 'Amor Vincit Omnia' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.42.

supplanted by the 'scopic regimes of modernity.'[2] I will show how Burnside's poetry conceives of modern Scottish identity as part of a changing world-picture which speaks to the autonomy of people within a circumscribed place.

PIBROCH

To the make of a piper go seven years of his own learning and seven generations before … At the end of his seven years, one born to it will stand at the start of knowledge, and lending a fond ear to the drone, he may have parley with old folks of old affairs.

Neil Munro, 'The Lost Pibroch'



[2] Martin Jay, quoted in Nasser Hussain, 'The Sound of Terror: Phenomenology of a Drone Strike' in *Boston Review*, 16/10/2013.

I will return to a close reading of the poem later in the chapter. For an initial response here, we can say that a transience emerges from the momentary revelation Burnside offers. In the epigraph there is a temporal shift of before and after; the 'start of knowledge' coming after the seven-year apprenticeship. Articulation requires training and set timescales, and I want to show how those scales collide when sustainability is understood through the sustained notes of inherited music tradition. The poem, then, shows how Burnside's writing traces the Scottish experience in the broader sweep of cultural domination where the decline of Gaelic

[3] John Burnside, 'Pibroch' in *London Review of Books*, vol. 39, no. 17, September 6, 2017.

and the Scots dialect testifies to the Anglicisation of his experience, 'in my own case, loss of the Scots language coincided with the loss of the landscape it described. One way in which Scots have traditionally 'bettered' themselves is by way of migration.'[4] Migrating ideas and fusing epigraphic spurs and aphorisms from other languages is one form of this migration as a form of betterment. It is also an empowering process by which other non-English, non-dominant worldviews can be put into dialogue with the work.

In this chapter I will seek to utilise some more recent scholarship around the nonhuman turn in reading Burnside, whilst also allowing space for a discussion about the materiality of language informing new theories about ecocriticism and ecomimesis. Contextualised through a reading of '*Pibroch*', I will then apply the terms nostalgia and sustainability to a critical impasse that exists today in terms of how people understand the lost cultures that have been eroded by what Fiona Sampson calls that 'overwhelming era of globalization',[5] a period in which she places Burnside as part of a group of poets coming to the fore in the speeded-up, contemporary culture that risks losing it all to planetary degradation. The loss experienced through environmental damage is explored through Burnside's poetry of 'surrender', a word that sets in equipoise the idea of renunciation with a willingness to give-in and follow. To do this, Burnside creates a space in which to work against a particular flavour of nostalgia towards an old Scottish cultural practice, not to renounce it, but to rescue it from commodification by the very culture responsible for its demise. Sustaining connections to these practices through a nostalgia predicated on salvage and restoration is a powerful way of reconditioning a relationship to one's place within a place.

Luisa Gairn's 2008 study, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* maps the ways in which identity and the language of place-making in Scottish literature diverges from a more English preoccupation with writerly craft, one which runs counter to the itinerant 'I' of the English Romantics and the bucolic English landscape. In her introduction, she lands on a definition of ecology which brings together the mind and body in their reflexive relationship to the natural world. Citing Cheryl Glotfelty, she suggests that 'all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it […] as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman.'[6] To de-privilege the human as the contextual centre of the world, ecological

[4] John Burnside, 'Place', p.209-10.
[5] Fiona Sampson, *Beyond the Lyric*, p.246.
[6] Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, p.7.

criticism builds upon postmodern theory, where '"the world" denotes the anthropocentric sphere of language and culture.' For Glotfelty, as it is for Gairn, 'ecological criticism expands "the world" to include the entire ecosphere.' [7] Here we can say that ecopoetics finds its latest iteration in jettisoning the human as the contextual centre of the world.

Gairn turns to John Burnside and Kathleen Jamie in her final chapter in a deliberate attempt to find in contemporary Scottish writing a desire to challenge the notion that landscaped places are tamed, sanitized places for the reflective mind. By way of historicizing this connection, Gairn tells us: 'Burnside and Jamie', are 'writers who are consciously setting out to explore constructions of "self" and "other" in the context of ecological theory. Modern Scottish views of "ecology" are not simply the appropriation of Romantic discourses but are attempts to find new ways of thinking about, representing, and relating to the natural world.'[8] Gairn's introduction is a 're-mapping' of modern Scottish literature; beginning in the nineteenth century, her aim is re-establish and historicise how 'successive generations of Scottish writers have both reflected and contributed to the development of international ecological theory and philosophy.'[9] Through figures such as biologist and sociologist Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), who played a role in shaping international debates about urban planning and the natural world; or John Muir (1838-1914) whose work inspired the National park movement in the United States, Gairn is making a case for a new distance between Scottish and English contributions to the contemporary debate about ecology and philosophies of dwelling. Quoting Geddes, Gairn's remapping wishes to account for those people who lived lives in what might have been considered wild lands; smaller, parochial communities overlooked by a broader urbanised projection of the highlands as wild and virtually empty. Geddes saw this as an inheritance from an English perspective, and gives an early clue to the latter-day theories of ecocriticism and the posthuman turn, 'remarkable as seeing man as a prime actor among other animals, instead of searching for a "natural" world uninvaded by man, which was more characteristic of ecology in the south of Britain'.[10] By ignoring those who left indelible traces of a unique Scottish way of life—including animals— Gairn's book is a reinterpretation of Romanticism as a world-view which meets its twenty-first-century incarnation as a form of ecocriticism, a history which makes the case for a particular Scottish

[7] Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Introduction' in Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds), *The Ecocriticism Reader*: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p.xix.
[8] Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, p.5.
[9] Ibid., p.5.
[10] Ibid., p.2.

flavour of literature, one distinct by its connection to a people and place in an encounter with its political and ecological self and other. This focus on parochial communities is now a contemporary imperative to find an alliance with past cultures which were rooted much more naturally in the land, and today it is a challenge to the very idea of ownership of place, refuted by Burnside as some predisposed licence to live somewhere. This reorientation provides the context for turning to a 2017 poem which mediates on the question of belonging and is a coming to terms with these nonhuman categories which, in the case of the question of the Scottish independence referendum of 2014, shows that that question has not gone away.

Gairn points to the comparison between a new articulation of belonging as a metaphysical category in Burnside's writing and the atavistic philosophy of Martin Heidegger. She describes how in Burnside's writing there is a deliberate paring down, in the same way Sampson describes his stepped lines as a kind of 'topple, something utterly removed from the steady gait and equalizing tensions of pentameter.'[11] There is an acute terseness to his work which lies in stark contrast to the voiced presence of the Romantic poet:

> The problem of how human perception always intercedes between self and world provokes, in Burnside's thought, a shift to a philosophy of phenomenology, to the discovery of 'primary virtues' which 'go beyond the problems of description'.[12] For Burnside, this can also mean paring down language and the most obvious markers of poetic 'craft' to a bare minimum, creating a simplicity which effaces the ego and rids poetry of the flourishes which declare the presence of the writer – Coleridge's 'eternal I AM'. Instead, Burnside argues, 'interesting poetry . . . asks questions about the quality of experience. What did you really hear? What did you really see? What did you really taste? . . . Poems that make us pay attention. Poems with an ecological heart'.[13]

In this chapter I will focus on one aspect of this entreaty, the 'what did you really hear?' to explore what nostalgia and sustainability can do in relation to sound, modernity, belonging, and the anamnesis of the ecological heart.

[11] Fiona Sampson, *Beyond the Lyric*, p.246.
[12] Gaston Bachelard, cited in Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature*, p.161.
[13] John Burnside, interviewed by Louisa Gairn, 31 March, 2004 in Louisa Gairn, *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature,* p.161.

idir eathara, or Both and Between

In Burnside's essay 'Poetry and a Sense of Place', we find an articulation of what it means to construct a lyric space. This poetic space acknowledges a continuum on which various human and nonhuman ontologies exist, accessible through a suspension of predisposed subject/world formulations. His definition of place explains how that idea comes about:

> 'poetry of place' concerns itself with specific locales, not to create a sense of local colour, or of any Romantic effect, but to set up a kind of metaphysical space, which is essentially empty, a region of potential in which anything can happen.[14]

Here, the 'place' within a 'metaphysical space' seems ponderously abstract, but place, rendered as metaphysical affects the concept of time as it relates to human presence and experience. The lyric then, can convey 'the timelessness of the chosen place.'[15] In this thrown condition, a deeper schism of time can gape open, as 'The lyric says, in other words, that the flow of time is an illusion: the reality is that things change, things unfold and decay, in the standstill of eternity'.[16] The lyric space is testing the dynamics of human-oriented temporality and reckoning with new ecological barriers and boundaries. Prompted by the ecological crisis in our midst, one which under the aegis of the Anthropocene charges the present with a new temporal axis on which the history of the nonhuman heaves into view, my engagement with Burnside's poetry here traces how lyric space connects the folk histories of local traditions to the much bigger idea that earlier forms of cultural practice were far less destructive to the environment than our own.

The lyric, being a human mediation in and against the world simultaneously must provoke the question that language is a technological extension to the human world. Indeed, contextualising various incarnations of ecocriticism, Scott Knickerbocker reminds us that if poststructuralism was concerned primarily with the linguistic sign, then ecocriticism aims for engagement with the physical world: 'The eco-phenomenologist David Abram goes so far as to claim that the development of written language accompanied and partly caused our increasingly occluded experience of nonhuman Nature and that oral cultures were thus more

[14] John Burnside, 'Poetry and a Sense of Place', Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur, DOI: 10.7557/13.2208, p.203.
[15] Ibid., p.201.
[16] Ibid., p.205.

ecocentric than we are.'[17] The intention of this chapter is to find a connective tissue through the mnemonic element of poetry as an echo of a much earlier tradition of words and music as sustained songs of a culture within an environment. It is to find in Burnside's misted world, writing that, according to Owen Sheers, 'can simultaneously hold and embody the contemporary and historical signatures of place.'[18] In the twenty-first century, as this chapter shows, place entails a much larger cultural field from which to draw inspiration, but also a divergence from the modern map where identities are contested as little more than economic or bureaucratic, drawn by degrees of status.

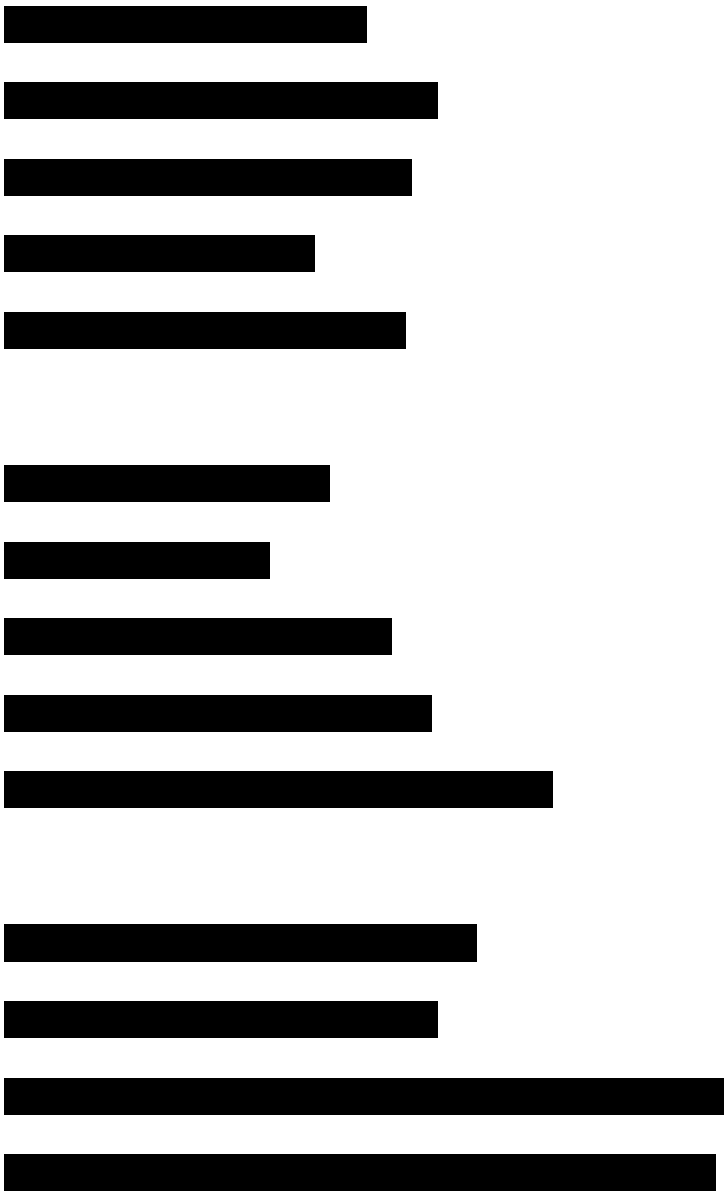
Burnside works at Hanseatic latitudes and to read his work is to find the crepuscular coastlines of Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg, as much as Hendrik Avercamp or Pieter Breughel's earlier wintry scenes. In chapter five I explore his turning to ice as a stage for these environs of change where a frozen lake gifts a temporary space like a momentary stage, or the gloaming catches something fleeting, only glimpsed in passing. Within this is a poetic vision rooted in a larger imaginative realm which involves circumventing the normative distinctions of what we mean when we say we are at home, let alone when we say that we belong in a place, that space is contested:

> To take one example: the Celts, or at least those Celts who once inhabited the British Isles, and informed much of what still remains as identifiably Scots/Irish/Welsh/Cornish culture, recognised space which they called, (in Irish), *idir eathara*, that is, a boundary that is neither one place nor another, but the space between the two.[19]

These borders and boundaries could be physical (rivers, glens, north/south borders) or they could be temporal (Halloween, new year, dawn/dusk, day/night), but it is in these slippages, 'the points at which one thing becomes another: the old year becomes the new, Summer becomes Autumn, day becomes night' that the idea of permanent change drives this vision of loss and renewal. *Idir*, or *eadar* in Scots Gaelic means, as preposition 'both' and 'between', a temporal, transitive space that the body passes through. In his fourth collection, *The Myth of*

[17] Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, The Nature of Language* (Amherst and Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), p.3.
[18] Owen Sheers, 'Poetry and Place: Some Personal Reflections', *Geography*, vol. 93, part 3, Autumn 2008, p.172.
[19] John Burnside, 'Poetry and a Sense of Place', p.203.

the Twin from 1994, we find the poem ‘Learning Gaelic’ where we see an early manifestation of this figuration of a double-natured negotiated space between inheritance and recollection:

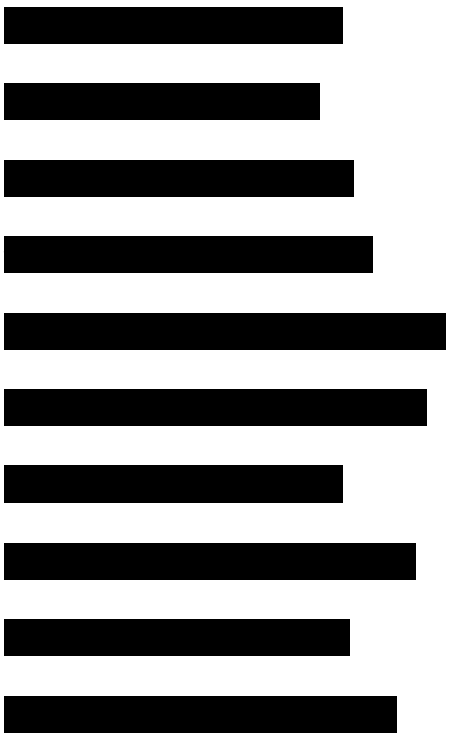


The opening lines resound through the word ‘anamnesis’, where life is a Platonic process of remembering. The speaker desires an untroubled language, perched between an as-yet and a once-was attachment which pushes language back to its phonetic properties, materially rooted in a specific locale, so we get ‘a sound for the feel of a place’ or ‘the name for the gap between margins’. Not only are the words lacking, but the second stanza confuses the idea that the knowledge of that lack has always existed. What comes to the speaker ‘rising at night’ is an intimacy with his ancestors, a feel for the Gaelic language as a storehouse, a

[20] John Burnside, ‘Learning Gaelic’ in *The Myth of The Twin* (London: Cape Poetry, 1994), p.9.

repository in which he can commune with the dead, carrying through the sounds unformed into articulate meaning, here received at the close as a vibration, ‘an echo, singing’. The poem’s axis is the clash of sound and meaning, hinted at with the ‘little owls ascending through the trees’. As I will show in my reading of ‘Pibroch’, the owl heard before it is seen privileges the ear as the primary receiving organ over the visual primacy of sight. Through this inversion I will be able to confront the interwoven taxonomy between the English Romantic lyric and Scots Ballads to privilege the latter’s influence on contemporary debates in ecocriticism.

Earlier, in his second collection *Common Knowledge* from 1991, we find what I believe is one of the first instances of Burnside’s direct engagement with Heidegger’s famous maxim that ‘language is the house of being’.[21] I explore this notion more fully in the shorter chapter on bees following this, linking ideas about the hive as a microcosmic model of peaceable dwelling. In the poem ‘Language’, the opening exclaims this idea that language works as a carapace, a place in which we occupy our being and mediate on the idea of dwelling as holders of language. The language is the misremembered inheritance of the Gaelic tongue and reveals a longing in the speaker for a connection to that past language figuring the speaker as caught between two worlds:



[21] Frank Capuzzi, Letter on ‘Humanism’ (1946) in Martin Heidegger, trans. William McNeil, *Pathmarks*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.239-276. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511812637.012.

Here the ‘deep house’ figures something coming from below and also towards a ‘deep ecology’ which, having its roots in the late 1960s and early 1970s—the term was coined by philosopher Arne Næss in 1973— began to take shape institutionally during the 1990s.[23] Here, language is a lost house, a conditioned fall from the sanctuary of one tongue into the incoherence and insecurity of the other; a radical other that the speaker is at pains to identify in language. Through the slippage between ‘*silt’* and ‘*swan’*, the interchangeable nature of language in the Heideggerian sense is that words take their meaning as an instance of negation; they ‘denote’ only by the fact that they do not mean what other words mean. In this, the ‘*silt*’ evokes the glacial piling up of matter, referenced between some originary paradise, some primordial pool of life and the human gene pool which here lifts off from its shared habitus of fish and trees in to the ‘household’ of language. There is a supplementarity between the earth and living things, a porous border which is tested by language as serving the human world but cannot fasten the moment when matter becomes animate, the ‘*silt*’ to the ‘*swan*’. The central turn, echoing the ‘deep house’ as a form of deep-sleep reverie—a term I spend time on in the bee chapter—is ‘dreams: the mysterious’ where what follows is the heightened, almost ecstatic awareness of being caught out—‘tripwire’—by the human hold on the living world. The possibility of listening to this other comes as a kind of post-commercialism only when the ‘city is finally / still’. At the close, the overlapping of the urbane and natural world is the site of a slippage where the idea of communing with the natural world breaks down to propriety. The Edenic pool and garden becomes the manicured lawn of a meticulous simulacra of anything ‘denoting’ the natural, now sealed off, ‘gift-wrapped’ by the morning promise of dew on the lawn of the proud homeowner. The ‘neighbourhood stopped’ by the ‘suburb’s fastidious’ enclosure.

Language and the House of Being

In Scott Knickerbocker’s introduction to *Ecopoetics,* three sounds act as an epigraph which highlight the fall into language from what he calls the ‘embodied experience of nature’:

[22] John Burnside, ‘Language’ from *Common Knowledge* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), p.33.
[23] The world’s first Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was founded in 1993.

‘Zheee?’

‘Cheee! Chee!’

‘Shdeee…shdeeeeeee.’[24]

They are ‘attempts’ by his thirteen-month-old-son, Rowan ‘to echo my latest denotation, “tree”’. This moment, recounted during the anecdotal opening while out walking with his son in rural Oregon arrests him, not least because he is ‘startled to realize that he is suddenly engaged in the old habit of weaving word to world’, more cogently, because ‘Rowan nudges language back to its wild origins in my ears.’ He calls this a ‘rematerializing of language’, a form of ‘defamiliarization’ and it forms the point at which his conception of ecopoetics begins. He lands on a quote from Charles Bernstein which gets him toward his target of critique, and what he considers has been the dominant mode of writing about Nature: mimesis. The Bernstein quote begins, ‘Poetry creates something of the conditions of hearing (not just listening to) a foreign language—we hear it as language, not music or noise; yet we cannot immediately process its meaning.’ Given the placement of the epigraph, in a similar way to the epigraph from ‘*Pibroch*’ we require Knickerbocker’s anecdote to reverse the process of materialization in language back to the childhood realm where words are not yet fastened on to a physical reality and to make Rowan’s tree manifest to us. For this ‘defamiliarization’, Knickerbocker coins the term ‘sensuous poesis’ to stand as a direct challenge to mimetic writing which, he claims ‘demands that the author be as faithful as possible to the real world ‘out there’. In his book he turns to four American poets—Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, Wilbur Smith, and Sylvia Plath—who he claims ‘unapologetically embrace artifice’ and whose work ultimately points to the later nonhuman turn in ecocriticism more broadly as a move away from mimesis. The rehabilitation of ecocriticism away from its insistence on ‘political (environmental) action’ has, in his view come at a cost, hitherto obscuring aesthetic experience, creating an ‘unnecessary tension between ethics and aesthetics’. In the spirit of *idir eathara,* he positions ecocriticism between these two poles and seeks to cast his four chosen poets as hitherto overlooked with regard to their relation to ecology.

Similarly, when Timothy Morton says that ‘eventually essence collapses into appearance, which is how an object ends’ he is pointing to the rift between the appearance aspect of a

[24] Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics,* p.1.

thing or object and its essence as something beyond its appearance for something else.[25] This is a crucial tenet of the foundational philosophy of Object-Oriented Ontology, a movement indebted to the work of Heidegger, and it applies here to the Pibroch as standing for that impasse between Nature's appearance for 'us', as Anthropos, and its essence, which is ultimately unknowable. Where aesthetics comes in is that when we identify objects, their 'causality becomes meaningful'. So, aesthetics is causality. What this means in poetry is, if it moves away from the idea of mimesis, it can 'defamiliarize' figurative language and rhetorical devices too often associated with 'artificiality.' Getting to the thing described in this way, Morton shows us that the 'nowness of a poem, its spaciousness, is the disquieting asymmetry between appearance and essence, past and future.'[26] Knickerbocker's rematerialization sees something proper to the origin of language and the way in which aesthetic appreciation takes shape through the pleasure of the sound and feel of words off the tongue and on the ear. What these ideas point to essentially is muddy origins of world-naming, which follows the close link between Burnside's poetics of dwelling and Heidegger's house of being. For Heidegger, language is a kind of building in so far as it opens a relation between language and thinking that allows us to dwell. In short, language is architectonic to the human, it comes from a baser, mammalian source which reveals the essential wildness at the heart of the Anthropos, a wildness which ecopoetics as defined by Knickerbocker seeks to tap into, to 'weave us to nature.'[27]

Morton's 'nowness' is a form of 'coexistence' with the poem, which institutes an inward process of transformation for the reader, what he might call an unmediated experience of the natural realm. Just as we construct the world around us with language, Burnside is aware of this two-way relationship between thinking ecologically and living ecologically when he proclaims: 'I cannot help thinking that an essential task of the artist, the writer, the architect and the urban designer, in the current climate at least, is to find ways of reminding us of our essential wildness, and at the same time, of the depth and richness of our past.'[28] By invoking not just the writer and artist but the designer and architect, Burnside is showing that all these occupations are intimately linked by that essential task; as Neil Evernden reminds us

[25] Timothy Morton 'An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry' in *New Literary History*, vol 43, no. 2, Spring, 2012 (pp.205-224), p.222.
[26] Ibid., p.222.
[27] Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics*, p.2.
[28] John Burnside 'Layers of Life Beneath our Feet' in *New Statesman*, December 12, 2011, p.57.

'Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning.'[29] The architect and the urban designer do not simply design buildings and urban spaces: in Burnside's view, they are the gatekeepers for showing us that dwelling is a spiritual category, deeply affected by our aesthetic awareness of forms in the natural world. In the introduction to their edited anthology, *Wild Reckoning: An Anthology Provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* (2004), Maurice Riordan and Burnside seek to push ecology back to its original meaning:

> we were conscious of an urgent need here to challenge the assumption that the principal subjects of nature poetry were matters green or objects furry, and to return to the original meaning of the word ecology: that is, to its delineation of a *Logos* of dwelling, a *Logos* that is neither exclusively science nor art, but side-steps such definitions in an attempt to understand, in the fullest sense, what it is to dwell in the world as humans.[30]

Following Knickerbocker's anecdotal beginning, figuring the ear in the haptic sense as a boundary between past and present, immanence and experience, the here and there, I will now introduce the close reading of 'Pibroch' by a brief contextualisation of its role in Scottish culture. The decision to read this poem extensively for the remainder of the chapter is to document how the various stanzas incorporate and historicise the major themes under discussion and build towards a final ecocritical reckoning rooted firmly in the twenty-first century. Beginning with the local, moving outwards to the numinous possibility of something much larger at stake in the landscape, the sustainability of inherited folk traditions that root a people in a nation and a landscape is a starting point for a discussion of cultural practice and identity within a place. Moving beyond the marginalisation of older cultural practices of ballad and elegy to the disappearance of the wild animals that informed much of that culture, I see how the poem pulls away with a longer, planetary lens in the context of nostalgia for a lost culture to chart the consequences of a creaturely sympathy for the lives we have lost and the landscapes we are losing. As the poem develops, the site at which the local and fixed give way to a distant numinosity shows Burnside's art of uncovering the locus of change and the lingering animal that invades our technological distance from the natural world.

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[29] Neil Evernden, 'Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy' in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp.92– 104.
Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics*, p.2.
[30] John Burnside and Maurice Riordan, eds., *Wild Reckoning: An Anthology Provoked by Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004), p.21.

Scotland and the *Pibroch*

Pinning words on to music is fundamental to the development of national traditions. In Scotland of the early eighteenth century, the dominant ballad form was traditionally a narrative poem set to music. Originally composed in order to celebrate or eulogise (e.g the death of a chieftain), the optimism of these elegies was yet to face the dispossession many highlanders experienced during the Jacobite Rebellions of 1745 and, later, as Juliet Shields remarks, the exhausted 'sense of despair that invaded the highlands after the end of the Napoleonic wars.'[31] Crucially in oral traditions, lyrics set to music would have a mnemonic quality, their simple repetitive melodies aiding in the process of memorialisation, allowing stories and memories to be passed on and kept alive without the need of notation or classical training. Gaelic elegies often evoked a condition of the distance of exile. Whether through the longing for a new home and the dream of emigration, or for the sentimental dream of the continued presence of one's ancestors, the connection between the mnemonic and sustainable nostalgia finds a link through the abstract nature of this inheritance. Songs which evoke nostalgia towards a history of a people in a place cannot but become the object of that loss itself. In other words, nostalgia is a disclosive, ambivalent mode in that the words and melodies cannot but evoke the time that is now lost. But keeping this connection to the past open or sustained in a place is one way of rescuing nostalgia from its lament of the condition of loss itself; it provides an auditory bulwark against encroachment, acting as a kind of frontier between centre and province. Among the themes of the ballads as narrative poems set to song, particularly in Scottish music, was the longing for the return of the dead as an act of rescue or continuance.[32]

According to Ethnomusicologist, Peter Cooke, 'The *Pibroch* is an extended composition in theme and variation form for the Scottish Highland Bagpipe.'[33] Encountering a stark lack of historical documentation on the *Pibroch*, Cooke writes of the attempts over the last two centuries to maintain and standardize the rigour with which the player learns the technique. He shares the generally held view that the *Pibroch* is the 'classical music' of the bagpipes and seeks to see the meaning of the term 'classical' in a non-European sense. He cites a definition from Asian music as 'To be deemed "classical" and authentically representative of the "great

[31] Juliet Shields, 'Highland Emigration and the Transformation of Nostalgia in Romantic Poetry' in *European Romantic Review*, 23:6, 2012, p.770, DOI: 10.1080/10509585.2012.728835.
[32] A.T Corke, 'The Romance of the Pibroch' in *The Musical Times*, vol. 51, no. 811, 1910, pp.578-580.
[33] Peter Cooke, 'The Pibroch Repertory: Some Research Problems.' In *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 102, (1975-76) pp.93-102. 'The *Pibroch*—derived from Scots Gaelic *pìòbaireachd*, "piping"'

tradition" […] its practitioners must be able to authenticate a disciplined oral tradition of performance extending back over several generations.'[34] Performance must exhibit learned discipline in an authentic mode, one which must stretch back at least two centuries from master to teacher as 'disciple succession is a *sine qua non*.'[35] It is a way of disclaiming the idea of Scottish 'folk' music history as being unique to the history of narrative impulse in song. But by drawing the comparison with non-Western musical heritages, he positions the history of the *Pibroch* as one of careful cultural preservation in the face of more dominant musical and cultural modes of the later eighteenth century and beyond.

One of the heaviest blows to the spread of its influence was the battle of Culloden; a word that could be shorthand for Scottish enmity towards the English. The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 brought with it the standardization of imperial rule. As Juliet Shields remarks, 'the rebellions hastened the demise of feudalism in the Highlands as Parliament enacted legislation to bring the wayward northern periphery under the centralized authority of British government.'[36] Rather than seeing this decisive shift as a case for the loss of Highland culture, Shields instead seeks to see how in to the nineteenth century, Gaelic poets' interest in English Romanticism contributed to the very idea of Highland culture rooted by its own sentimental mythology. Shields cites a definition of this literary taxonomy as 'a site of Romantic production' rather than a 'Romantic object or commodity.'[37] She sees the Highland clearances leading to a diaspora of Highland culture and the evolving concept of nostalgia as moving from 'pathology to sentiment'[38] over the last century and a half. In seeking to cross this ontological divide in poetry's unit of analysis, Burnside's 2017 folkloric landscape, post-referendum, enrols an emotional connection to its own appearance, in this case the longing for a place which is on the other side, sliding into mythology like the sirens' song.

A 1901 definition from *The Highland Bagpipe*, W.L Manson writes 'Pibroch . . . The word does not, properly speaking, denote any class of tune — it means pipe-playing — but it is generally applied to a class which in itself includes three classes — the *cruinneachadh* or gathering, the *cumhadh* or lament, and the *failte* or salute.'[39] With the elusive resonance of the funereal *Pibroch* from where it takes its title, the following poem begins *in media res*:

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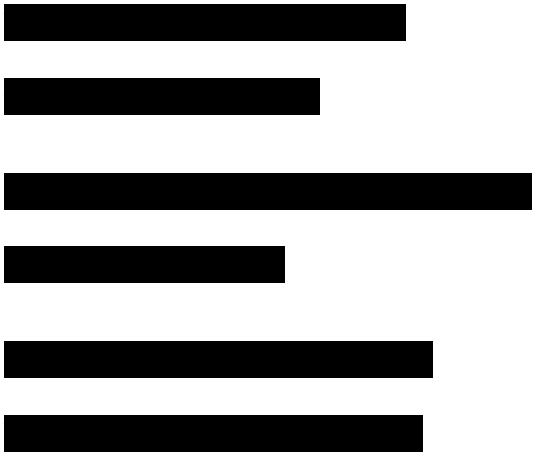
[34] Harold Powers, cited in George Grove ed., *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians (A.D. 1450 – 1889)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[35] Ibid., p.93.
[36] Juliet Shields, 'Highland Emigration and the Transformation of Nostalgia in Romantic Poetry'. p.766.
[37] Ibid., p.766.
[38] Ibid., p.767.
[39] W.L Manson, *The Highland Bagpipe* (Andesite Press, 2017) (1901), p.79.



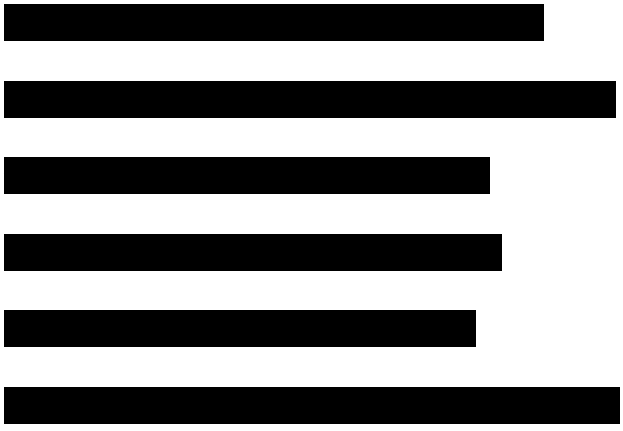
When we are speaking, we are not listening. Furthermore, when we describe something, we are ‘humanizing’, bringing something into being through language; we are calling-forth. Here, the first noun is ‘hills’ and the calling forth comes in to focus by that singular nomination. The ‘land’ from which the hills come forth is then withdrawn in spite of its being called forth by the poem. It does so as an appearance of disappearance, silenced by human speech that has drawn attention to only one aspect of it, the hills. The act of listening involves a duality which is unique to that particular sense in that it involves retention and protention; a listening to, and a listening for. It figures the ear as a porous border between inside and out and points to a temporality of both presence and absence simultaneously, something fundamental to music itself.

‘By that time’ is an elusive date-stamp, and in following the first two lines there is a critique here about preservation of land. Those who fail to act can be said to be ‘all talk’, a hint at the problem of intellectualisation of landscape and environment. In this there is also the veiled critique of textuality. Knickerbocker criticises the idea that ecocritics ‘see their work as curbing the excesses of poststructuralist language theory […] in the battle of representation, if poststructuralists are on the side of language, then ecocritics are on the side of physical reality.’[40] My aim here, following Knickerbocker, is to see this as an unhelpful distinction, because the materiality of language has a deeply felt coherence to the fate of our adjustment in the physical world. Just as constructions of temporality are human categories, as nonhuman however, this ‘time’ in the poem could also be a way of characterising human time-frames as just one construction of temporality among many; ages, aeons, and eras are all different ‘times’. The ecocritical resonance then meets an anthropogenic displacement,

[40] Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics*, p.3.

pointing towards a longer, planetary awareness of our language of place. Perhaps the ecocritical urgency contained within this is the simple assertion that times have changed.

The ‘deer’, as ‘cartoons’ give a first clue about the animist ambition of the poem. In Italian, ‘carta’ is paper and ‘one’ refers to whole or single. ‘Cartone’ is a term recognised as a Renaissance painterly technique which involves first tracing an image in full either by pricking thousands of tiny holes and then covering it with charcoal or using the image on carbon-paper so as to be pressed or transferred on to the canvas. The original cartoon becomes defiled or abandoned. Crucially any cartoons that survive do so by way of their being unused, an almost literal trace of the original before it becomes destined by the human hand and formed as the final art. The cartoon technique involves a process of transferal, or reversal. The latent image leaves something vestigial as an indivisible remainder between man and animal. Burnside incorporates techniques of observation here, as he does with the distortion of the mirror or the pull of the frame to institute the question concerning technology and how it frames our relationship to Nature. In ‘Penitence’ from *A Normal Skin* (1997), we find an earlier instance of this thwarted relationship as the speaker muses on the memory of hitting a deer with his car, with the recollection culminating in a penitence connecting his world the fate of the animal. Here, natural phenomena meet the human at this border between one world and another figuring the car as technological threshold in the shape of the fender:



That final line incorporates the relationship between man and the possible softening of the impact between machines and animals. Fender is also the name for a low guard around a

[41] John Burnside, ‘Penitence’ in *A Normal Skin* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), pp.60-61.

fireplace hearth protecting against the spillage of hot coals on to the floor, another border between the wild spilling over into the domestic.

In the introduction to their edited anthology, Riordan and Burnside cite James P. Carse's aphorism that 'Nature offers no home' which contains, in their view, the 'highest per-word poignancy quotient of recent years.' In a 2011 article, Burnside picks up the statement again, as he says, 'and it is true that we are not at home in nature; on the contrary, with every year that passes, technology and our way of life distance us more from the physical ground of our being.'[42] There are three major conceptual terms that are crucial in this statement, ones which rely on an ethos of finitude which finds rhetorical resonance in the context of a finite planet. The first is 'nature', the second, 'technology', and the third, 'being'. The work of Martin Heidegger is central to the understanding of these terms and how they structure the relations between them. Presence, the idea of *being-there*, requires a futurity that grounds us as *being-towards* something. For Robert Pogue Harrison, in Heidegger's formulation there is always 'something extra' that 'comes first' in human gathering.[43] Echoing the three classes of tune identified by Manson, the *Pibroch* exemplifies the generative element of human practices in the gathering, the lament and the salute. What these classes represent is that they all denote a calling towards something, so, as it is for Heidegger, humans have a grasp of their own being because they grasp that they will one day die. Harrison states 'There is something which directs and orients us towards some future goal (storing the grain, providing for coming needs, legislating laws etc.)' For Heidegger, only *Dasein*—the name he gives to human existence—among all creatures is able to have something in view that directs actions towards longer term goals. And here we come to the quasi-religious element of such a configuration, one which points to the overlap between the religious and the ecological. As Harrison shows, Heidegger's *Dasein* is 'temporally ecstatic, that is, thrown beyond the immediacy of beings in their actuality into a recessive realm of future possibilities. If it did not stand outside itself in such a manner, transcending its temporal present, it could not have sufficient distance from entities to grasp them in their being.'[44] If life is lived ahead of itself, as Heidegger calls it 'being-towards-death', then only in understanding that we will die does the human live. To put this more succinctly, Harrison says that 'finitude generates, rather than puts a limit on, our existential transcendence.'[45]

[42] John Burnside in *New Statesman*, December 12, 2011.
[43] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.90.
[44] Ibid., p.90.
[45] Ibid., p.91.

The continuity and sustainability of the human relies on the existence of a future, but a contemporary problem occurs when the discursive grasp on finitude of the self reckons with the fate of the planet and the finitude of the other, that our actions elicit a veiled compunction about the activity of the Anthropos more generally. Nature then, is 'enframed' as a human category. Furthermore it is 'enframed' by the media of our contemporary moment. When Heidegger talks about technology, he is alluding to this idea that Nature is a codified framework, ultimately a human invention and category:

> The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already affected man in his essence. The rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.[46]

What this means is that technology structures the way 'reality' discloses itself to us. Nature then, is conditioned by the modes in which it is revealed to us. Technology is a mode of revealing, a framework. The car in 'Pibroch' sits in direct opposition to the ear of the speaker. Whereas the headlamps direct light, enframe, and capture something only in direct view from a fixed position, the ear exists in what Marshall McLuhan calls 'acoustic space […] boundless, directionless, horizonless.'[47] What Murray Shafer sees in McLuhan's statements is an overarching metaphor, one which puts the artifice of language in step with the enframing of technology. For McLuhan, the primordial dark was supplanted by the light of writing: 'Writing turned the spotlight on the high, dim Sierras of speech; writing was the visualisation of acoustic space. It lit up the dark.'[48] When Heidegger talks of the essence of technology it is to this aspect which he is drawn, the idea that it is a means of disclosure. What this means is, rather like the example of the foregrounding and backgrounding of 'hills' and 'land' at the beginning of the poem, there is a process of withdrawal whereby the framing of only one aspect comes to stand-in for the whole, and it is one of the consequences of modern technology which sets the world as a series of raw materials like stocks or asset. This 'equipmentality' turns things in to what Heidegger calls '*Bestand*' or 'standing-reserve'

[46] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', trans. William Lovitt (Garland Publishing, 1977), p.309.
[47] Marshall Mcluhan and Edmund Carpenter, eds., *Explorations in Communication* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p.207.
[48] Ibid., p.207.

where the land becomes a resource for human consumption.[49] Jonathan Bate sees this ocular version of tourism's hungry consumption with the eye as a parallel to modern industry's 'relentless consumption of matter.'[50] When Heidegger poses the question of the trajectory of technology, he points to the distancing effect it has on our conception of Nature, echoing the line break of 'rear-view / mirror', he says: 'Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, "get" technology "spiritually in hand." We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control.'[51] That will to mastery finds a corollary reversal in '*Pibroch*' as the moment of arrest comes audibly from the dark of the acoustic sphere, calling out in the machinic light of Heidegger's technological night and Burnside's car.

In the spirit of this reversal in '*Pibroch*', the silence of the hills becomes deafening, operating as the metaphysical space to be temporarily filled. A world is folding inwards, distance and perspective become distorted through a frame like a pull-zoom of a camera where the line break before 'mirror' is a reflection of a diminishing space, setting the poem as focusing in from a position of retreat. Burnside's warped chronology of the hunted deer—now a Bambi-like anachronism—decommissions the human view of the here-and-now in favour of a reversal of the frame, leaving 'the hare in our headlamps' no longer on Whitmanian 'brotherly' terms. A distended, reified Nature is caught in the flash of light. It is a momentary freeze-frame or fresco, the animal stunned by the artificial rays becomes more than itself in the *Zeitlupe* of the spotlight.[52] The poem continues:

[redacted]

[49] 'The name 'standing reserve' assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the challenging revealing. Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object': 'The Question Concerning Technology', p.17.
[50] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p.254.
[51] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p.314.
[52] *Zeitlupe*; Literally 'Time-magnifier'. German term for 'slow-motion' as cinematic technique. *Zeit* – 'time'; *lupe* – 'magnifier'. I am opting to use this term as it gets closer to the phenomenological effects of retarded motion in terms of distance and proximity of the viewer's position than 'slow-motion'.

[redacted]

These lines arrest at the point where we contemplate the abstraction of the local environment by first speaking and then listening in a call and response, and where the language we use is inadequate and faintly imperialistic, silencing the earth's acoustics by human glossolalia. It is worth noting the echo of Wordsworth's owl-mimic from 'There was a Boy'.[53] In that poem, the boy plays a sound through his fingers 'as through an instrument, / blew mimic hootings to the silent owls.' As they respond with 'quivering peals' and 'long halloos', there is a reciprocity gifted by the role-playing of the boy. He takes the place of the owls in order to become them, at least in song. The resonance for this poem comes when the noise recedes:

> Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
>
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
>
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
>
> Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
>
> Would enter unawares into his mind
>
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
>
> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
>
> Into the bosom of the steady lake.

It is the gift of silence which follows the call and response where this poem then deviates. There is a deep incongruity between 'gentle shock' and 'mild surprise' which point to the idea that being 'unawares' is a non-rational precondition for the aural arrest. The appearance of the *Pibroch* finds a corollary in that there must be some ambiguity as to the essence or origin of the sounds, without which it could not arrest the 'heart' above the 'mind' in such a way. In the Wordsworth poem, the moment at which the sound ceases there is an unsolicited intrusion, an animal instinct that recalls the wonder and sublime of the deeper habitat of the owls, and their drone foretells something terrifying with its own 'solemn imagery'. In

[53] William Wordsworth, 'There was a Boy' in William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, (vol.II), eds., Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2008), p.299.

'*Pibroch*', after the owl call there is no more the gift of silence. What persists now is an industrial drone, a white noise which the speaker can no longer position as natural.

In '*Pibroch*', the word 'parse' functions as limitation in language, as an attempt to 'place' the music gives over to the incoherence of an imponderable drone. Firstly, parsing a sentence means resolving it into its component parts to analyse its syntactic structure, emphasising the divisions between subject and predicate which here become blurred. Secondly, it is a term from computing whereby code is rendered or 'parsed' in order that it can be appropriately 'translated' to its destined script. A contemporary example of this is the way search-engines parse words to allow for a broader sweep of the terms as they appear. The drone could be read as something untranslatable by modern technologies, a sustained sound not giving way to syncopation, effectively enchanting it as something pre-technological; an obsolete format for modern sound systems, as mute as a smoke-signal over radio. The deployment of this term is one example in Burnside's work of a slippage where thought is always in process and never quite fully achieved, pulled between one realm and the next. It is an unsettling condition but one in which he finds a freedom for exploring what he calls 'the missed world'.[54] As we shall see, this drone could be a projection of our own inclined sound into a landscape, and here, using the quasi-mythical sounds of the *Pibroch* it creates a heightened ephemerality, calling the listener into a place with a troubling expectation as much as an inclination. The momentary opening in which the words of the poem combine with the music tests the unity of a sense of self within a place as a historical lineage of cultural belonging, reaching through time on the sustained notes of the Highland bagpipes.

Such appeals to enduring mythic sounds in the landscape risk a sentimental atavism, and the Highland bagpipe here is not a wholly welcome memory:

[redacted]

[54] John Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology' in *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science,* ed., Robert Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.93.

There is an inclination here to imagine the sound as some form of enrolment into local stewardship; as if recognising it would qualify one to speak of the environment in which it is historically situated. But knowledge of a thing is not the experience of a thing. The *Pibroch* figures somewhere between imaginative resonance and custodial anthem and it speaks to the idea of ownership of space as always a form of call and response. But claiming a space is also a defiant political act, and the one who controls the airwaves controls the audience in a misted world. The fact that the word is italicised puts some distance between its appearance for and its appearance as something either known or unknown, teetering behind the lexical standard of English. The *Pibroch* as signifier then, does not exist as a container, or exist as a closed form, it is as if its form is attained by its reverberation, by the feelings and actions it may elicit. In short, it must access the ear of the listener before it achieves its status. This testing of people and place connected through the absent space as a reverberation could be an unexplored musical tradition in Western harmonics, becoming a way of achieving some liminal status as an historical drone. In facing down the invention of tradition, teetering with the temptation to claim a nostalgic ownership as the 'piper of place' he dangles the word 'might' as if to chide himself of this sentimental urge. The iconography of the Highland diaspora is not immune to reification as anyone who has ever visited Edinburgh will know. But here, Burnside is questioning this nationalistic hold on his own sense of self in a place he calls home, effectively registered in the 'haar', a unique form of fog that rolls into the east coast of Scotland creating a temporary weather event; its beauty in its locality as it hovers, curiously, a few feet off the ground, not quite claiming the land.

Why the summons of '*the pibroch'*? Is it a ready access to the land through sound that cuts through the local mist; the poet as the piper; the lyric poet who stirs the soul of a people in the way the piper of the *Pibroch* would summon men by its martial call? This falls short by being some kind of self-conscious retreat into a neo-feudalism, fostering a sentimental urge into vestigial nationalism. The *Pibroch* is a portent on the wind, one which is 'local and brief,' and in pausing momentarily before entering the house, it reminds us of the susceptibility with which we reconstruct Nature at moments when it may please us by Romantic allusion or some imagined pride. Shields documents this particular flavour of nostalgia as it pertains to the Highlands:

> People from remote or mountainous areas were supposed to be peculiarly susceptible to nostalgia both because their isolated situation fostered stronger attachments to home and because displacement required greater cultural and psychological adjustments for them. Highlanders in particular were 'notorious for their susceptibility to nostalgia,' and rumors circulated of entire Highland regiments that fled the battlefield after the sound of bagpipes reminded them of home.[55]

Shields is quick to see how the taxonomy of appropriating such a distinct and alien culture has paid a backhanded compliment to the idea of retaining a connection to the local in the technological age of the despoliation of Nature. With the arrival of the nineteenth century individual aesthete, many of those ties to other kin in Nature are disappearing, and it is from here where the nostalgia for a Highland sound moves from a question of space to a question of time. Shields traces this pathological conversion through the Romantic recycling of the Gaelic vision, 'Whereas Highlanders' homesickness was caused by spatial or geographic distance from the homeland, Romantic nostalgia depended upon temporal distance, whether historical and communal or psychological and individual, from an irrevocable past.'[56]

Acknowledging a similar scarcity of available writing on the cultural significance of the *Pibroch,* in effect confirming this historical severance from the past, and perhaps in want of retrospectively accounting for its place in later discourses of ethnomusicality, Cooke identifies one source in Joseph McDonald's *Compleat Theory* of 1762 that describes the role of the piper:

> The original design of the bagpipe . . was to animate a sett of men approaching an enemy and to solemnise rural diversions in fields and before walking companys. To play amidst rocks, hills, valleys and coves where echoes rebounded and not to join a formal regulated concert.[57]

Belonging to oral traditions and coming much later as a cultural mode in Cooke's analysis, the *Pibroch* is a sound that rings through the glens and mountains where 'echoes rebounded', distilling the effect of there being no identifiable source for the music. It is a clever 'echo' of its own history in Western music where in the search for the origin of the sound, it could be

[55] Ibid., p.767.
[56] Ibid., p.768.
[57] Joseph Macdonald, *A Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* in Edinburgh University Library, MS La. 3, c.1762. p, 804.

said that it is the landscape itself that transmits and reverberates the sound; there is no concert hall, no spotlight on the piper and no domesticated space for the acoustics to find more subtle registers. The elusiveness of the *Pibroch* as 'classical' art is one reason why it is of interest to ethnomusicologists. Another reason for music's late appearance in native assertions of cultural Scottishness is the fact that music is more ephemeral than literature or other expressive arts particularly at the time. But this retreat into the present exonerates the poet's naivety toward registering a sound that lies beyond description. The speaker is at odds with the alluring sound in his environment he cannot fathom, poised at the threshold of home and the outside. The following stanzas situate the final part of the poem in the wider context of the Anthropocene and the question of the animal as it relates to contemporary theories of sustainability and cultural preservation in the face of a widening ecological crisis that disrupts notions of time as well as space. The incongruity of such a 'poetry of place' finds rhetorical resonance as a form of ecocriticism when pitched on a decidedly nonhuman scale.

The Wolf at the Door

The Anthropocene provides the backdrop for talking about nonhuman ontologies, yet in opening up history on a non-anthropocentric scale it also edifies the condition of time itself. The remainder of the poem will be explored in this section by turning to the question of the nonhuman through the nexus of the Anthropocene. The lyric, then, becomes an operational space in which to confront ecological thought. The writing of poetry as an ecological register of the comportment of Nature has its roots in British Romanticism where a sublime object is somehow 'out there' as an aesthetics of natural beauty to counter the denigration of the landscape of the late eighteenth century and the concomitant forms of industrialised, alienated labour. Lifting a definition of 'green Romanticism' from Kevin Hutchings's 2007 survey of the ecocritical field, Vince Carducci broadly asserts that it stands to mean 'the representation in poetry and other texts of humankind's position vis-à-vis the natural world.'[58] Careful to warn against appropriating forms of writing that in today's criticism can be seen as markedly ecologically concerned, Carducci reads 'green Romanticism' as an index in finding the beginnings of a reified Nature in the age of capitalist consumption, arguing instead that the modern interpretations of these older texts is to see the conditions for their appearance as 'foreshadowing conditions that now extend worldwide.'[59]

[58] Vince Carducci, 'Ecocriticism, Ecomimesis, and the Romantic Roots of Modern Ethical Consumption' in *Literature Compass*, vol. 3, no. 3, (2009) pp.632-646. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2009.00638.x.
[59] Ibid., p.634.

So far in the poem, Burnside has conjured a concatenation of objects both figurative and oblique that interweave a metaphysical space. His 'poetics of ambience' is the gulf between the present and the timeless that traverses the ontological divide between self and place in the same way Morton's ecological thought demands a willingness to trespass into Nature's 'standing reserve.' Running alongside this is the concept of the Anthropocene which according to Jeremy Davies, is 'a way to help us get a grasp on the fact that green politics now has to confront the role that human societies play in deep time itself.'[60] The Anthropocene is in one sense, an acknowledgment of failure that our precarious material world of supply and demand is beginning to buckle under its own excess, killing off the source of its strength. But to insert the Anthropocene as catch-all way of referring to carbon capitalism as the *prima facie* case for global warming 'in some ill-defined slice of the recent past', is an error in the judgement of scale that Davies believes is where the urgency of its appearance resides.[61] The ecocritical value in attending to poetry is to delve into this deep time where mysticism comes unbridled from dogma. I pick up the poem halfway through stanza nine, at the turn following the 'haar', and here the poem ushers towards this new temporality, a register to locate the mysterious drone of the *Pibroch*, a waveform that lies beyond human frequencies. To do this, Burnside turns to lost wild animals that once roamed Scotland:

The wolf here figuring as an historical feature of the Scottish landscape with its own howling drone is framed as a way of pulling the 'mirror' further back through time. A pack of wild wolves is certainly a danger to humans but having now disappeared from Scotland due to human hunting, it could be that the human is now the prime threatening force in Nature. It is difficult to tell if the latter two stanzas refer to the wolf or the speaker of the poem, such is

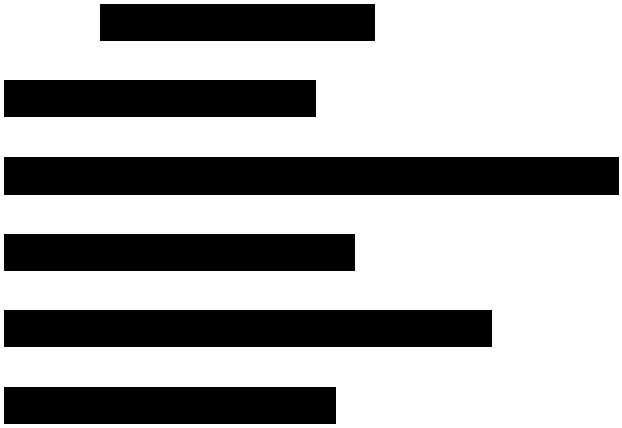
[60] Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), p.59.
[61] Ibid., p.110.

the shared mammalian instinct to think home by the seasons. Nevertheless we have the word link inside 'slink', shaken 'loose' from the voiceless, sibilant 's' which comes back to us through thought in 'thinks' and then re-joins man to animal in 'seasons'

In an earlier poem from 2014's *All One Breath*, 'Travelling South, Scotland, August 2012', the date stamped title is an entry into a log, or a dialogue with our indexicalised discourse for ecocriticism and the Anthropocene.[62] The 'South' in the title echoes the figure of speech 'going south' as a condition of crisis. We find in the opening line another example of the relationship between centre and province: 'It gets late early out here / in the lacklustre places' which evokes an encroaching dark ecological threshold felt most keenly in the places lacking the lustrous sheen, the gloss of aesthetic beauty of landscape. In this place you find ecomimesis as neglect and entropy. Places that lack lustre are dark, neglected, forgotten, and here, they may also be the indexes of anthropogenic climate change. Moving away from the glass and steel, perma-lit urban centres which mask the fate of the 'rural sprawl', Burnside's borderlands are where the fate of the natural world will be witnessed. The idea of it 'getting late' implies that there are predestined timescales which can be measured in symptoms of decay; symptoms of ruination which rear their head in the peripheral edgelands where there are 'indelible traces / of polythene wrapping; marrowfat clogging the drains / on the road that runs out to the coast / then disappears. / A last bleed of gold in the west, like a Shan Shui painting, / then darkness.' A typical Burnsidian technique incorporating chiaroscuro here, where late capitalism's consumerist rot appears first and foremost in these backwood places as a darkening condition. The 'last bleed of gold' from Shan Shui is not incidental either to this fate. Gold as a colour in Shan Shui represents a direction—northwest—but also an element—metal—which stands as the ultimate product of industrial machino-facture. The fate of the west against the Shan Shui depictions of mountains meets its fateful opposite, the disappearing road like a glacier melting into the sea. The speaker as a witness to 'a steady delete / of anything that tells us what we are' is also caught up in a timeless zone, as if the dated title is witness itself lying in wait like a message in a bottle to be discovered. As such, the fates of the animals and rumours of their presence speak at once to the idea of rewilding as human intervention in the natural world, but also to confuse the appearance of them for our future witness. In the second stanza, a confused chronology of the animals that once roamed Scotland meets the idea of rewilding, in this case the reintroduction of wolves into the Scottish Highlands. In the poem, the registering of the animal's disappearance could be for

[62] John Burnside, *All One Breath*, pp.51-53.

the second time, posing the question as to the efficacy of reintroducing species which met their fate at the hands of the human the first time round. Who's to say they would fare better the second?:

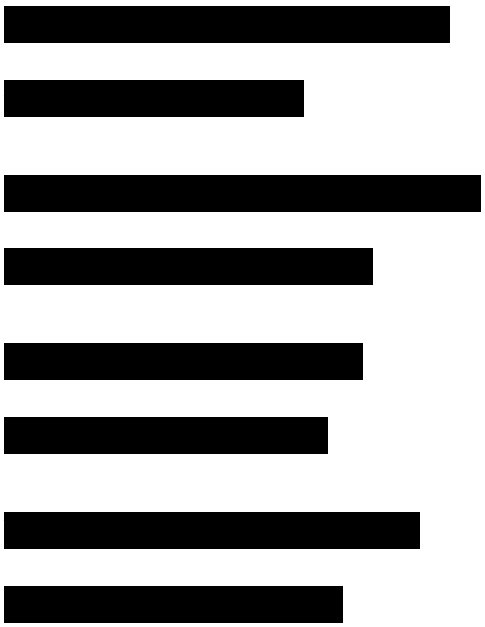


The poem reads as if from a rediscovered time capsule where the chronology of the animal's presence is interrupted by interchangeable recollections of what once were and what might have been.

In '*Pibroch*', the preternatural reading of home by the cyclical attunement to the seasons places the wolf and the human on older temporal lines, allowing the poem to be read in the context of a longer planetary scale which the Anthropocene affords. Despite its proliferating interpretations, the indeterminacy of the Anthropocene concept could be driven simply by the question of knowing how powerful we are as a species. This poem in some ways charts that historical journey at once through the preservation of human cultural practices in light of domineering, globally imperialist forces, but also in the personal psychological drama of one's political and ecological self as it relates to the idea of home.

At the close of '*Pibroch*', there is a confusion of timescales and distance which under the aegis of the Anthropocene circumvent hitherto human measurements. The closing lines question the credulity of the speaker's wonder, the sound finding some inner parallel universe offering an escape clause to the reified nostalgia of what once was, and the choice to see one's own life as sustainable with and codetermined by the mute register of animated life. It is a reckoning for humanity as the custodian of all living things:

[63] Ibid., p.51.



The dog-wolf is a recurring animal in Burnside. A liminal creature caught between wilderness and the human shadow. At what point does one become the other, and does the domestication of the hound represent a step on the road to the domination and domestication of Nature? There's no halloo of the hunting party baying the dogs to pursue the quarry, just puzzlement remains as the silence from the opening line calls the man and his hound to the fathomless sound that the poem has tracked so closely. The dog-whistle, inaudible to human ears, carries sound waves at such a higher pitch as if to prove this ephemeral register lies beyond range, just as dog years passively shorten the scale once more, disclosing the limits of human perception. Here we can say that the referential element of the *Pibroch* figures as representative of a sound of a natural order, one that has been fatefully muted by the human-made world. The ephemerality of music as opposed to literature highlights here the sonorous quality to the earth's natural timbres: a cacophony of sounds underwritten by a time-stamped 'pulse' before the poetic 'song of the earth', a Heideggerian flourish taken from a line of Hölderlin which makes explicit the connection to Jonathan Bate's new-millennium poetics of the same name from 2000. Bate acknowledges this song as a call to us, warning of the dangers explicit in the dilemma of environmentalism and Romantic nostalgia:

> But where is the voice of nature calling us? Back to a premodern age? Or forward to a saner future? There are dangers in the psychological mechanism which attracts us to places which seem to be purer than the cities in which the majority of moderns spend their working lives – a 'natural' landscape, a 'harmonious' village community, a

> ‘primitive’ wilderness. The urge to go back to nature may lead us into nostalgia for an historical era when, we suppose, humans were less alienated from nature.[64]

It has been the aim of this chapter to see in Burnside’s lyric a desire for a positive rehabilitation of older ties to community through song. Jonathan Bate is careful not to position this nostalgia as some kind of melancholic pathology, instead allowing for the possibility that listening in the right way we may live in a ‘saner future’. In the poem, the wonder at which the drone calls the speaker is one that ‘beguiles’, as if only something so mysterious could affect him to come away from his ‘warmth’, the gradual warming of the earth in exchange for a domesticated peace. The sonorous quality of sound across a landscape has an immaterial quality to it, in other words it cannot be placed. In Burnside’s lyric it is a connective, literal, sustained note in the form of the classical bagpipes, and with its funereal and martial resonance, it signifies universal loss and the call to protect in the spirit of a unity in Nature. It is a warning that speaks for mankind in the form of a memorial toll, recalling John Donne, ‘never send to know / for whom the bell tolls.’ The expanded lyricism of this poem takes us from local place to global time eschewing the seduction of nostalgia for a sustained sound that carries into the present and must, for causes that lie beyond human scales, remain undisturbed. Continuing this theme, in the following chapter I turn to bees in Burnside’s poetry, pulling back from a nostalgia about the mythology of bees and what they are for us. Letting things be, leaning into mystery, like the sound of the Pibroch is an approach which allows room for other, nonhuman beings to go in peace.

[64] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.36.

Chapter Two

A Reverie of Bees: Reparation and Renewal in John Burnside's 'Ahimsa Bee Sutra'

> To make a prairie it takes a clover
>
> and one bee, —
>
> One clover, and a bee,
>
> And revery.
>
> The revery alone will do
>
> If bees are few.[1]

Emily Dickinson

> *The sign and credentials of the poet are, that he announces that which no man foretold. He is the true and only doctor; he knows and tells; he is the only teller of news.*[2]

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Beehives have often been invoked as representative of a range of human polities; from kingdoms to republics, conservative hierarchies to socialist utopias. As the centre of apian industry, over time the hive has come to represent an enclosed microcosm of perfection and order, as Samuel Purchas, in 1657 wrote in *A Theatre of Politicall Flying Insects*: 'For every Hive, or Commonwealth, endeavours to bee a Non-such, and to engross all within its own circumference'.[3] Today, in David Farrier's *Anthropocene Poetics,* he picks up the idea of animal metaphor in lyric, quoting Donna Haraway as generating new 'world-making entanglements', making available new forms of figuration which allow human experience to peer into the animal world.[4] On bees, he signposts how visions of the hive have furnished ideas of 'cooperation, sacrifice and civic responsibility'.[5] This is to see an intermingling

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[1] Emily Dickinson, 'To Make a Prairie', Part II, Nature, XCVII in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), p.309.
[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet' (1844) in *Modern Criticism: Theory and Practice*, eds., Walter Sutton & Richard Foster (Indianapolis and New York: The Odyssey Press, 1963), p.50.
[3] Samuel Purchas, *A Theatre of Politicall Flying-Insects. Wherein Especially the Nature, the Worth, the Work, the Wonder, and the Manner of Right-ordering of the Bee, is Discovered and Described* (London, 1657), p.13. Samuel Purchas shared the name of his father, the Anglican cleric, Samuel Purchas (1575-1626).
[4] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* in David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), p.97.
[5] Ibid., p.99.

between the fate of human systems and bees. To glimpse this idealized system is to locate some sense of shared space, a 'commonwealth' animated by a certain posture directed towards the bees' world. In the twenty-first century, with the increasing use of neonicotinoid pesticides in bee farming and the consequent discovery of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), that relationship is, according to Farrier, one of a dense 'knot[s] of labor, technology, violence, and love.'[6] Our pesticide-ridden world and the ever-growing cultivation of monocultures have contributed to a present crisis in the global bee population, even as we have just come to recognise bees as fundamental to sustainable food supplies. 'Every third bite of food you take, you can thank a bee or other pollinator for'[7] writes biologist E. O Wilson which, at a stroke, codetermines our own fate with the survival of honeybees worldwide. Today we recognise the force of that judgement as bees are responsible for at least 130 edible foodstuffs, all of which are consumed the world over. Food that owes its entire existence to the activity of bees include alfalfa, almond, apple, asparagus, avocado, blueberry, broccoli, carrot, cauliflower, celery, cranberry, legume seed and onion. This is not to mention foods that depend up to 90 percent on bees and other insect pollination such as cherry, cucumber, kiwifruit, macadamia, pumpkin, squash.[8] The fate of bees in the twenty-first century incorporates environmental anxieties in the human world about issues of sustainability and global human health. As Farrier explains, the contributing factors to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) are all part of the smoke and noise of industrial agriculture:

> The possible causes are all linked to simplifications of industrialized agriculture: malnutrition from the monoculture crops the bees are used to pollinate; the loss of genetic diversity as a result of selective breeding; disruption caused by transporting hives long distances to pollinate new farms; a pest known as the varroa mite; and neonicotinoids, a class of pesticide widely used in Western commercial agriculture that acts as a neurotoxin, impairing worker bees' ability to navigate. The most likely cause is a combination of factors, but bees' sensitivity to neonicotinoids led to a European Union-wide ban in 2013.[9]

Burnside's work incorporates these contemporary urgencies whilst finding a sympathetic link with early-modern understandings of bees as model providers of abundant ecological and

[6] David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction*, p,99.
[7] Ibid., p.29.
[8] Noah Wilson-Rich with Kelly Allin, Norman Carreck, and Andrea Quigley, *The Bee: A Natural History* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2014), p.96.
[9] David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*, p.99.

theological bounty, as Purchas wrote: 'the bee is a little creature, but God's smallest springs prove at last main Oceans, his least beginnings grow into great works, great wonders.'[10] Indeed, 'without bees ever being aware of it'[11] writes James Meek, 'humans have made them prophets, moralists and role models' and bee poems are not new; from Virgil's *Georgics* to Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Coleridge's 'Work Without Hope', Yeats's 'Lake Isle of Innisfree' and 'Meditations in a time of Civil War' to Sylvia Plath's bee poems sequence closing her posthumous collection, *Ariel*; Carol Ann Duffy's *The Bees* (2011) (her first as poet Laureate) and Sean Borodale's *Bee Journal* (2012), bees bring together agriculture, politics, climate science, and progeniture within poetics. This section will explore some of these ideas by focussing on the activity of bees as an extended metaphor for continuity, peace-making and ideas of meaningful dwelling in John Burnside's poetry.

In 2018, Burnside published a short, dual language collection of poems on bees, entitled *Im Namen der Biene/In the Name of the Bee.*[12] The collection of 16 poems, split over two sections, 'Bee Myths' and 'Of Locusts and Wild Honey' brings together the breadth of themes mentioned above, but does so with recourse to the power of language in the face of what the translator calls 'the unhoused area of the threshold between being, memory and absence' ('*behausten Bereich einer Schwelle zwishcen Sein, Gedächtnis und Abwesenhiet*').[13] That 'unhoused' state speaks to ideas about the corruption in our sense of dwelling, ushering in an unhomely lyric at some sort of tipping point 'where we are talking of the end' ('Pure').[14] Burnside treads Ted Hughes's *Crow* territory in the opening poem, seeking out a 'Creation Myth', pulling together the myths of bees to some apocryphal origin, 'In the beginning, nothing was here […] – until the first damp swarm / of living bees // entered the space between those fields of light / and everything began'.[15] By contrast, the idea of beginnings and ends in human terms such as ruin and rebuilding is deftly redolent of Yeats as 'some made their homes in rocks, or crumbling walls'[16]. It seems Burnside is aware of the tradition of bee poetry and bee invocations, and he is building on this in *Im Namen der Biene*.

[10] Samuel Purchas, cited in Mary Baine Campbell, 'Busy Bees: Utopia, Dystopia and the Very Small' in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, Duke University Press, Fall 2006: DOI 10.1215/10829636
[11] James Meek, review of Bee Wilson, *The Hive: The Story of the Honeybee and Us* in *London Review of Books*, vol., 28, no. 21, 4 November, 2004.
[12] John Burnside, *Im Namen der Biene / In the Name of the Bee*, trans. Iain Galbraith (Mainz: Golden Luft Verlag, 2018).
[13] My translation.
[14] Burnside, *Im Namen der Biene/ In the Name of the Bee*, p.22.
[15] Ibid., p.6.
[16] Ibid., p.8.

This doubly pre- and posthuman notion of being unhoused inspires the approach of this chapter. I will discuss those three concepts: being, memory, and absence as key terms underlying Burnside's poetics more broadly. Exploring ideas about the house as hive and the location of memory in the idea of building allows for a commentary on the continual anthropogenic process of building and decay, and how absence creates a condition for a posthuman ontology. I will see how Burnside attempts to de-sanctify the honeybee to move towards some sense of secular resurrection adequate to the contemporary crisis around the fate of bees.

In a 2015 article, 'Telling the Bees' Burnside draws attention to how, for 'almost as long as humans have cultivated the land, we have kept honeybees (*Apis mellifera*).'[17] Documenting this long anthropological co-existence and cultivation, it appears as if bees form part of a universal, not to say deeply spiritual realm, in which honey has played a symbolic role across cultures and religions. Burnside chronicles this long association from 'ancient Egyptians' who 'used honey in their rites for the dead; the Bible, the Hindi Vedas and the Koran all make reference to the healing qualities of honey.'[18] In Burnside's hands, to give bees a designated place which moves away from their co-option into various myths is to move from an instrumental appropriation of their industry towards an ethics of respect. It is to find in bees an example of what it means to live in harmony with the natural world and to cause as little harm as possible.

Burnside shows how the mythology of bees have put them at risk:

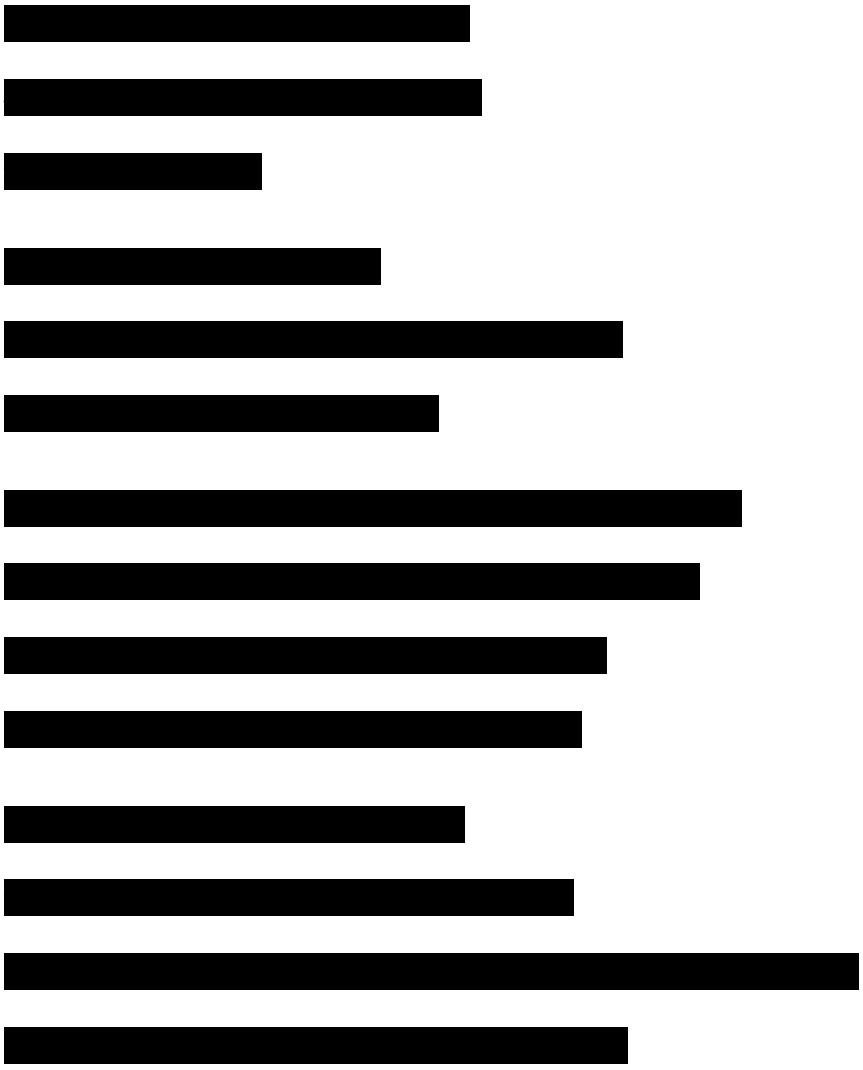
> The causes are not yet clear, but in my view the myth of the indefatigable honeybee has played a part. What is happening serves to highlight how dangerous our stories about other animals can be, if they warp our understanding of the animals' real nature and needs.[19]

Humans have long tampered with bees in the name of science, so much so that farmed honeybees today are 'one-third larger than their wild cousins, but their lives are 15 percent shorter.'[20] These mutations are the dangers of which Burnside's caution makes clear. An admixture of myth and appropriation is bound together in the central poem, 'Ahimsa Bee

[17] John Burnside, 'Telling the Bees' in *Nature*, vol. 521, 7 May, 2015, p.29.
[18] Ibid., p.29-30.
[19] Ibid., p.29.
[20] Jake Kosek, 'Ecologies of Empire: On the Uses of the Honeybee,' in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, p.651.

Sutra' I will present a little later, one of two bee poems from his 2009 collection *The Hunt in the Forest.*[21]

In exploring Burnside's bees, I want to begin by showing an earlier poem, 'An Operating System' from *The Myth of the Twin* (1994)[22], where we find clues to this ongoing lineage; a 'fabric' between the 'mind' and the natural world which holds in balance the beehive and the operation of thought itself. We enter this world through some kind of threshold between one world and the next, figured here through the ambiguous signifier of a room, an idea picked up again in the later poem as the main focus of this chapter:



[21] John Burnside, *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.44.
[22] John Burnside, 'An Operating System' in *The Myth of the Twin*, p.33.

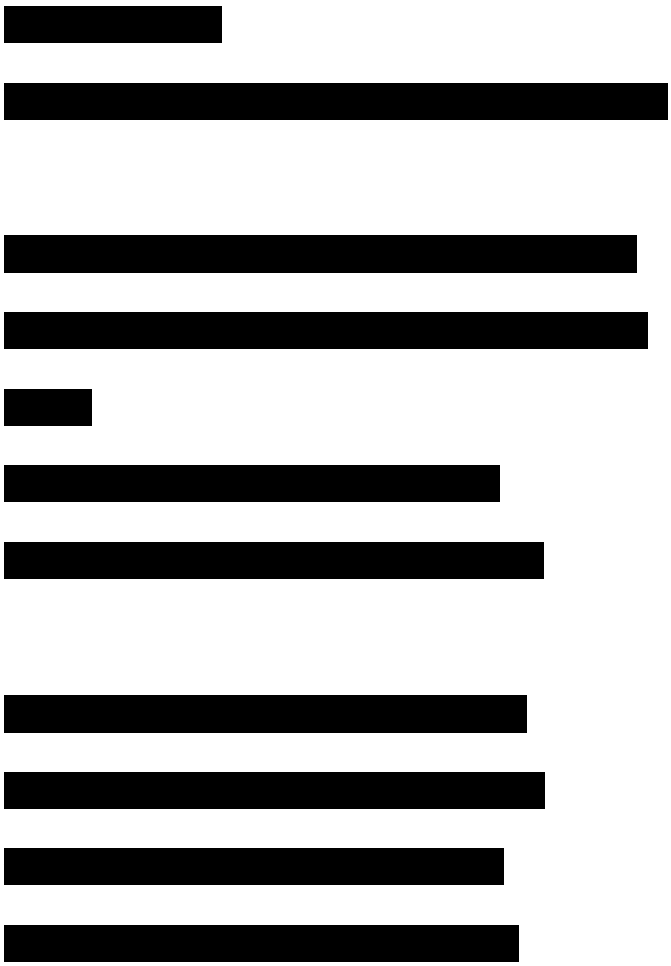
Contrasting with the title and the line ‘locked machine’ we find an abundance of natural imagery and one ‘clue’ as to the craft of Burnside’s poetic gift of finding the slide between thought and the maintenance of the wider world.

To extrapolate this idea of the interiority of the mind ‘wide as a room, but tiny’, my aim here, in hovering close to ideas of the hive, is to say something about what Arnold Berleant describes as a ‘move beyond the architecture of refuge to an architecture of continuity’.[23] The mind opening out, threaded to something much larger and numinous, from ‘least beginnings’ to ‘great wonders’. Just as Farrier’s Anthropocene poetics shows us how interconnected we are to the bees’ world, so indeed does Burnside’s animistic poetry move from withdrawal and separation to a spiritual openness, allowing for a negotiated space in which to rethink our coexistence with other living things and the whole operating system of the natural world.

AHIMSA BEE SUTRA

[redacted]

[23] Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (University Press of Kansas, 1997), p.123.



The poem's title draws on Buddhist concepts. As he wrote in the article, he is alive to the fact that bees have been co-opted across religions and civilisations. The title then, aims for a pantheistic appeal to ideas of spiritual grace from a non-western origin. In doing this the poem embraces a world-making sensibility, elevating bees beyond the confines of creed, religion and region. In the poem, Burnside creates a stalled temporality, a kind of *in parenthesis* in which to locate a timelessness of the relation between beauty, decay, and the renewal of an unchanging order and rule—*Sutra*. The poem is a hymn to the assemblage and communion of all living things. *Himsa,* the Sanskrit word for harm, becomes a universalist invocation, a Buddhist prayer in *Ahimsa,* the absence of harm.

The poem is written in direct address to 'you', directing an inextricable link of combined or entwined fates which moves from the personal to the political, demonstrating Burnside's appeal to interdependent testimonies of immanence. I want to look at some ideas in Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* to bring out the connection between the natural architecture of the hive and how it has been seen as a variable model of order for a huge range of universalising projections whilst at the same time providing a source of reverie for the

singular poet. This is to find a link between the poet's project of meaningful dwelling in a compromised world by first making peace on a small scale. As Bachelard has said:

> I feel more at home in miniature worlds, which, for me, are dominated worlds […] To have experienced miniature sincerely detaches me from the surrounding world, and helps me resist dissolution of the surrounding atmosphere.
>
> Miniature is an exercise that has metaphysical freshness; it allows us to be world conscious at slight risk. And how restful this exercise on a dominated world can be![24]

Burnside's poem could be said to be 'world conscious', invoking Buddhist spirituality, and it attempts to locate a 'metaphysical freshness', which balances myth with science in approaching the dominion of bees today.

In the *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard identifies the reverie as a psychic condition which internalises poetic images in order that they can then be communicated. It is a state which, as he says, prepares 'poetic pleasure for other souls.[25] But there is a reciprocity in poetic reverie, as opposed to dreaming; 'the soul keeps watch.'[26] There is a link here first with the human operating system of thought, and the hive's natural order, but also how this is a chiasmic relation of back and forth with the idea of the making of a shared space where we find an echo of Emily Dickinson's lines from 'To Make a Prairie'. For Bachelard, for a poetic image, 'the flicker of the soul is all that is needed'.[27] Seeing nonhuman objects as possessive of souls is a form of animism, but as industry became global and bees have been put to work in the service of global food production, the soul finds an instrumentalised extension, as Adorno and Horkheimer warned, 'Animism endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things.'[28] The motive then is to turn back from this instrumentalization and find a refuge in the resonance of the sound of bee activity for our own sense of shared habitus away from the buzz of commerce.

In Bachelard's reading, the 'house' represents a physical as well as an interiority of the self. The singularity of the house of memory is what the poet calls upon in his reader:

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[24] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p.161.
[25] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.xxii.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.21.

> For the real houses of memory, the houses to which we return in dreams, the houses that are rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description […] The first, onierically definitive house, must retain its shadows. For it belongs to the literature of depth, that is, to poetry.[29]

For Bachelard, the house represents a multiplicity of places of repose: nooks, turrets, garrets or simply rooms; think back to the 'room you discover by chance' from 'Operating System'. The house 'houses' our memories, it lodges them as images, not to grant through them an accessible, liveable real-time but such that they take on a material quality—a particular smell or flavour, a song or melody, or perhaps the way the light falls through a window-pane. For Bachelard these provide the contours and forms for the transportation of memories through rich poetic images that create the idea of home and space we inhabit 'poetically'. One of the many neologisms Bachelard introduces is the idea of 'topoanalysis'. For the psychoanalyst, he should turn to the 'localization of our memories.' Topoanalysis, 'an auxiliary of psychoanalysis […] would be a systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives.'[30] This comes close to a summary of Burnside's poem, an intimate phenomenological search for the original home or hive in which we took refuge. This construction of a psychological space of memory does something important to the question of time. In Bachelard's formulation, all memories are 'motionless' which comes close to the idea of *Sutra* as an unchanging condition we see in the poem as 'rise and fall'; memories exist in a vacuum of non-linearity, sealed hermetically from temporal continuity. Why does this occur? In one sense, it is about the episodic nature of memory, but it is also about a composite frame in which the mind makes memories and attaches them to that space. For Bachelard then, the house is a storehouse of dreams and memories where the very idea of protection or the shell of the house, just like the hive, forms the ability to thrive. Burnside has talked of the mind as a house, that certain rooms, pertinent to this poem, lurk 'at the back' which call the poet to a repository of reverie and meaning making. In an interview he says,

> I imagine the mind as a big house. You've got the parlour where you sit and have tea, your bedroom, your kitchen, your bathroom. But actually there are endless rooms around you that you don't use, and there's one room way at the back – the furnace room, maybe – where your thoughts begin.[31]

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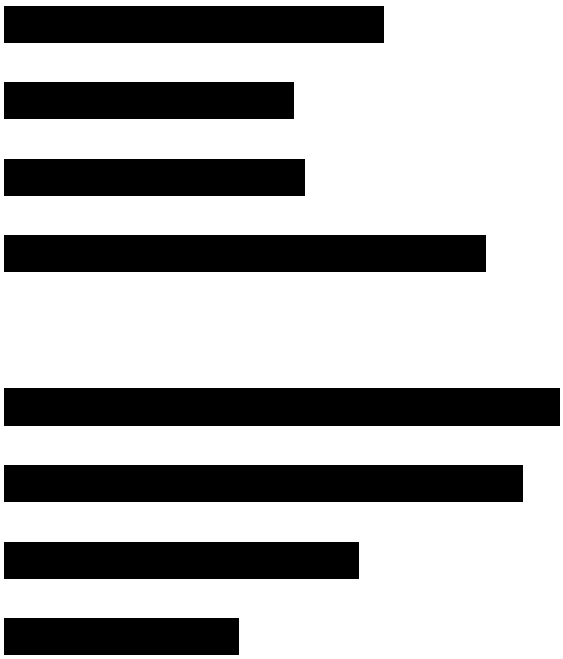
[29] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.13.
[30] Ibid., p.8.
[31] 'John Burnside: A Life in Writing', interview with Sarah Crown in *The Guardian*, 26 August, 2011.

At all costs, something must always remain closed in the memory as a way of understanding how poetry works. Bachelard proposes a simple formulation ‘we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.’[32] One function of poetry more generally is to point towards things we cannot say, those things that burn quietly in the furnace room.

In staying close to his idea, I will now explore a close reading of Burnside’s poem in relation to the house of memory in question. If the poem is defined by its title as a spiritual invitation, how does one seek to enact by prayer, a protection against harm when those doing the praying begin with grief of their own thwarted belonging in that relationship? How, in other words, does one delimit oneself, or displace oneself, if only temporarily to locate a safe-place, a sovereignty in reflection. The reverie is one form of temporary refuge allowing access to the bees’ world as it crosses over metaphorically into our own. With sex, the poem points to that literal communion where our home-making finds its first iteration.



The opening, with its adverbial declaration, ‘Doubtless’ is akin to an intuited form of knowledge (*Ansatz*), conditioning a felt mutuality between the human and the microscoped world of the insects’ dominion. The word acts as an article of faith prompting a religious interpretation as one among many. The poem finds a ‘reserved’ formal dwelling place ‘at the end of the house’ in question, marking out a definitive space for the bees but also hiving off a liminal zone between the earth-bound and the heavenly. The enjambment which opens the

[32] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.6.

second stanza, ‘or else’ carries a warning about the location of animals more generally; something is at stake. They have the right to a designated space. If not, in losing them we will destroy our own history and tear away our humanity. The door implies an interiority, but as before, this may be metaphysical as well as a designated physical place. Are they with us, without us, behind us, above us, even ahead of us?

The ‘place’ at ‘the end of the house’ has distinct human proportions, and the poem proposes a link between an idea of some heavenly architecture and its relation to place in the here and now; the hive as utopian megastructure expressing all manner of earth-bound polities and providences. In this there is an echo of Milton’s bee simile comparing fallen angels with swarming bees as they enter their fallen place, *Pandæmonium,* at once reduced to a diminutive form whilst paradoxically maintaining their infinite, not to say timeless expansive form where they ‘in narrow room / Throng numberless’.[33] In Burnside’s early poetry there was a preoccupation with Angels and the Annunciation.[34] Here, that interest is carried over, as it was for Milton’s simile into the realm of the earthly in bees. Milton’s debt to Virgil’s *Georgics* which places man as the arbiter of the life of the hive in the role of bee-keeper echoes the way Burnside’s later poetry finds man as the fallen creature, now fully responsible for the providence of animals’ fate. In an interview from 2015 he was asked about this early fixation:

> Ah. *Angels*. That was a while ago. I guess I was playing with what I had grown up with, just as I played then – and sometimes still play – with Christian/ Catholic iconography and concepts. I guess there are two kinds of writing, in broad (very broad) terms: writing that interrogates what is there already, existing/ received ideas and images for example, and writing that proposes another way of looking at things, an individual *Weltanschauung*, to go back to that old term. It’s hard to get away with either of these unless there is a certain amount of play in the process. For me, thinking about angels in particular gave rise to a certain kind of play that, at the time, interested me.[35]

[33] John Milton, ‘Paradise Lost: Book One’, *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (R. Gilbert, London: St. John’s Square, 1826), p.97.
[34] John Burnside, ‘the way the dead’, ‘the hoop’ in *The Hoop* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1988); ‘Annunciations’ in *Common Knowledge*; ‘The noli me tangere incident’ in *Feast Days* (Secker & Warburg, 1992); ‘The Resurrection’, ‘Angel’s Eyes’ in *The Myth of the Twin*; ‘Lack of Evidence I, II, III’, ‘Parousia I, II, III, IV, V’ in *Swimming in the Flood* (London: Cape Poetry, 1995).
[35] ‘Animals in and around poetry’, interview with John Burnside a cura di Myrtha de Meo-Ehlert, Lo Sguardo - rivista di filosofia N. 18, 2015 (II) - Confini animali dell’anima umana. Prospettive e problematiche.

Architectonic and play are key terms in Burnside's poetry. The epigraph to 'Travelling South, Scotland, August 2012'[36] comes from Ian D. Suttie, 'necessity is not the mother of invention; play is' suggesting that there is, echoing Adorno and Horkheimer, in our instrumental reasoning, an overlooking of the idea of play as the driving force for discovery and innovation. That poem 'unfurls into a light we could have known / but failed to see' reinforcing a blindness at the heart of 'the kingdom-at-hand / this order / this dialectic / this mother of invention / ceaseless play'. Indeed, ethnologists remain mystified by what has been called the waggle dance, the way bees loop in the air to communicate to other bees where the pollen lies.[37] The sense of play is only guessed at; how can we know if animals 'play'? But the poetic licence reaches for prelapsarian communication through need (necessity) and instinct, conflating ritual dance with a tribal knowledge. As Jo Shapcott writes, hovering in a similar zone attempting to 'speak bee'; poetry attempting to articulate the ineffable in 'The Threshold', 'Workers landed on my tongue / and danced their bee dance as their sisters / crowded round for the knowledge'.[38] In Burnside that approach is a necessary part of an ecological participation, as Scott Brewster explains:

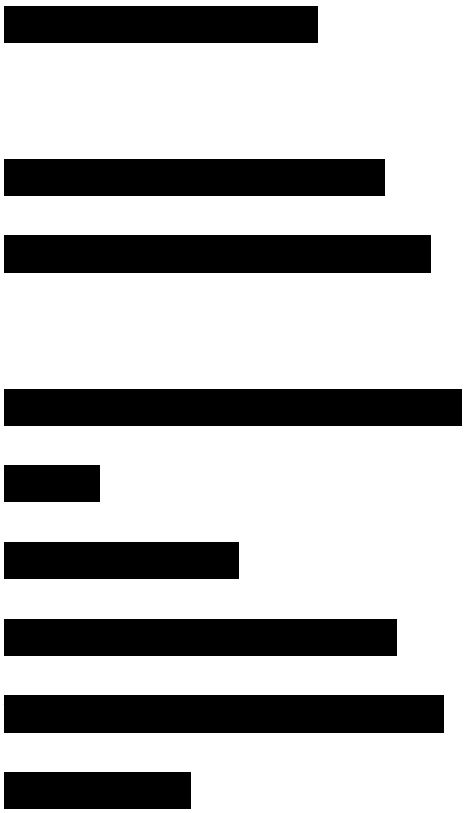
> Burnside's lyric longs for concealment, purity and withdrawal, but this desire is compromised by the absolute obligation to open out to otherness, to embrace the world, however tentatively, with all the attendant risks of contamination – for both the inside and the outside – that the encounter with the *eco-* might entail.[39]

Brewster finds in Burnside's later poetry an attempt at reckoning with the wild, teetering or 'verging' (see below) between objective reality and its felt effect as a form of animist coexistence. In essence, Burnside's bee reverie is a non-knowing as a primal condition. There is a movement from thinking *about* to thinking *with* bees.

In the same interview where he talked of his early interest in angels, he spoke of his interest in Gnosticism, that poetry is some kind of alchemical process by which to achieve a kind of *pleroma* or fullness. As an example of that post-secular rejection of Angels he quotes a recent, uncollected poem 'Lichtschwarm' which begins:

[redacted]

[36] John Burnside, *All One Breath*, p.51-3.
[37] Karl von Frisch received the Nobel Prize in 1973 for his discovery of the honeybee dance language.
[38] Jo Shapcott, 'Six Bee Poems', available at: https://poems.poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/six-bee-poems/ [Accessed 11 February, 2019].
[39] Scott Brewster, 'John Burnside: Poetry as the Space of Withdrawal' in *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry*, eds., Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p.180-1.



That cast-off religiosity, one which acknowledges an irreducibility between body and soul, lingers in a purgatorial zone by which there is a moral question hanging over our treatment of other living things. It is as if we are invited to look over the Annunciation to the natural world that lies beyond, a perspective dramatized in Botticelli's *Cestello Annunciation* with the open door drawing the eye past the Angel and Mary to that 'kingdom-at-hand'. In 'Lichtschwarm', the etymological root of 'Schwarm', 'swarm' or 'buzz' is now more readily translated as 'flock', meaning there is a direct relation to the wings of the bees to the wings of angels as a graduated, if not fallen term. So, the poem, 'flock of light' brings together something physical as a conditional charge. Later we get 'sunlight / swarms', 'grass // glimmering', 'Bees // are hanging in the shadow of the hedge / like daylight lanterns'. These examples coming after the disavowing of angels show the speaker in search of the divine through the gesture of light as it animates natural phenomena. It is not heavenly; it is an earthbound illumination in 'the swell / of the literal'. We have moved into Burnside's later poetry here. In another interview Burnside has qualified his poetic instinct as such, 'The kind of poetry I write is a constant

[40] Ibid., See also 'Lichtschwarm', Jürgen Partenheimer, Rudi Fuchs, Petra Maria Meyer, John Burnside, Issue 20 of *Inside the White Cube* (White Cube, 2007), available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Lichtschwarm.html?id=4kxsswEACAAJ&redir_esc=y [Accessed 8 January, 2019]

search for the authentic, but not outside the common, lived experience. It's the commonplace that is real.'[41] No place for the angels here.

To chart this poetic development in Burnside's oeuvre, the link between the earlier preoccupation with angels to the urgency of the environmental question over our relationship to the living world and its maintenance is the concept of animism. Coined by British anthropologist, Edward B. Tyler (1832-1917), adapted from proto-vitalist Georg Ernst Stahl, it is a kind of proto-religious term loosely meaning a belief in spiritual beings. Historically it is a term that marks a certain trajectory of projected belief in a life and soul of inanimate objects. Against this disavowing rationalism, what Freud called 'the subject's narcissistic over evaluation of his own mental processes'[42] we could pit Burnside's self-diagnosed apophenia, 'a condition I have been managing all my life'[43], what Helen Mort describes as 'the unmotivated seeing of meaningful connections.'[44] This sense of a higher connectivity is a post-secular return of an animistic world-view which testifies to the non-separation of inner and outer worlds of body and soul, finding a twenty-first century iteration in the interdependence of the human and the nonhuman realm. We seem to be moving from that scientific age into the environmental age. In this way, animism is an instance of Bachelard's reverie, as he quotes Pierre-Jean Jouvre, 'poetry is a soul inaugurating a form.'[45] Another example we find in the earlier poem 'Animism' from *The Light Trap*, where a sleep-deprived revelation links religion to the fable of bees, breaking open the concept of inner and outer, the house and the natural world:

[redacted]

[41] Attila Dósa, 'Poets and Other Animals: An Interview with John Burnside' in *Scottish Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2003, p.14.
[42] Sigmund Freud [1919], cited in Caroline Case and Tessa Dalley, *The Handbook of Art Therapy*, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 2006), p.169.
[43] John Burnside, *I Put a Spell on You* (London: Vintage, 2014), p.218.
[44] Helen Mort, '*Something else, then something else again': neuroscience and connection-making in contemporary poetry*', p.157.
[45] Pierre-Jean Jouvre, *En Miroir*, Collection Littérature générale, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1954), p.11 in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.xxii.

Awake at night, when the mind rattles through the wheel of its interconnected thoughts, we find a close relation between insomnia and apophenia, the suspension of the rational senses like Saint John's dark night of the soul. The verging as an instance of slipping into a new form of (sub) consciousness suggests a pagan or gnostic belief, but it also figures as a form of reverie which reveals 'the secret animal', momentarily a shared animus between the speaker and the 'you' of a second self. A direct subject is not given, only hinted at; that 'you' we find in 'Ahimsa Bee Sutra'.

Curiously, as with 'Animism', the end of the house speaks not only about space, but also time. In this way, it recalls W.B Yeats's 'The Stare's Nest by my Window' from *Meditations in a Time of Civil War*:

> The bees build in the crevices
>
> Of loosening masonry, and there
>
> The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
>
> My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
>
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.

The poem is an invitation to reorder and rebuild. The tireless work of bees which never ends is allegorical of the 'rise and fall' in Burnside's poem, implying that human culture is always in a state of disorder and reparation. In 'Animism', barricading a 'secret animal' indoors, there lies Yeats's line 'We are closed in, and the key is turned' which shows that by cutting ourselves off, we lack an ethics of openness. It is the bees and starlings which invite a crossing over from a place where there is 'More substance in our enmities / Than in our

[46] John Burnside, 'Animism' in *The Light Trap* (London: Cape Poetry, 2002), p.16.

love;' and Yeats's refrain verges on an appeal to repair our damaging, sealed-off exceptionality to achieve a new form of love in a time of war with the help of the bees. The 'honey of generation' from 'Among School Children', is another way of indicating sexual intercourse and progeny. Lee Whitehead has suggested that Yeats's 'honey of generation' has 'preservative, cathartic, and inebriating effects.' All those ideas are in play in Burnside's poem. The house, then, is a locus of the passing of time, a formal delineation of an enclosed space, but also the site at which memory is preserved and knowledge is passed on. The word echoes Martin Heidegger's ideas about language being the 'house of being' acting as a kind of mausoleum, a house that comes at the end, where he might say our language propels us from an originary house to a being-towards-death. The line 'a yellow cupboard full of lice and moths' suggests abandon and decay of an unoccupied house, implying a portent of death and ruin for the soon-to-be-dead that 'ticks like a heart, or a cloud, / in the kindly dark.' 'Kindly' here is very close to kindle, the tinderbox at the start of a lustful romance but also the beginnings of a pyre which comes back to us as 'embers' in the fourth stanza.

The death-watch beetle is another invocation of war reverberating from Yeats's poem. They are said to tick and tap on wooden rafters in the middle of the night and were made famous not least with the heralding tragedy of Edgar Allen Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* from 1843. In the narrator's blithe attempt to convince others of his innocence, it could be said that he is haunted by the rising volume of the death-watch beetle's scratching the floorboards he takes to be the beating of the dead man's heart he has just dismembered and placed under the floor. Ultimately, the ticking becomes unbearable and he confesses his guilt. At bottom it can be said that their appearance *anticipates* some tragedy which here gestures towards a running down clock—an index of the Anthropocene perhaps?—;the fate of the insects themselves signalling the tell-tale ticking of our interdependence.

But what about the eponymous bees? They do not appear in this entomological list. The 'yellow' seems to suggest their presence, but perhaps this synaesthesia of colour as form implies a fading, the way images are said to yellow with age and decay. In this close canticle, the great neglected interiority is 'the house of the self'. If there is evidence of decay, then, as with Yeats, the bees are invited to show us how to rebuild.

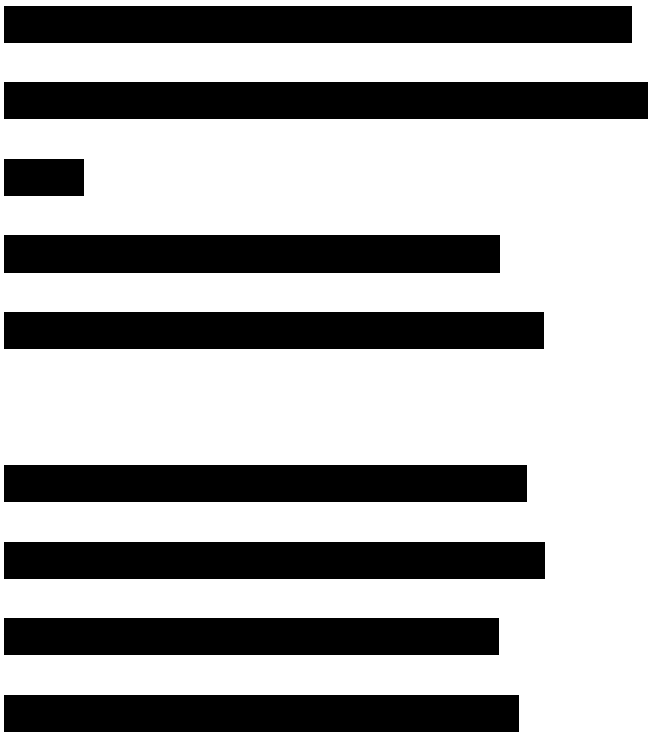
> The house of the self, perhaps, with its sloping floors
>
> and *trompe l'oeil*,
>
> where, tonight, you will gather bees from the smoke

and the noise,

heavy and dark, like a bundle of stonewashed linen.

Trompe l'oeil literally means 'deceiving the eye' which after 'sloping floors' confuses the stability and security of the person in question. The appearance of the smoke extends this perceptive limitation while also suggesting the pacifying of the alarmist pheromones in the guard bees which allow the beekeeper to go about their work safely. The gathering is also an invitation to protect in the face of 'smoke' and 'noise' which, like radio waves are aggregated factors in bee decline.

Staying with the smoke, does this find the connection to this impairment in the 'haze' we see later after that curious line 'honey in the bones'? Haze and smoke and *Trompe l'oeil* cloud and derange the perspective, it is a device in the poem of destabilising the clarity of one world and another. The poem here seems to play with Dionysian themes, at that incongruity of intoxicated sensations through recognising the virtue of restraint which is not just required but essential in beekeeping and orgasm. But that restraint is also a warning about our tampering with the natural cycles of the bee's production.



The repeated 'heavy and dark' over the line break emphasises a struggle, allowing for this to be a two-way interpretation of human activity and the work of the hive at one and the same

time. Worker bees, with their 'indoor jobs'[47] do the 'heavy lifting' both inside the dark of the hive and outside in the open. Both words are antonyms of 'light'. Bachelard finds a similar bifurcation commenting on these lines from Tristan Tzara, 'The market of the sun has come into my room / And the room into my buzzing head'.[48] The sun likened to the market becomes the site of an originary productivity, gesturing to the idea that the engine of the 'sun's rays carries with it bees'.[49] Reverie, then, in the 'buzzing head' becomes some form of primal vision in 'the hive of the sounds of the sun'. This ceaseless, life-giving bounty of the sun in Burnside has become part of the ecological critique in the endless flow of 'golden rolls', which points to Francesco de Hruschka's invention of the centrifugal honey extractor in 1865. The irony in this corrupted form of extraction is that it is a device which interrupts the regular cycle of honey making in the hive and brings it to market. The natural order has been interrupted. What this means is that the hive is 'not only a residence and honey factory; it is a sophisticated regulatory system for its busy denizens',[50] the interruption of which is a warning about tampering with our own sense of collective history and memory we share with bees. There is harm done to that regulatory system through unfettered capitalistic extraction. Ominously in the Burnside poem, that brilliant sunlight is now fading to 'embers', the bees here cast as disappearing, as CCD threatens the diminishing of their industry the way embers burn out to ash at the end of the fire. Similarly, the invocation of the flood, the opposite to fire, also provides the incidental imagery of biblical cleansing in a similar way, finding its completion in the final word 'resurrection'.

The 'flyblown hide' suggests contamination, of myths certainly, but also of the way that touch can be an 'unconsidered slide', the 'one thing then another' of ancient myths of bees originating in carrion through the process of Bugonia[51] like the image of the dead lion

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[47] Becky McKay, 'Sweet Melissa: A Brief Review of the Honey Bee, *Apis mellifera*' in *Journal of Agricultural & Food Information*, vol. 11, Issue 1, 63-69. DOI: 10.1080/10496500903439684

[48] Tristan Tzara, '*Le marché du soleil est entré dans la chambre / Et la chambre dans la tête bourdonnante*' in *The Poetics of Space*, p.226.

[49] Ibid., p.227.

[50] Ibid., p.29.

[51] In Virgil's *Georgics* book IV, he presents the ritual of slaughtering a bull in which to encourage the growth of the hive from its 'intact hide'. What is implied is that order and peace emerge from the metamorphosis of decay, disorder, intoxication,—as the basis for Dionysian art—blood and terror:

> First they choose a narrow place, small enough for this purpose:
> they enclose it with a confined roof of tiles, walls close together,
> and add four slanting window lights facing the four winds.
> Then they search out a bullock, just jutting his horns out
> of a two year olds forehead: the breath from both its nostrils
> and its mouth is stifled despite its struggles: it's beaten to death,
> and its flesh pounded to a pulp through the intact hide.
> They leave it lying like this in prison, and strew broken branches

surrounded by a halo of bees on Tate and Lyle's *Golden Syrup* with its version of Samson's riddle, 'out of the strong came forth sweetness.' We often say we look with 'lion eyes' on the lover, but here the 'broken space' could be a fundamental gap behind the eyes of a lion, believed to ward off pain and suffering, here it is 'broken'.[52] The Buddhist invocation then, is to cease our harm, and Burnside's poem grieves for our failure to see what has been sundered. This poem seems to play at the incongruities of honey as a by-product of our communing with animals, but the house of plenty has become a room at the end of the house, inviting an eschatological judgement. The word 'swarm' also contains the word war, the fact that it is 'another swarm' catches the 'rise and fall' as a notion of empires or civilizations, which in turn revisits Yeats's *Meditations*. The idea that peacetime is an interruption of a generalized state of war to which will inevitably return is reversed in 'Ahimsa Bee Sutra', to institute a poetic return to an unchanging condition of renewal and reparation.

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under its flanks, thyme and fresh rosemary.
This is done when the Westerlies begin to stir the waves
before the meadows brighten with their new colours,
before the twittering swallow hangs her nest from the eaves.
Meanwhile the moisture, warming in the softened bone, ferments,
and creatures, of a type marvellous to see, swarm together,
without feet at first, but soon with whirring wings as well,
and more and more try the clear air, until they burst out,
like rain pouring from summer clouds.

Virgil, *Georgics IV,* 281-314 'The Autogenesis of Bees' available at: https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilGeorgicsIV.php#anchor_Toc534524374 [Accessed 23 July, 2020].

[52] The Eagles' famous song from 1975, 'Lyin' Eyes' pivots around the sonorous conflation of this idea. The woman in the song clandestinely visiting another lover, all the while being unable to 'hide your lyin' eyes'. The eyes notwithstanding being the window into the soul.

Chapter Three

'How children think of death': The Shadow of the Forest

> *To be human means to be always and already outside of the forest's inclusion, so to speak, insofar as the forest remains an index of our exclusion.*[1]

Robert Pogue Harrison

> Nobody travels far to see
>
> the massed, snow-feathered twig-light
>
> of the wood. Nothing convinces;
>
> distance makes for home
>
> in all directions: /
>
> 'The Forest of Beguilement.'[2]

In Robert Pogue Harrison's seminal 1992 study of forests, he explores how they play a central role in the western conception of Nature. Taken as a metaphor, forests represent for him a shadow of human civilization and figure as places within which human laws and hierarchies are suspended, upended and overthrown. There is an inherent lawlessness in the forest which can be figured in many ways, but my aim here is to use the forest metaphor to explore John Burnside's exploration of how humans come to the ground of their being through enchantment, mysticism and the unconscious. In his 2009 collection, Burnside deliberately chose Paulo Uccello's quattrocento perspectival masterpiece, *The Hunt in the Forest* (sometimes known as *The Hunt by Night*) to anchor a series of poems under that title with reference back to the late medieval ritual hunt. The collection explores the ways in which language attempts to speak about death; the death of love, family, animals, even the possibility of imagining our own end as destiny. Burnside's speakers are coming to terms with death, attempting to bring an understanding of it to the realm of the living. In doing this, these poems stage a forestalling of linguistic attempts to access an event wholly alien to us. The vanishing point in the forest in Uccello's painting represents that threshold between one world and the next. When Martin Heidegger states that 'Dying is not an event; it is a

[1] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.201.
[2] John Burnside, 'The Forest of Beguilement' in *Common Knowledge*, p.52.

phenomenon to be understood existentially'[3], what he is saying is that in the knowledge of death as an anticipation of something unavailable to my experience—one cannot experience death in the sense of coming out the other side to testify—I live passionately in the full freedom of my mortal life. What Burnside does with this collection is appeal to that existential quandary, figuring how death enters our world vicariously through the experience of grief and loss, mourning, melancholy, and even desire. These human categories might be called presence effects of something beyond the earthly and present, and in this way, this collection attempts to speak the unspeakable to confront death. Sean O'Brien has remarked of the collection that Burnside's 'treatment of grief is a kind of understanding, a part of the world, not something cast out from it.'[4] It is here where the significance of the forest setting takes on its existential function as threshold metaphor between the light of human life and the darkness which haunts the ravelled edges of human experience. The forest metaphor reflects the interdependence of the living and the dead; it does so at a critical juncture in our ecological awareness of the contemporary moment.

The use of perspective in the painting—as the hunters and the animals converge towards the darkness of the central vanishing point under the forest canopy—invites a contemporary reading about how a collapsed perspective of the natural world in contemporary debates about the Anthropocene is framed by a darkened ecological reckoning. This involves acknowledging an inextricable link between the fate of humans and nonhumans. Burnside's speakers offer a consolation which moves from description to dissolution, opening a space that allows us to face the fate of the planet in the way we inevitably experience the inarticulacy of grief. Ultimately, there is a sense in which the hunt is an eternal quest for the sublime, some ecstatic revelation at the limits of our confrontation with a Nature in retreat.

In this chapter I will explore how Burnside's forest metaphor engages with the philosophy of dwelling in the later writings of Martin Heidegger, in particular his writing about the forest clearing (or opening). If Heidegger's ideas seek to 'unconceal', or bring into the light the illuminating origins of a preternatural language through the metaphor of human-made clearing or glade, then Burnside's poems seek a primordial unity in Nature, grounded in the darkness of the late mediaeval period of Uccello's famous painting.

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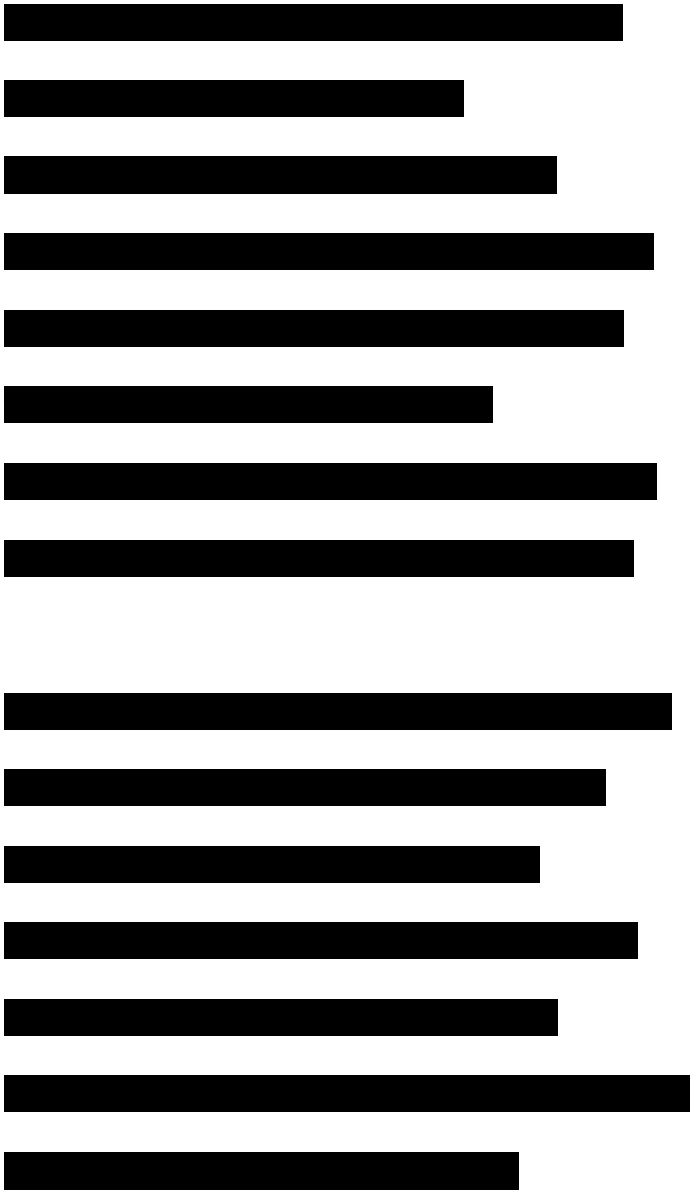
[3] Martin Heidegger, from *Essential Selections in 19th and 20th Century Philosophy*, by James Fieser, available at: www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class [Accessed 10 January, 2019].
[4] Sean O'Brien, 'Time, Gentlemen Please.' Culture. *Sunday Times*, 22 Nov. 2009, p.48. *The Sunday Times Digital Archive*, available at: http://tinyurl.gale.com/tinyurl/Br2dP1. [Accessed 7 Oct. 2019].



First of the Forests

Documenting a relative collapse in any stable notions of humanity's place within Nature, and how the severance in this fundamental relationship took place, Harrison's preface outlines his forest metaphor more explicitly:

> Western civilization literally cleared its space in the midst of forests. A sylvan fringe of darkness defined the limits of its cultivation, the margins of its cities, the boundaries of its institutional domain; but also the extravagance of its imagination. For reasons this book explores, the governing institutions of the West—religion, law, family, city—originally established themselves in opposition to the forests, which in

> this respect have been, from the beginning, the first and last victims of civic expansion.[5]

Here, 'civic expansion' is a by-word for deforestation. As human civilizations have advanced, the forests have ceded their ground to human clearing. The significance of the 'sylvan fringe of darkness' as a border between two domains lies today as an outlying antithesis to modernity's urbanisation. Forests are, as living ecosystems, 'victims', framing the story of humanity's anthropological progress from hut to village, city to institution; the gradual encroachment of humanity's endless globalisation creates a contemporary confrontation between the human clearing—which makes this journey possible—and the forest. The forest, today, has become an index to the health of the understanding of Nature as a whole.[6] Unable to speak for themselves as they are trammelled, burned and cut down to make way for resources and dwelling places, the reckoning of a new post-secular register of our 'love' of Nature in the face of its degradation becomes an allegorical story revealing new and extant political and ecological consequences of our actions. In the twenty-first century, the analogy of the forest as the shadow of the human forces an encounter with the radical decentring of a new posthuman position. This is what unites those who engage in posthumanism: a recognition of a state of afterwardness by virtue of displacement of the latter, a *de*anthropocentrism. This is what I am trying to show in Burnside, that being poised between one world and another is where the self has been cast out from human institutions and becomes, in his radical displacement, exiled quarry himself. The role reversal of the hunter becoming the hunted has a long history in western literature and depictions of the forest. From Diana and Acteon to the cruciferous stag turning to face the pious hunter in the hagiographies of Saint Eustace and Saint Hubert, the repose of the returned look is an allegorical warning of human hubris. Burnside fuses his own ecopoetics with the sympathies of the persecuted who cannot speak for themselves. He does so as an acknowledgement of a Nature in retreat.

At the outset of his study, Harrison turns to Giambattista Vico's 'giants' from his *New Science* (1725) in which he charts a vast stretch of pre-lapsarian humanity where 'Noah's descendants gradually lost their humanity over the generations and became solitary, nefarious

[5] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, XI.
[6] Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Towards and Anthropology Beyond the Human* (University of California Press, 2015); Anna Lowenhaupt-Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton University Press, 2015); Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia.*

creatures living under the cover of branches and leaves. They became bestial 'giants.''[7] This fall, according to Harrison, is Vico's 'first humanizing event in prehistory.'[8] If the destiny of the hunting, roaming creature of the lower Palaeolithic age is to become a species of settlers, then Vico's narrative charts that journey from scavenging to agricultural dwelling and cultivation—'a horizon of sense'—as a decisive moment in the relationship between identity and place-making.[9]

Reviewing Harrison's book, Jonathan Bate noted how it is an essentially anti-Enlightenment treatise whereby Cartesian dualisms have alienated humanity from Nature by an instrumental reason which stands outside of the forest. He argues that 'true poetry is that which goes beyond the confines of the city, which enters into the dark forest […] The history of forests in the Western imagination is the story of our self-dispossession, but it is also our hope of salvation. If there are to be no more forests, there will be no more poets.'[10] That 'self-dispossession' is a deeply Romantic idea, but it also instructive of how in the twenty-first century, the forest becomes the living extension and embodiment of an ecology which stands in opposition to the rapacious and acquisitive nature of industrial modernity. As Bruno Latour has recognised, 'Ecology clearly is not the irruption of Nature into the public space but the end of '*nature*' as a concept that would allow us to sum up our relations to the world and pacify them.'[11] If modernisation brings with it the disappearance of the concept of natural world, then ecology is in opposition to modernity.

Historicising the concept of Nature, Jonathan Bate turns to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1750) which for him, as with Vico for Harrison, represents modernity's founding myth of the 'state of Nature and our severance from that state.'[12] For Rousseau, the hopeful adolescent Enlightenment was quashed by the severance of man from Nature. It is this severance that forms the central argument in Bate's millennium ecopoetics, which I argue is applicable to and influential on Burnside. In returning to the child's realm, Rousseau likens this innocence to a falling into experience involving wholesale structural breaks from the natural divisions in Nature: the fall into property, meat-eating, language and deforestation. Bate identifies in Rousseau this fourfold severance from that pre-

[7] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, p.5.
[8] Ibid., p.5.
[9] Ibid., p.7.
[10] Jonathan Bate, 'Cry Treedom.' Review of *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*, by Robert Pogue Harrison, *London Review of Books*, vol. 21, no. 15 (1993), p.21. 1 August, 2019.
[11] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p.36.
[12] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000), p.42.

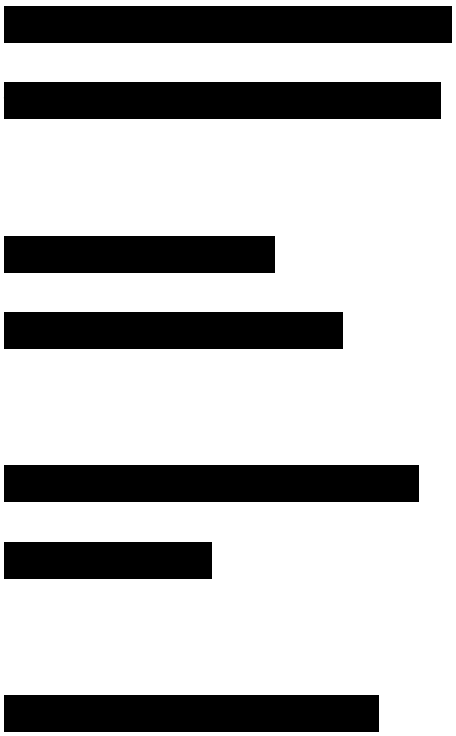
lapsarian world where there once stood 'immense forests never hewn with axe.'[13] In Burnside's title poem, it is 'How children think of death', an innocence which creates 'the shadows / between trees'. That intuited foreknowledge before the entry into language is the inexpressible vanishing point that the 'grown-ups cannot name.' The disappearance *in* the forest becomes a disappearance *of* the forest which speaks now to a universal loss.

Rousseau's warnings pre-empt the coming Romantic period—a polarisation between urban dwelling and country life—where an animist vitalism fuses with aesthetic power to create a vision of Nature as something 'out there' to be controlled. This disjunction, expedited by the Industrial Revolution saw the Romantic sensibility develop into a kind of proto- ecological consciousness as Coleridge famously remarked, 'the essence [of Nature] must be mastered – the *natura naturans*, and this presupposes a bond between Nature in this higher sense and the soul of man.'[14] That bond in 'this higher sense' is about placement and embodiment in something we could *then* come to describe as a natural life-world. Essentially, embodiment prefigures description, as Bate observes, 'the poet's way of articulating the relationship between humankind and environment, person and place, is peculiar because it is experiential, not descriptive.'[15] In the same way that for Vico, the first language, a *theo-logia*, came not from an inspirational category of self-disclosure, rather 'Vico insists that the celestial auspices—signs in the sky, such as lightening or the flight of birds—were all first of all languages, preceding even human phonetic language.'[16] What unites the two thinkers, and makes them key in understanding Burnside's poetic phenomenology is the idea of existential abandonment in a seemingly unintelligible world which persists with the outright rejection of an assumed *a priori* subjectivity. Those auspices in Burnside are those shadows which point to a darkening register, an ecopoetic conditioning of where we find ourselves now. This *grounding* gets to the fundamental point at stake in the twenty-first century, as Bate continues, 'such a claim (experience over description) is phenomenological before it is political, and for this reason ecopoetics may properly be regarded as pre-political.'[17] Bate, like Vico is historicising the story of the pre-*polis* to find the moment when such a fall took place. The key point in his 'dilemma of environmentalism', echoing my epigraph from

[13] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Frank Philip (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.23-4.
[14] William Taylor Coleridge, 'On Poesy or Art' from *1818 Lectures on European Literature*, Lecture 13, Tuesday, March 10th, 1818 in Samuel Taylor Coleridge *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. R.A Foakes, *Collected Works*, v. 5, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 2: pp.220-1.
[15] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.266.
[16] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, p.5.
[17] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p.266.

Harrison is that ‘our very freedom to transform and transcend the state of nature is the source of our enslavement.’[18]

In this way it is possible to see why Burnside picks up Martin Heidegger’s later central metaphor of the *Holzwege* (the path through the forest), one of several Heideggerian neologisms that will help find the right vocabulary to access the sylvan realm.[19] Along the path through the forest towards the *Lichtung* (the man-made clearing or glade) lies the metaphor for language as a mode of unconcealment; Burnside has long situated poems here. In an early poem from his fourth collection, *The Myth of the Twin* (1994), ‘Dark Green’ uses colour as a distancing device, testing how dark the green really is, or what it eventually comes to conceal. The poem opens:



[18] Ibid., p.45.
[19] ‘‘Wood’ is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden. They are called *Holzwege*. Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so. Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*.’ Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track* Edited and Translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge University Press, 2002 [1950]), V.
[20] John Burnside, ‘Dark Green’ in *The Myth of the Twin*, p.37.

That break after the first stanza acts as a physical conditioning of the self, a shifting of senses that prepares or presages some deep movement of the mind to this new register of dereliction and decay:

The colon then invites a surfacing of consciousness, as if from a dream, or pointing to the separation of when the human was lifted out of some primordial soup where all life begins:

There remains the trace of some elemental life rendered almost intangible. The 'barely a trace of the vapour' comes before 'perfume' and 'whisper' which tests the materiality of meaning at a strained or lingering pitch. The 'vapour' is also a lingering smell of petrol as the fossilized green that 'lived / before you came' becomes black oil providing an epochal shift between prehistoric time and our present time. At the poem's end it is the 'place on the way', which returns its meaning back with the momentary glimmer of a dream as it 'runs on / without you'. The slipping between two physical states at the beginning has become a slippage of consciousness akin to a dispossession where the darkening path is an extension of the depths of our own imagination. This poem echoes Harrison's thesis and anticipates the concerns of the later collection I am discussing here how Burnside shows us that despite the human leaving the forest, the primeval has not left us.

In *The Shakespearean Forest*, Anne Barton contrasts what she sees as the 'green and harmless sylvan world' of 'enchanted' Elizabethan woodland with the dark, necromantic forests of Northern Europe.[21] She cites Michel Pastoureau's mediaeval forest symbolism which eschews green in favour of black as the conditioning colour, where 'forest place names are always associated with the colour black, never with the colour green. It's the idea of

[21] Anne Barton, *The Shakespearean Forest*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017), p.3.

opacity, of shadows, of terrifying night which takes charge of the nomenclature, and not that of vegetation, nourishment, natural resources.'[22] This mediaeval appeal to the forest as a place associated with the dark sets up one of my central claims of the chapter, that with *The Hunt in the Forest*, Burnside achieves, like the intuitive appeal to the painting, a not-quite-naturalism. This poetry reveals his skill in being able to move away from description towards an existential phenomenology where to be human one must confront the darkness at the heart of life. If Uccello's painting is admired for its exceptional use of perspective, what that perspective implies is a form of detachment, an objectivity. Burnside has stated that 'violence arises from the tendency to objectify others—humans, animals, terrain and so on.'[23] Light allows for differences to emerge between objects and marks them out for us 'objectively', darkness blends difference and allows for a shape-shifting interdependence between the animate and the inanimate, implying indistinct thresholds between living things. One reason the collection is governed by darkness is precisely because, under the forest canopy 'the logic of distinction goes astray.'[24] Burnside sees violence as a 'spiritual failure, a failure to recognise the fundamental imperative to respect and honour 'the other.''[25] The 'other', that which marks out the limits of our existence is here put forward as what we have hitherto understood as the concept of Nature, the maintenance of which will be achieved by this appeal to interdependence.

On Forests and Woods

The symbolic significance of the overarching title, *The Hunt in the Forest,* is intensified by the fact that the word 'forest' appears only once, in the title poem. 'Wood' by contrast appears nine times throughout the collection, inviting discussion over the meaning of the word today and the difference between the two in a historical context. For Harrison, the word 'forest' itself speaks to 'outsideness' with respect to public domain and so operates less as a specific definition of woodland and more about the nature of its origin as a designated space. Harrison finds it originating as a 'juridical term'[26] deriving from the Latin word '*foresta*'

[22] 'les noms des lieux forestiers sont associés à la couleur noire, jamais à la couleur verte. C'est l'idée d'opacité, de ténèbres, de nuit terrifiante que prend en charge la toponymie, et non pas celle de végétation, de nourriture, de ressourcement.' Michel Pastoureau, cited in Anne Barton, *The Shakespearean Forest,* p.3 ; Michel Pastoureau, 'La forêt médiévale: un univers symbolique' in André Chastel, ed., Le château, la chasse, et la forêt (3 e Rencontres internationales d'archéologie et d'histoire de Commarque, 1988) (Bordeaux: Sud-Ouest, 1990), p.84.
[23] Attila Dósa, 'An Interview with John Burnside,' *Scottish Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003), pp.9-24 (p.19).
[24] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, p.x.
[25] Attila Dósa, 'An Interview with John Burnside', p.19.
[26] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, p.69.

coming into use during the Merovingian period (between the 5th and the 8th centuries). As to the word's provenance, the combination of '*foris*', meaning 'outside', along with '*forestare*', meaning 'to place off limits, to exclude', suggests that its usage was as a delineation of space, instituted by virtue of royal decree, by which 'kings had taken it upon themselves to place public bans on vast tracts of woodlands in order to insure the survival of their wildlife, which in turn would ensure the survival of a fundamental royal ritual—the hunt.'[27] What seemingly sets the word 'forest' apart from 'wood' is the idea that there must be something to protect, yoking the human to the animal in the service of sport and leisure. In the following provocation chapter, I focus on the issue of badgers as emblematic yet also problematic to the idea of a balance between the wild and the domestic in British agriculture. In the contemporary moment, Burnside brings to bear the effects of that imposition on our natural world, or how we come to manage our relationship with our environment now instituted through charities, (forestry) commissions, (woodland) trusts and (royal) societies, all of which emerge from an ecological consciousness representing a modern incarnation of that will to protect. The forest then, at least in the British Isles, has at least since the late mediaeval period been a tamed enclosure for the pursuit of sport as an activity of the aristocracy. In contrast, it is no surprise then that the word only makes a fleeting appearance; anchored, as it is in the larger, tenebrous forests of northern Europe.

As for 'wood', in Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*, he seeks to see the etymological slippage between 'wild' and 'wood' as terms 'grown out of the root word "*wald*" and the old Teutonic root "*walthus*"'. '*Walthus*', he says, 'entered the Old English in its variant forms of "weald", "wald" and "wold"'. One figure that played a decisive role in this juridical formulation of a designated space was John Manwood, with his *Treatise and Discourse of the Lawes of the Forrest* from 1598.[28] Harrison documents Manwood's work as gamekeeper of Waltham Forest and a judge at the New Forest, finding in his treatise the juridical claim about the institution of various laws 'pertaining to the afforestation and preservation of wilderness'.

[27] Ibid., p.69.

[28] The full title of which is: 'Wherein is declared not only those laws, as they are now in force, but also the original and beginning of forests; and what a forest is in its own proper nature, and wherein the same doth differ from a chase, a park or a warren, with all such things as are incident or belonging thereunto, with the several proper terms of art. Also a treatise of the pourallee, declaring what pourallee is, how the same first began, what a pourallee-man may do, how he may hunt and use his own pourallee, how far he may pursue and follow after his chase; together with the limits and bounds as well of the forest, as the pourallee. Collected, as well out of the common laws and statutes of this land; as also out of sundry learned ancient authors, and out of the assises of Pickering and Lancaster. Whereunto are added the statutes of the forest; a treatise of the several offices of verderors, and certain principal cases, judgments, and entries of the assises of Pickering and Lancaster. Never heretofore printed for the publique.'

For Manwood it was the monarch who 'could save the wilderness from the ravages of human exploitation.'[29] There is an argument here that woods, far from being derivatives of larger forests, in fact are the precondition for the institution of the forest, as this passage from Manwood shows:

> But there were still, and even in the Saxons time, many great woods which were not destroyed, and those were called Walds, that is forest or Woods where Wolves and Foxes did harbour; which being afterwards destroyed by Edgar, a Saxon king, *Anno 959,* and very few remaining, the Welshman paid him a yearly tribute of wolves-skins; and those and such ravenous beasts being thus destroyed, the residue being beasts of Pleasure, as well as delicate meat, the Kings of this land began to be careful for the preservation of them, and in order thereto to privilege certain Woods and Places, so that no Man may hurt or destroy them there; and thus the said Places become Forests.[30]

In both cases, Harrison and Macfarlane hold that woods and forests have been crucial to the imagination, as 'within the stories of forests, different time and worlds can be joined.'[31] The idea of these terms coming to delineate a space creates the sylva-cultural threshold between the wild and the tamed and institutes a border at two domains.

Forward or Back?

Eric Gill's 1923 woodcut on paper, *The Hound of Saint Dominic* adorns the cover of Burnside's *The Hunt in the Forest* (2009).[32] The device depicts a rampant greyhound dog careering forwards with its head turned back, a flaming torch clasped in its jaws.[33] The image bears a striking similarity in its two-way intimation of modernity with Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* and Hegel's *Owl of Minerva*.[34] The hound sits on a neutral background with no

[29] Ted Hughes's latter-day recycling of this Forest Law recasts the idea with his *Rain Charm for the Duchy* (1992), written during his laureateship on occasion of Prince Harry's baptism.
[30] John Manwood, cited in Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, p.71.
[31] Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta, 2007), p.92.
[32] The device was suggested as a cover image by John Burnside's editor at Jonathan Cape, Robin Robertson. Robertson also detailed over personal correspondence how Burnside 'takes an active role in decisions about his covers, and he certainly suggested the Brueghel image on *Black Cat Bone*'.
[33] Eric Gill's connection to the Dominican Order led him to establish St. Dominic's Press in 1915 of which *The Hound of Saint Dominic* became the device.
[34] „*die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug*" translates as 'The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.'; The *Angelus Novus*, created in 1920 was purchased by Walter Benjamin who, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* says: 'A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single

situating landscape in which it moves, nor is there any indication that Saint Dominic is present. Most depictions of Saint Dominic show the hound always at the edge of the image. In contrast here it is centre stage which encourages a more sustained focus on the hound itself as an extension to the human and how the collection invites an orienting function with regard to an aesthetics of other living things. As such the image achieves a singularity and an exceptionality which institutes the question of the animal as in service to, and in flight from human activity in the contemporary moment. This device conditions the paradox of the hunter and the hunted and serves as a floating metaphor for this thesis more broadly. The hound is travelling between two worlds, bounding away to a liberated future without the Saint, but looking back to a world it has illuminated by the flaming torch (see figure 1).

That the animal is poised in this way echoes the diachronic approach that emanates from Burnside's previous work as well as presaging what is to come. *The Hunt in the Forest* opens up a theme to which Burnside returns in the opening sequence poem of the following collection *Black Cat Bone* (2011). His constant recourse to revised themes, reworked myths and earlier titles orbit the thematic world of his eleventh collection, pulling the poems backwards to a mediaeval world whilst also forwards to an ethics of environment conditioned through ecopoetics. He has also been remarked for his prolific and recurrent use of epigraphs and aphorisms where both suggestively connective and elusively transient dialogue interweave his poems. In all cases the reader is invited to participate in Burnside's paratextual world. Encountering each successive collection, Burnside creates his own warped chronology, a liturgical timelessness not pre-disposed to any given state of

Figure 6. Eric Gill, 'Hound of Saint Dominic', 1923, Woodcut, 17.5 x 26 cm. Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed 12 May, 2017, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1033807/hound-of-st-dominic-print-eric-gill/

catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.' From *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p.249.

flux or stasis, and the invitation to join the hunt is compelled by the lyric's constant suspension of the linearity of time as a flow: as Burnside has stated, 'this calendar offers frequent rehearsals for the eternal, reminding us that time doesn't flow through our clocks and calendars, it stalls there.'[35] The stalling of time aims at what he calls 'the missed world' [36] which contains the possibility of the chance encounter, a disconsolation, abridged by a charmed delitescence visited in visions of religious prophecy and ecological ruin.

In Bruno Latour's formulation, borrowed from Isabelle Stengers's idea of *The Intrusion of Gaia*[37], what was in the Enlightenment a flight from the 'archaic horror of the past' meets 'the emergence of an enigmatic figure, the source of a horror that was now in front of them rather than behind.'[38] In this there is an immediacy which speaks of a warped chronology of events.[39] It is a paradox of depth that finds no better analogues than in Paulo Uccello's painting—from which Gill's woodcut could have been lifted almost directly—and Burnside's collection. *The Hunt in the Forest* delights in the ineffability of the experience of habitats. Those environs are forest paths, back roads, municipal swimming pools, hospitals, coast roads, clearings in the wood, the back of the house, and the far end of the fair. These are environs of change, portentous edgelands of trepidation and mystery, where a poetry celebrating what Burnside has called 'the numinous, the immanent, those kinds of words'[40] can work towards some restitution and an ethics of care, to 'restore our sense of wonder, and so increase our respect for other life forms.'[41] The key word here from the latter quote is 'wonder', the enthralling sense of the sublime that lies behind the rational self is ushered forth in Burnside's poised two-way lyric: 'of something that used to be yours / in the not yet given.' ('Treatise on the Veil') As with the hound, in the collection there is a spirited momentum towards or away from some originary encounter which raises questions about

[35] John Burnside, Nature Diary in *New Statesman*, 26 Jan, 2018, p.57.
[36] John Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology', *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science*. Edited by Robert Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93.
[37] Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*, trans. Andrew Goffey (Open Humanities Press, 2015), pp.43-51.
[38] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p.2. 'I began the strange project of turning toward Gaia with a mental image of the silhouette of a dancer, fleeing backward at first, as if she were escaping from something so frightful that she was indifferent to the destruction she was leaving behind her pulling back blindly, a little like the 'angel of history' made famous by Walter Benjamin.' p.241-2 […] 'And there she stands, suspended, frozen, her arms hanging loosely, looking at something coming towards her, something even more terrifying than what she was first seeking to escape – until she is forced to recoil. Fleeing from one horror, she has met another, partly created by her flight.' p.1. 'The Angel of Geohistory,' by Stéphanie Ganachaud, filmed by Jonathan Michel, February 12, 2013. Available at: https://www.vimeo.com/60064456 [Accessed 4 June, 2018].
[39] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[40] John Burnside, 'A Life in Writing', interview by Sarah Crown. *The Guardian Review*, 27 August 2011.
[41] John Burnside, 'Apiculture: Telling the Bees', *Nature Journal*, vol. 521, 7th May 2015, p.30.

perspective, distance, and the indeterminacy of the two when applied to a contemporary 'view' of Nature. As has been stated, is the problem up ahead or is it behind us? Who is stalking whom? Finding a subject-position after a broken or damaged relationship becomes very difficult where there are constantly shifting tipping-points, indexes of excess, critical zones, 'data dumps,'[42] limits, and 'hockey-stick'[43] graphs, all of which serve to alienate man further from Nature by indexing the extent to which humans have contributed to the geological conditioning of the planet. In Uccello's expansive painting, Burnside has found a composite frame to deliberately seek to enact an encounter with that metaphysical indeterminacy.

In pausing before the painting, and in suspending the linearity of time in favour of a paradigmatic version of colliding apocryphal forest stories, Burnside's collection seeks to see a primal unity in Nature, one which acknowledges the extent to which human culture and Mother Nature are not separate domains but one and the same thing, and that could be a perilous revelation. Reading through a selection of poems in the collection alongside the artwork for the remainder of this chapter, my aim is to show how together they speak about orienting oneself to face what haunts the future of our imagination.

Uccello and the Birth of Perspective

Going back almost half a millennium to the painting in question involves tracing how such incipient aspects of the work provide such a visceral source of inspiration for the poet and how that relationship can be a way of getting at, through description, a non-hermeneutic approach to Nature. Charting the case of Irish poet, Derek Mahon and his habitual recourse to painting as a source of inspiration, Sanjeev S. Patke details how that relationship comes about:

> Such poetry also exemplifies a type of literary allusion in which the notion of 'firstness' associated with origin and originality is set aside for the ironic enterprise of accepting a sister art as the instigation to produce forms of 'secondariness' which render signification through the activity of writing poems that reflect on issues evoked or suggested by a picture—*ekphrasis*—as a form of refraction.[44]

[42] Timothy Morton, extracts from *Being Ecological* (London: Penguin, 2018).
[43] Michael Mann, *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2013).
[44] Rajeev S. Patke, 'Painting into Poetry: the case of Derek Mahon' in *Word and Image: A journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, vol. 22, no. 2 (London: Routledge, 2006), p.118.

In Mahon's case, Patke identifies 'elective affinities with painting' as a 'decolonizing resistance' that goes some way in respect to how Mahon searches for a wider 'canvas' on which to escape the confines of the perceived parochialism of belonging to a particular Irish tradition. Patke's post-colonial view of Mahon's work implies that turning to painting helps pull the writer away from the parameters of present ideological positions, framing the poem as somehow lying-in-wait for the painting down the centuries. By radically decentring the painting's provenance, the poet's interpretation 'disassembles itself as marginalia, but only in order to over- or underwhelm the painting from this vantage point of marginal vision.'[45] It is to Uccello's famous painting that we now turn in order to get us closer to John Burnside and his lyric vantage point that lies up ahead (see figure 2).

Figure 7. Paolo di Dono, called Uccello, 'The Hunt in the Forest', c:1465-70, Tempera and oil, with traces of gold, on panel, 73.3 x 177 cm. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, accessed 2 February, 2016, https://www.ashmolean.org/hunt-forest

The Hunt in the Forest is perhaps the most famous work by the Italian artist, Paulo Uccello (1397-1475). Created towards the end of his life around 1465-70, it exists today as a decisive work in the development of perspective in painting and is regarded as being one of the great masterpieces of the *quattrocento*. Unlike other early renaissance painters, Uccello's status as a master of perspective has not diminished in influence, and today the painting is a central highlight amongst the exhibits of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, earning it the unofficial title, 'the Oxford Hunt'. Of the remarkable staying power of this work in particular, John Pope-Hennessy surmises that Uccello's significance was 'never forgotten and then rediscovered, never neglected and then reassessed, he has remained securely in his niche

[45] Ibid., p.120.

besides the figures of Donatello, Brunelleschi and Masaccio.'[46] Training in the workshop of sculptor and goldsmith Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455), Uccello's late masterpiece leaves plenty of indications as to the influence of his craft and to the significance of his contribution to the development of painterly technique that would change art indelibly. This fact was not lost on John Ruskin, as he remarked in a letter to Kate Greenaway, 'I believe the perfection of perspective is only recent. It was first applied in Italian art by Paul Uccello. He went off his head with the love of perspective.'[47] This feverish devotion to the vanishing point—'A fair thing is this perspective' he is reportedly to have pronounced—is the beginning of a relational status in western painting where space becomes a rational, if not a measurable environment in which human figures are positioned. Taken as a starting point in this recondite relationship, the painting prefigures the environmental urgency of our ongoing pursuit into what we call Nature. In short, the work acts as one of the first orientating registers of Nature as it appears to us as observers. Following Ruskin's insistence of this decisive break, 'going off one's head' could be a productive way to interpret where we position ourselves with regard to Nature in the twenty-first century, to investigate the privileged gaze of the first position. The painting, I argue, presents us with a paradox at the heart of a contemporary debate about the 'state of nature' and our 'place' within that circumscribed idea. The depth of Uccello's painting is in this case an invitation to consider the artwork through the past continuous, finding a perspectival thread that runs from Uccello's vanishing point to the vanishing points of our own access to the natural realm.

The Hunt in the Forest is a large tempera and oil painting on two wooden panels approximately 177cm wide and 73cm high. The orthogonal lines that structure the vanishing point take the form of the diminishing lateral lines of trees. This is where we find the 'parallel lines' references the 'meeting' of two worlds, or the passing from one realm into another, which, when we add the word 'appointment', a word meaning an agreement but also indicating an arrangement, it places this scene as some pre-destined *fait accompli.* In the foreground there are four large trees, most probably deciduous oaks which frame the picture into three equally sized areas. The central perspective into which all things converge coupled with the ubiquity of Uccello's characteristic profiles of human faces gives the picture a fish-eyed tilt as they hurl to the centre. That centre, just as the stanza break in the poem is a void acting as a kind of threshold or horizon. It represents the brink between quiddity and

[46] John Pope-Hennessy, *The Complete Work of Paulo Uccello* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1949), p.1.
[47] John Ruskin, cited in *The Complete Work of Paulo Uccello*, p.1.

abstraction, the real and the mythic. To the far right of the picture, there is a river providing a natural frontier and another crucial orthogonal. To the left of the foreground centre lies a small standing-water pond fringed with bulrushes and, perhaps most curiously of all, a bounty of putative mushrooms on the forest floor. The significance of this subterraneous, mycelial network allows for a particular contemporary reading. Given the importance of mushrooms to the forest's ecosystem more broadly, their presence, easily overlooked, reveals something conspicuous at the heart of this drama, not least the inextricability of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman.[48] Turning to the human figures in their scarlet, blue, pink, and cream jerkins, it is only by following the eye deep into that vanishing darkness of the forest into which all are compelled that the art of the composition reveals its magic. The figures are bent and contorted with frenzied energy, the scene is not one of a defiant crusade and there is a vulnerability to the bodies in their unruly poses as they charge their unseen quarry. This incongruity is part of the painting's power as there are a number of speculative inconsistencies that reveal the licence with which Uccello constructs this forest drama: the dogs are greyhounds rather than bloodhounds that are more typical, a hunt would ordinarily take place in daylight, and the number of men on horseback seems disproportionate to an effective hunt. Uccello's masterpiece makes the overblown human enterprise seem foolish, naïve, and gloriously thrilling, providing a source of inspiration for a contemporary poet alive to the weight of that numinous exchange as 'the men return', and 'they never quite arrive at what they seem'.

If, according to Latour, beginning in the fifteenth century, western landscape painting begins a process of 'organising the viewer's gaze so that it can serve as a counterpoint to a spectacle of objects and landscapes'[49], then where we stand in relation to the world involves a conditioning of our proximity to that idea of Nature 'out there'. Latour's concern is that the ecological crisis almost always comes up against the primacy of this subject position. As he says 'a return of the human to nature unleashes a kind of panic since we never know if we are

[48] Elio Schaechter's ethnomycology attempts to identify the species of mushroom so abundant on the clearing floor in Uccello's painting. Pointing to the 'highly stylized' nature of the image allows Uccello a licence to paint such an unlikely abundance of fungi. He goes on to suggest that 'the putative mushrooms do not suggest any strong symbolism and the hunters and their entourage do not appear to pay any attention to them.' Despite this symbolic dismissal, in achieving a stylized aesthetic, I am inclined to attach symbolic meaning to them only in so far as the association of mushrooms today speaks to altered states which affect both humans and nonhumans: psychotropic mutability and the threat/promise of intoxication. Their appearance also gestures to the mushroom cloud, an image that stands in for the absolute obliteration of the inhabitable world. The indiscriminate nature of them acts as a totalizing register of the technological mastery of Nature. Elio Schaechter, ''Mushrooms' in an Early Renaissance Painting: 'Uccello's The Hunt in the Forest.'' *Mycologist*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2005, pp.150–151., doi:10.1017/S0269915X05004039.

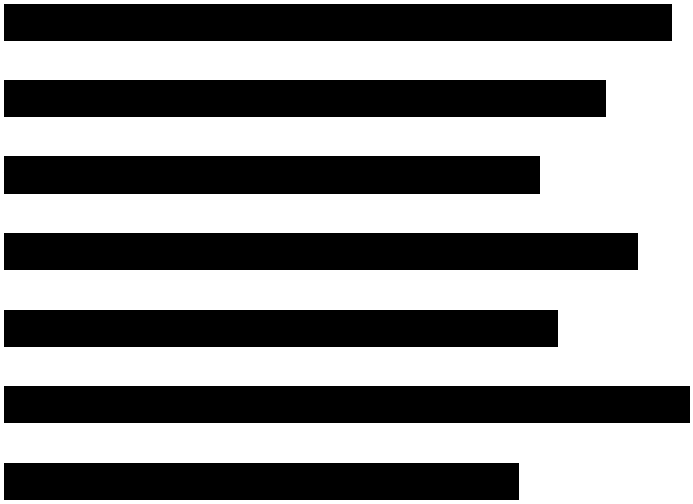
[49] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p.16-17.

being asked to return to the state of brute beats or to resume the deep movement of human existence.'[50] In the twenty first century, any notion of 'returning' involves what Jonathan Crary has called 'suspensions of perception'[51] The argument put forward by Crary is that modernity has fundamentally reshaped our techniques of observation in the form of a continual demand, so much so that in requiring us to 'pay attention' on screens, on devices, on television, we have done so at the expense of attention to our immediate, present environs. The great irony of this scopic paradigm is not lost on Crary when he says that 'one of the ways an immense social crisis of subjective dis-integration is metaphorically diagnosed is as a deficiency of 'attention'.[52] In Burnside's lyric space he pulls together the shadows at the dormant edges of our ordinary gaze, integrating all the latent features and symbols of the natural and mythic world which, following Crary's thesis we have overlooked in reaching this apotheosis of immanence. My contention is that this immanence is a flattening of perspective which conditions a contemporary ratio of our relationship to the finite planet, and in Burnside's forest, we are invited into the shadow of the forest, to venture in, to pursue, to track and trail in a transcendent space to remind ourselves of WH Auden's admonition that 'a culture is no better than its woods.'

The Hunt in the Forest

[redacted]

[50] Ibid., p.15.
[51] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999)
[52] Ibid., p.2



The poem begins with the childhood gaze, an innocence enclosed by the possibility of something intangible yet monstrous; death or rapture. Trading in the ritualistic ‘hiding place’ which relies on the hide-and-seek present/absent conditionals of ‘if’ and ‘then’, the place in question is an imaginative repository obscured to the adult seer. There is an incongruity over the addressee. Are we being told about children or adults? The poem seems to dissolve this discrepancy compounded by the word ‘they’ which scales the poem up to a universal pronoun. The trees, as in the painting, act orthogonally, as symbolic obstructions to knowledge. Shadows obscure, ironise, mirror, and haunt; they are objects without substance. An undescribed world cannot be ‘grown-up’, it is void of meaning at the same time also pregnant with it. Something else is alive, or set in motion prompted by the inevitability of ‘Nevertheless’, a necessary pursuit where ‘appointments’ have ‘momentum’ of their own. It is as if the words of the poem themselves are on the move, disappearing into the shadows leaving only a skittering resonance of a transient trace on the way to something else. The poem expresses Burnside’s poetic concern with *mutability,* where, in the attempt at accommodating ourselves in a nonhuman-oriented world, language ultimately dissolves. The poem unleashes a boundless chain-linked consciousness amongst all living things. That is to say, each individual thing has its own animist vitality but one conditioned by a relational interdependence, as if the hunted is made more sublime by the presence of the hunter and the unstoppable force that turns from ‘altered’ to ‘transformed’ is a progressive mutation from one state to another. It is on this axis that the poem shifts. ‘Altered’ is merely a slight change but ‘transformed’ implies that there is some form of perfection achieved. Is this what we are given to believe about death, something which is wholly unknowable but which acts as a

salve against our grief to imagine the departed as happier, healthier, perfected into something better in death? Rachelle Gauci has noted the circularity of the poem's momentum, citing Maurice Blanchot's claim that 'death opens interminably onto the repetition of the beginning'.[53] It is no coincidence then that the opening two poems in the collection 'Learning to Swim' and 'The Hunt in the Forest' are echoed by the final two poems 'Saint Hubert and the Deer' and 'Old Man Swimming' which circumscribe this idea identified by Gauci as an earthbound effect of this eternal return, in the same way that 'the men return' in the poem utterly changed.

The 'greyhound to roebuck, laughter to skin and bone;' that teases before the line break has the hunter and hunted in a compressed metonymic form echoing the change from the previous line. It reads almost graphically in illustrative snatches. We see the greyhound lock on to the roebuck, we hear the laughter of the hunters subside as the kill is made. It is a compression achieving a deeply connective tissue between the humans and the quarry. Here, when the sequential elements of the hunt are pared down to the pure matter of 'skin and bone', it falls as the last word which conjoins the dog, stag and hunter into one shapeshifting encounter.

The line break, as I have noted, is the making of a space for all kin, where the line 'and no one survives the hunt' scales the poem up to the alter of world-historical truth-telling. Something numinous has been exchanged, it is a solemn withdrawal for the hunters as 'they never quite arrive at what they seem' plays with sound of seem/seam, how something appears to the viewer but also points to a rupture in the fabric of things. The 'far in the woods' has become in the second stanza 'deep in the forest' so as to highlight the difference between a bucolic, enchanted setting to a dark, tenebrous crucible. As the 'men return' back to the human ken and tragic adulthood, there is little room for escape from the striking black knives of 'kill', 'slip', 'blood', 'silk', 'until', 'still'. It is as epiphanic as it is dark; the wager of Nature as a ravaged corporeality where the translation of the collision of human and animal bodies is sacrificial and solemn. What remains is the sullen object, the defiled, inert object of the pursuit where the slain animal now looms so large *in absentia*.

[53] Michel Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), p.57, cited in Rachelle Gauci, 'Rhapsody and Death in John Burnside's *The Hunt in the Forest*', 12 August, 2013, available at: https://textpublication.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/rhapsody-and-death-in-john-burnsides-the-hunt-in-the-forest/ [Accessed 15 September, 2016].

Natalie Pollard argues that *The Hunt in the Forest* 'is haunted by points of verbal and visual vanishing'[54] but crucially acknowledges the two-way perspectival distance between the speaker as 'both actor and spectator', at one remove but implicated nonetheless in this disappearing act. Perspective then, as I have said, is a form of detachment. The words in the poem almost take on the flight of the animal, as Burnside's lyric is on the move, never quite settling on a defined, fully disclosed thing. Just as in the painting, the quarry remains out of sight. As such, the poem participates in an ongoing process of revelation and concealment; suspending, if only temporarily, the privileged ontological status of the human for a crucible in which all living things take their place in the search for some unity in Nature. To do this, he creates liminal, interstitial spaces in time. A series of middle zones appear throughout the collection, but most notably in the sequence 'An Essay Concerning Time' where we find 'mid-afternoon' ('Kairos III, Königsberg'; 'Treatise on the Veil, II, Maintenance'), and 'the first day of late middle age' ('Treatise on the Veil, I. August'). These are stalled temporalities recurring throughout the collection, but there is also a spatial aggregation too in physical incongruities: 'middle ground' ('I. Kairos; 'II.[55]') occurs repeatedly, testing transformative power as a two-way process in a negotiated space. In the spirit of the hunt, and picking up another recurring term, language is always in some way a reflexive 'echo' with a source, or the pursuit of a dwelling ('Learning to Swim'; 'Echo Room'; 'Symposium', and 'The Missing'). It is always occupying a position between dwelling and non-dwelling as a kind of Meno's paradox; one which can be resolved in some sense as poetry is the *process* of revelation, of a belonging and a 'becoming'. For Burnside, this attunement to being open to change is a part of living as *Geist*:

> If am convinced of anything, I am convinced that it is essential to live *as a spirit* […] I would say we are not born *with* a spirit (as we are born with lungs, or a heart), but it is our peculiar gift to live *as a spirit*, by an imaginative (or magical, or alchemical) process: an *inventio*, by which we create ourselves from moment to moment, just as the world around us creates itself out of nothing.[56]

[54] Natalie Pollard, review of *The Hunt in the Forest* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Friday, March 26, 2010, issue 5582, p.28.
[55] 'View to the west across the valley of the wounded knee battleground with slain American Dakota Sioux and burial party barely visible above cottonwoods along the creek, Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, December 1890'.
[56] John Burnside, 'Strong Words', pp.259-261.

It is the 'moment to moment' that arrests here, a series of temporary revelations by which we construct the world around us. There is no complete unitary, unchanging world-picture that we conjure out of language and experience; it is always already on the way to something else. These transmutations could be the experience of poems themselves, each one a different lens to train on the world as it appears to us in fragments. The spirit is a kind of shared animism which allows for what Burnside calls 'A Science of Belonging', but, as Alexandra Campbell has asserted, 'for Burnside, the act of "belonging" is not simply derived through connection or encounter (though this is key) but relates to the ethical notions of membership, responsibility and acceptance. To belong is to be welcomed, to be accepted, and to accept that connection comes with responsibility and risk.'[57] The risk is that science reduces our capacity for mystery. On the contrary, for Burnside 'The more we know, the more the mystery deepens.'[58] And this is the responsibility Campbell speaks of, to reclaim some genuine experience of a shared habitus where one can feel part of a wider web of life than the all-too-human world of technological abstraction.

In documenting the pervasive will to self-empowerment as a doomed project, David Borthwick has observed 'the hunt as an allegory for the futility of tirelessly seeking power, or fame or renown; a rat race of men all bent on a goal that may be a chimera, a beast of fancy.'[59] Borthwick is keen to see how this allegory is for Burnside a critique of proprietorial masculinity, keenly aware that in Burnside's experience, as he has said, 'every man in the world, down to the poorest man, has the possibility of exercising power, if only over his even poorer wife and children.'[60] For Burnside it was, and is, everyday cruelty that suffuses the domestic with terror; his father was an orphan who lied about his origins his entire life, a nowhere man who died 'somewhere between the bar and the cigarette machine.'[61] The story begins in childhood, but it is the adult Burnside who has re-entered that primal scene to trace how, like his father's lies about his own life, his has been a discovery that his early life set him on a path towards his own vanishing point. Hilary Mantel remarked of Burnside's memoir:

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[57] Alexandra Campbell, *Archipelagic Poetics: Ecology in Modern Scottish and Irish poetry*, p.148.
[58] John Burnside, 'A Science', p.95.
[59] David Borthwick, 'Driven by Loneliness and Silence: John Burnside's Susceptible Solitaries', *The Bottle Imp*, Issue 12, November, 2012.
[60] Lesley McDowell, 'Poet sees the Plight,' in *Sunday Herald*, January 19, 2003, 'Seven Days' Supplement, p.10.
[61] John Burnside, *A Lie About My Father* (London: Vintage, 2007), back cover.

> The child's boundaries were permeable – open to the night, the wind, the sounds of animals and vegetation. His father, volatile, capricious, chronically dissatisfied, picked and picked at the ethereal sensibilities of the child, as if trying to locate and test the boundaries that were proper to a man.[62]

Mantel's judgement on Burnside's life-writing speaks to the texture of 'The Hunt in the Forest'. As such the edges of one's experiences, of what *could* have happened, finds a distinctive imagination which suffuses physical edgelands with this dark dread. In the crucible of the forest, Burnside aims to test this indeterminacy of the childhood realm by a constant cancellation of anything fully formed.

The Clearing

The chiaroscuro of the sunny clearing to the forest's shade is a liminal zone stalked in *The Hunt in the Forest*. The imaginative seed of this dark border is planted in childhood, in the sudden coolness of the first few steps under the canopy; or in the physical hesitation one feels under a greying sky of when to turn for home. In exposed places, the weather is the critical factor; the concern in the forest is the available light. Taken together, these atmospheric thresholds, or apprehensions of environment, awaken a sense of trepidation, of the hidden and concealed, but the darkening of the forest gestures further towards danger, fright, and even terror. The forest is an indeterminate place where sightlines change with every step as the sureness of the path gives way to a new topography. Walking into the forest you are accessing an unfamiliar and unnerving world but one riven with seductions and revelation, a possibility of a re-enchantment of Nature. Burnside's poetry gestures towards the provisionality of fixed forms both physical and linguistic, generating an interstitial gulf between self and world.

Crucially, childhood stories open many poems in this collection, gesturing towards the plasticity of language as yet unformed or not fully attached to the reality it seeks to depict. This entails a playfulness on the part of the poet, a conjurer of grammar with its etymological roots, *grimoire*—a textbook of charms, spells and divination—,a person who figures as the enchanter-in-chief for a preliterate crowd. Heidegger's philosophy is where Burnside's lyric turns away from the clearing of the glade, and pushes the drama back into the forest. In many respects, the active search for meaning in language is a grown-up game of hide and seek,

[62] Hilary Mantel, 'What He Could Bear', review of *A Lie About My Father* in *London Review of Books*, vol. 28, no. 5, 9 March, 2006.

Heidegger's Black Forest serves as another *Holzweg*, a 'woodway' in which a philosophy of dwelling is found 'at the meeting of parallel lines'. The forest metaphor standing as a shadow to human civilization itself becomes the theatre for a forbidding wager between man and animal, human and spirit.

The distinction between the image and the lyric speaks to the differences between time and space. As Harrison states: 'unlike music and poetry, whose rhythms participate in, arise out of, or echo the flow itself, most visual artworks cannot directly represent the temporal flow of our inner lives, precisely because they are committed to the spatialization of form and the formalization of space.'[63] He sees this distinction as a discontinuity 'manifest in the phenomenon of language, which does not belong to the order of nature. Language is an ecstasis that opens the space of intelligibility within nature's closure.'[64] The difference is crucial from the point of view of how we experience time. Harrison shows that when we build, architecture *houses* our experience of lived time as human time, demonstrated as he shows when turning attention to ruins. The point is that ruins show what human time is 'up against—natural or geological time—ruins have a way of recalling us to the very ground of our human worlds.'[65] What he is saying forms part of the development of Burnside's poetic vision, that the *logos* is the *oikos*, so that 'the word ecology means far more than the science that studies ecosystems; it names the universal manner of being in the world.'[66]

In Heideggerian terms, language is a disclosure of meaning *in time*, the suspension of which is achieved through a rupture in the logic of how time used to pass. Burnside's forestalled lyric here is an attempt to speak across that gulf to offer a way into a meditative silence of what could either be a perpetrator's guilt or a victim's trauma. For Burnside, this could be personal, but in the first collection to emerge after a global financial crash, one which searches for an appropriate way in which to dwell on the earth, the forest metaphor could be a threshold we have crossed as a species of killers, unhabituated in a world presumed to be available for a limitless idea of mortgaging the future. That word, mortgage, comes from mort, meaning dead, and gage, meaning pledge.[67] The deal dies when the debt is paid. If a

[63] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, p.3.
[64] Ibid., p.200.
[65] Ibid., p.3.
[66] Ibid., p.200.
[67] "Mortgage | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Mortgage by Etymonline." *www.etymonline.com*, www.etymonline.com/word/mortgage. [Accessed 18 Feb, 2022].

limitless extraction of the natural world represents some sort of grievous ‘appointment’, then in entering the forest and confronting this harrowing wager, Burnside offers a way of balancing that debt, as I show in a close reading of a poem about the death of a badger in the following chapter, moving us on to renewed terms from a damaging relationship to the planet. *The Hunt in the Forest* inculcates our belonging to the fate of the world.

Chapter Four

Blues for Badger

All the world will be your enemy, prince with a thousand enemies, and whenever they catch you, they will kill you.

Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (1972)[1]

Animals are great – until they mildly inconvenience us.

John Burnside[2]

like friendly animals we might have known
from somewhere else, some childhood we have lost
and turn to one another to renew
with questions, dares, evasions, hunted looks.

'Epithalmium IV: Borders'[3]

In April 1971, a Gloucestershire dairy farmer found a dead badger on his land. He took the corpse to the local government Animal Health office in Gloucester where the post-mortem, conducted by Roger Muirhead, a local MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food) veterinary officer reported 'pathological lesions caused by tuberculosis, and identified its causal bacterium, Mycobacterium bovis, in fluids taken from the badger's lymph glands.'[4] This discovery was swiftly and widely communicated within MAFF and set in train a decades long investigation into the relationship between badgers and bovine TB (bTB). The humble badger had unwittingly become part of the contemporary story of industrial agriculture, yet its place in the British cultural imagination has always contained a whiff of suspicion; there

[1] Richard Adams, *Watership Down* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2005), p.35.
[2] 'Nature' – 'Winter is coming, and stubborn little field mice are beginning to take up residence in my house' New Statesman, 20 November, 2019.
[3] John Burnside, 'Epithalmium, IV. Borders' in *A Normal Skin*, p.51.
[4] Angela Cassidy, *Vermin, Victims and Disease: British Debates over Bovine Tuberculosis and Badgers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) Open Access, p.51.

has been and remains a degree of antipathy towards this ancient woodland creature. This is to say that how we come to think about the animal today; its appearance, its habitat, its proximity to us, its right to exist in peace is a question mediated through longer, often predetermined dispositions. The Badger Trust claims that the animal is 'a living symbol of the British countryside'[5], but the badger's role in the contemporary environmental debate is symbolically two-faced. On the one hand it has been invoked as pariah, pest, and vermin; on the other, a freedom-fighting masked bandit; an almost mysterious, long-neglected and misunderstood victim, one which would eventually claim its place in 1995 as the symbol of the National Wildlife Trusts.

The early 1970s, when this link between badgers and bovine TB was first made, was a time of growing intersection between conservation, natural history and political liberation movements—*Friends of the Earth* was founded in 1969; *Greenpeace* in 1971. Documenting this political moment in her extensively researched book, *Vermin, Victims and Disease: British Debates over Bovine Tuberculosis*, Angela Cassidy wagers that public consciousness shifted due to what she calls ''galvanising events' for the new environmental politics in the UK, including Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), the Smarden toxic chemical spill (1963) and the Torrey Canyon oil spill (1967), [which] all turned upon literary and visual imagery of suffering animals affected by pollution.'[6] Cassidy outlines how the early 1970s saw an amplification and a radicalisation of social and environmental movements of the previous decade, which further encompassed broader concerns about environmental damage from nuclear stand-offs and oil crises. Increasingly it was animal imagery that cut through to the public mood. As she explains:

> Similarly, while the UK had long-standing traditions of political action against animal cruelty, including anti-vivisectionism and anti-blood-sports campaigning, animal politics also took a more radical turn at this time. New forms of activism emerged, including the disruption of fox and other hunts in the field (sabbing) and releasing animals from laboratories: it was also around this time that distinctions between long-standing 'animal welfare' and more radical 'animal rights' agendas started to emerge.[7]

[5] 'The Fascinating Lives of Badgers', available at: https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/badgers [Accessed 17 March, 2020].
[6] Angela Cassidy, *Vermin, Victims and Disease: British Debates over Bovine Tuberculosis and Badgers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) Open Access, p.49.
[7] Ibid., p.49.

These environmental fears and apprehensions fed into a literary and cultural imagination, with images of colossal earth-moving diggers carving up the land for the modern motorway and the construction of bypasses to new urban settlements resulting in ever-expanding conurbations. Wild animals were under threat, their fates tinged with a condition of exile. Perhaps the most famous example in literature is Richard Adams's influential *Watership Down* (1978) which tarried with the after-effect of the public awareness of myxomatosis (an infectious, viral disease affecting rabbits), which came to the UK in 1953.[8] The late 1960s also saw an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) affecting livestock across the country, a crisis which would require military intervention. Like the rabies rumours before it, the die was cast for what would prick the abscess of public opinion with the evidence that badgers are vectors for the spread of bovine Tuberculosis. That fateful discovery culminated in 1973 in The Badgers Act which responded to the lobbying of badger advocates, granting the animals specific protections against killing or cruelty. At the same time, it created a framework by which government could licence individuals to 'to kill or take' the animals for research or conservation purposes, as well as 'for purposes of preventing the spread of disease.'[9]

The Badgers Act instituted the culling of badgers as the political apex of ecological compassion in Britain. It was an attempt to move on from outdated practices such as using cyanide 'gassing' and snaring, whilst also accounting for a new-found ethics of empathy and care towards wild animals coterminous with the public mood. What was once a debate affecting farmers and rural economies became a touchstone for erstwhile predisposed political opinions about the relationship between the country and the city; the elsewhere of pastoral England as a place of harmony and plenty, and the reality of urbanisation, intensive farming practices and the increasing demand for meat which swept the badger up in a larger story of our relationship to woodland creatures. What I want to show here is how John Burnside creates a space in which to allow for a stepping back from overt political discourse, to ask questions about our own accommodation in the wider world the animals share with us.

By the 1980s, it was estimated that the badger population in England and Wales was around 250,000, a number which has risen over subsequent decades. Today the population is

[8] Ibid., p.50
[9] The Badgers Act, 1973, cited in Angela Cassidy, *Vermin, Victims and Disease*, p.60.

estimated to be around 485,000.[10] Alongside the constant updating of legislation relating to the culling of badgers to reduce cases of bTB transmission, it is thought that over 50,000 badgers are killed on the roads each year.[11] This number far outstrips the number of badgers culled—up to 2017, DEFRA has culled over 15,000 badgers—but debates about the presence of badgers in the UK seemingly pass over the larger number of deaths on our roads. Charting the period's blithe misunderstanding of what would prove to be fatal to the many animals in the proximity of our new motorways, cultural historian Joe Moran points to the publication in 1974 of *The Roadside Wildlife Book*, 'written just as the first campaigns against urban motorway building were gathering momentum in west London, Leeds, Glasgow and other cities, [it] was devoted to the counter-intuitive proposition that the roadside was an eco-haven, rich in wildlife.'[12] In 1992, The Protection of Badgers Act did nothing to address the growing issue of roadkill, but sought instead to consolidate previous legislation in The Badgers Act of 1973 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981, advocating ethical culling which legislated that a 'person is guilty of an offence if, except as permitted by or under this Act, he wilfully kills, injures or takes, or attempts to kill, injure or take, a badger.'[13] A badger injured or killed by a vehicle is no legal offence and reveals the blind spot in mitigating technology and the health of the countryside. In other words, nothing could stop the car.

In this formative context, Burnside has turned to the badger as emblematic of a peculiar battle-ground in the modern environmental movement. It is a furtive, stealthy animal, noted for its drive toward self-preservation and pugnacious spirit, arresting those kinds of feelings in many who come down on one side of a 'debate' as to the dominion of badgers in our woodlands. These ongoing debates about the badger betray an instrumental, cold objectivity towards the fates of other animals. Burnside's project in his ecopoetics more broadly is to move away from this detachment by seeing how cold, unfeeling, and less human we have become in the process. As he says in an article on the badger published in 2013, around the time an Independent Expert Panel report on the pilot badger culls in Somerset and Gloucestershire was being presented to the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and

[10] Philip Case, 'Badger population rises to 485,000 in England and Wales' in *Farmer's Weekly*, 24 March, 2017, available at: www.fwi.co.uk/livestock/health-welfare/livestock-diseases/bovine-tb/badger-population-rises-485000-england-wales [Accessed 30 March, 2020].
[11] 'Road Casualties', available at: https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/report [Accessed 13 July, 2020].
[12] Joe Moran, 'A Cultural History of the New Nature Writing' in *Literature & History*, vol. 23, no. 1 Spring, 2014, p.51. Manchester University Press http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/LH.23.1.4
[13] The Protection of Badgers Act, 1992. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/51/section/1.

Rural Affairs: 'to see another animal in its true light, however briefly, is to recover a little of the connection that makes us compassionate, which is to say: whole.'[14] He goes on to say that this recovery involves a wholesale shift in our relationship to other living things; it is an act of witness, of looking beyond the confines of predisposed thinking and 'scientific objectivity'; it is a process by which '[t]o become compassionate […] we must first see the other, not as hearsay or prejudice would have it be, but as it is.'[15] Later, he directly addresses the question of our treatment of badgers, that

> we should be thinking carefully about what we do, especially when it comes to killing; and right now, in England, everyone should be thinking about badgers, not because the planned cull will place them on a list of endangered species, but because every time we kill for no good reason, we damage our own credibility as fully formed creatures, with all the faculties one would expect from the living: attentiveness, knowledge of and care for their habitat, the spirit of inquiry, an ability to feel and to imagine.[16]

Burnside's poetry allows for a deep immersion into this felt compassion which, for Fiona Sampson, makes him 'a late Romantic, who looks to his *own* responses to replace both an absent God and the realist contract.'[17] His poetry doesn't aim for a completeness, or a unity in the strict sense. Death is vicarious, entering our imagination through traces, shadows, flickers, and glimmers, 'the ghost of something feral in a slick / of dew' ('II. Pain Management')[18], the consequence of our presence becomes something unknown where 'something you must have disturbed has hurried aside / and left you a liverish stain in the yellowing grass'.[19] These images are momentary perceptions which make for constant slippages into sequential metaphor, anchored in compassionate feeling for the lives of others with only passing glimpses of a series of truths, as swift-footed as the animal bounding away in the headlights or darting from the undergrowth.

In the preface to her book, Cassidy invites two questions which dovetail with Burnside's ecopoetics: 'How do and how should people live alongside other animals? What does it mean to *care* along the way, and who or what should (or do) we care for?'[20] To pose these

[14] John Burnside, 'Into the Wilderness' in *New Statesman* 12 April, 2015, p.99.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p.99-100.
[17] Fiona Sampson, *Beyond the Lyric*, p.252.
[18] John Burnside, 'In Memoriam II: Pain Management' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.4.
[19] Ibid., p.5.
[20] Angela Cassidy, *Vermin, Victims and Disease,* p.vii.

questions is to institute questions about the value of animals in the British countryside. In doing this she is indirectly making a space for the right of animals to dwell peaceably, but also inculcating our sense of home as a shared space with other animals as an ongoing form of civic and cultural management. Crucial to this, and to Burnside's poetics, is an ethics of affect about our relationship with the animals that live alongside us, animals we have co-opted into the myths we tell ourselves about our place in the land. It might be said that historically positive depictions of the badger have initialled the forces in opposition to proposed culls. I want to detail some of that before close reading the Burnside poem 'Uley Blue', partly to show how reading this in 2020 reveals we have come a long way from a late Edwardian idyll, that modern depictions of the badger are often rooted in abject scorn. The badger (*Meles meles*)—a burrowing relative of the family *Mustelidae*, which includes pine martens, otters, pole cats, weasels and ferrets—in particular, has been the victim of hearsay, myth and anecdotal accounts of devilry in the maintenance and health of British agriculture.

Steering away from the overt political vacillations over badger culling, this section will examine 'Uley Blue' by Burnside, which pulls many strands of the debate together, beginning from the local and site-specific connotations of a place in Gloucestershire, but then moves to ask deeper questions about the badger as a wild animal in our midst, exploring the underside of humanity's understanding of cruelty and the management of the death of others. The poem comes from *The Hunt in the Forest*, a collection that deals, as I say in chapter three with the after-effects of death and goes on to explore, through ritual and hunting, the many forms of grief we attempt to articulate towards things lost. One reason for my overview of the bTB debate is to show that by reading this poem now, at a juncture in the expanding ecology of Burnside's poetics, is to show how that relationship reveals the growing sympathy we feel towards the fate of our woodland animals. Burnside's poem asks if there is a stain on our conscience in this regard. To read this in 2020, as DEFRA (MAFF's successor, The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs) announce an end to all 'inhumane' practices of badger culling, instead rolling out a nationwide vaccination programme, is to celebrate the gains of the modern environmental movement alongside changes in the weight of our collective ecological conscience.[21]

[21] 'Bovine TB vaccine trials get go-ahead in England and Wales' in *The Guardian*, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/22/bovine-tb-vaccine-trials-get-go-ahead-in-england-and-wales-badgers [Accessed 3 August, 2020]. New evidence also suggests that up to 94 per cent of bTB infections occur cattle-to-cattle, see also: https://ptes.org/campaigns/hedgehogs/hedgehogsandbadgers/

Badgers in Literature

With its striking black and white striped face and mixture of porcine and ursine body shape; its omnivorous diet coupled with its nocturnal activity and discreet sett habitat, the badger remains today an animal that divides uninformed opinion, forcing difficult questions on us about their place in the British countryside. In British folklore, they have been portrayed as either benevolent creatures of a high, morally independent character, or nefarious rogues who dig up quality land and ravage other species. As Beatrix Potter dismisses the disagreeable Tommy Brock, the badger may be simply 'not nice in his habits.'[22] Potter's badger is a deviant nuisance, stealing baby rabbits for his supper, cuckooing the tumbledown home of the fox Mr. Tod's house; just as much a menace to the innocent rabbits as the curmudgeonly old Mr. McGregor. But perhaps the most enduring badger in the British imagination comes from Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* (1908), where he first appears gruff but wise, hostile and a little insouciant; it is a brusqueness which eventually gives way to a doughty, hospitable warmth as Ratty and Mole discover one night wandering lost in the *Wild Wood*. Burnside mentions this story in his article, in view of the fact Badger's home appears as a lost Roman dwelling complete with arches and stone columns, the remnants of a glorified past now buried under layers of temporary dwellings that humans erect only to move on all too quickly. Badger's home is testament to permanence, dwelling just under our noses, or just beneath the surface of our temporary habitats. Indeed, badger setts can be over a hundred years old.[23] Burnside quotes from Grahame's famous story, to make a point about the enduring spirit of the animal, offering a way of upholding their right to dwell peaceably alongside us: 'People come–they stay for a while, they flourish, they build–and they go. It is their way. But we remain. There were badgers here, I've been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again.'[24] The badger for Burnside, appears as a redoubtable, diffident, self-sufficient character, analogous to the stoic sensibility of the morally independent British character, but also nothing of the sort.

But the badger's fate in today's ecologically attuned world is of a piece with wholesale arguments about the politicisation of British, not to say the English countryside as this rather flippant piece from 2004 in *The Times* shows:

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[22] Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Mr. Tod* (New York: Frederic Warne and Co., LTD, 1918), p.9.
[23] "The Fascinating Lives of Badgers | Badger Trust.", available at: https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/badgers [Accessed 17 March, 2020]
[24] John Burnside, 'Into the Wilderness'.

> Not since the Beast of Bodmin, not since the Hound of the Baskervilles, had so awful a creature plagued the countryside. *Meles vulgaris*, something between a weasel and a bear, was overrunning hill and dale. And it was, of course, Labour's fault. What were the teddy hugging, town-dwelling, pizza-eating classes going to do about it, I was asked? They would not be content until every rustic parlour was a zoo of free-range foxes, badgers, stags, kites and predatory geese?
>
> I could not argue the damage. Across the landscape meadows were being upheaved, hedges, banks and bridleways subsiding, tennis courts falling into holes. Tunnels of Ho Chi Minh ingenuity were sapping the ancient walls and lawns of England with a verminous Vietcong.[25]

Tongue in cheek certainly, but it bounces the political football that is the badger's place in the cultural imagination. In its rollicky gossip it betrays an objective snobbery. Another unsolicited 'think-piece' from *The Daily Telegraph*'s Charles Moore goes even further by claiming about the badger, and with no sense of irony that 'The concept of life itself has warped', going on to proclaim that '[p]eople who go white with rage at the idea of any restriction on the abortion of human foetuses get even more beside themselves at any killing of wild animals by human beings'[26], somehow equating critique of the pro-life movement with the determination to protect badgers from untrammelled human rights. These examples show that the badger debate falls into pre-existing fears from left and right, red or blue, where a whole manner of conflicts are invoked to suppose the underlying intentions of each warring faction. The badger is iconic, but the language we use when we talk about it is paramount to an ethics of animal rights. As Burnside remarks in his article, such unwarranted fears about its presence have been deadly, 'I very much doubt that any life form […] would casually visit wholesale destruction on another species, purely on the basis of hearsay, local prejudices and innuendo.'[27]

For a more even-handed portrayal of the badger, one which sets about locating space apart from the human domain, we must turn to poetry. Edward Thomas's early twentieth century poem 'The Combe'[28] has the badger residing in the 'dark, ancient and dark' of the hillside

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[25] Simon Jenkins, 'A Verminous Vietcong Stalks The Countryside', *The Times* (May 21, 2004).
[26] Charles Moore, 'The Murky 21st Century Tale of Tommy Brock and Mr Grant' in *The Daily Telegraph* October 12, 2012, available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/earthnews/9604460/The-murky-21st-century-tale-of-Tommy-Brock-and-Mr-Grant.html [Accessed 21 September, 2020].
[27] John Burnside, 'Into the Wilderness', p.100.
[28] Edward Thomas, 'The Combe' available at: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57197/the-combe [Accessed 21 September, 2020].

hollow, undisturbed, where 'no one slides over the sliding chalk'. This most inhospitable of places, as deep as England, becomes a site of invasive barbarity where some respectful distance between man and animal is sundered to a darker fate in a place of human-imposed brutality:

> But far more ancient and dark
>
> The Combe looks since they killed the badger there,
>
> Dug him out and gave him to the hounds,
>
> That most ancient Briton of English beasts.

Patrick Barkham traces this troubled relationship with badgers, bringing us up to date observing 'both ancient enmities and a more contemporary sentimentality towards badgers'[29], where, in this passage he shows just how much of the British countryside is linked to that most ancient Briton of English beasts:

> The badger, and its other old names - brock, pate, grey, bawson, billy, black-and-white are written into our landscape: Badger in Shropshire, Brocklebank in the Lake District, Grayswood in Surrey, Badgers Mount in Kent, Broxbourne in Hertfordshire. At least 140 Anglo-Saxon place names originate from broc. There are a fair number of fox-related place names but, apart from the odd hamlet called Rattery and a brace of Pigeon Lanes, few other species have such a strong linguistic presence in human habitations. We might imagine this shows the esteem in which we hold this most independent of wild animals, but the history of our dealings with the badger over the centuries is one of relentless brutality. This, too, is revealed in our language, in the origin of the verb 'to badger'.[30]

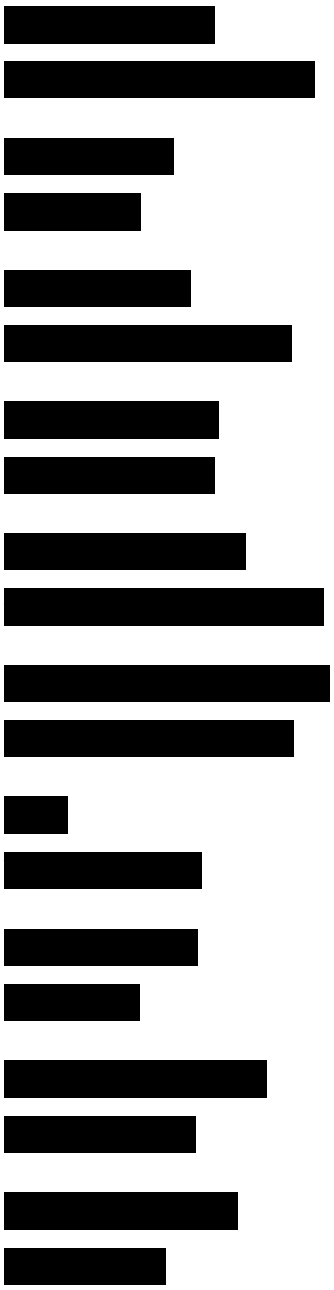
It is a stretch to say that the verb badger is somehow brutal, but the point stands. It is an unwelcome effect of language, an intrusion. In the nineteenth century, John Clare's famous 'Badger' depicts the grizzly practice of badger-baiting as a bloodthirsty pastime. The poem, spirited along in heroic couplets documents a brutish spectacle, where the 'old grunting badger' is depicted as both friend and foe, its viciousness seemingly at odds with its rather diminutive size which nonetheless endows the animal with a brusque charm befitting of his

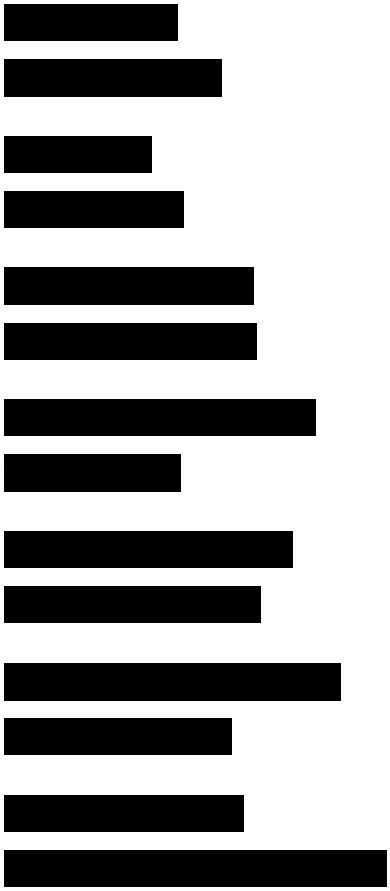
[29] Patrick Barkham, *Badgerlands: The Twilight World of Britain's most Enigmatic Animal* (London: Granta, 2013), p.8.
[30] Ibid., p.4.

status as admired and feared. These depictions are analogous with Barkham's account; that long held ambivalence towards the badger becomes something engendered in today's debates about its place in British cultural imagination. I want next to show how Burnside's poem responds indirectly to such a climate of debate.

In showing how this poem incorporates myth, facts, direct experience and historical records, I am able to contextualise it with the present concerns of the environmental movement. It is to find a common ground on which to approach such a subject as the place of badgers in today's environment.

ULEY BLUE





An initial reading of the poem finds the speaker having found a badger hit by a vehicle. Blue from the bodywork of the vehicle has left a mark on the animal. The speaker halts to observe the dead or dying animal and finds a redemptive moment in the rain. A stain is somehow washed clean. There is an act of grace in this, and it comes to reinstate the natural colours of the badger as a form of peace-making in the recovery of its agency. The road in the first stanza echoes that of the term roadkill in that it is the road itself which kills. Human infrastructure is here the cause of death and it implicates all those who use the road as a collective murder of the animal. This is the only poem directly about badgers in Burnside's oeuvre. Though they have made fleeting appearances before and after this poem, it is in a collection about the art of dying and the management of death in which this poem sits as apposite of our destructive habits towards the fates of others.

Burnside's title refers to a specific location, the old mill village of Uley, Gloucestershire, which lies between the main county towns of Stroud and Dursley. The blue refers to the famous cloth that was made there, where weavers worked in the mills erected along the many

[31] John Burnside, 'Uley Blue', first appeared in *London Review of Books*, vol. 30, no. 23, 4 December 2008; *The Hunt in the Forest*, pp.31-2.

natural streams which feed into the Ewelme river. The valley's springs contain salts and minerals which were then turned into famous dyes from Stroud Scarlet to Uley Blue. The poem begins and returns to this historical association, but in between deviates using blue as a formal device to set a tone, aiming towards tuning to a particular 'blue' mood as the subject matter more directly, namely a lament in the form of a song to some broken or damaged relationship. The blue then, appearing five times in the poem, oscillates between descriptive and suggestive imagery as well as providing a counterpoint to the black and white and grey of the badger.

Figure 8. Harry Payne, 'Prince Rupert's Cavalry Charging at Edgehill in 1642', c.1920. Illustration from Story of the British Nation, Volume II, by Walter Hutchinson.

Uley blue cloth has a long association with the military, at one stage the main cloth of the British army; the martial colour associated with blue tailcoats and hunting clothes. Today, schools which carry the name bluecoat are reminders of the national influence of this prized material. We find an example of this military dress in the 1642 painting by Henry Payne which shows the Royalist charge during the early civil war battle at Edgehill, Prince Rupert heroically depicted charging the Parliamentarians resplendent in his blue uniform (see figure 3).

In the poem, Burnside pulls together this martial history into the history of hunting more broadly. The death of the badger is as a by-product of blue industry: only the hunter's blue is now the blue paint of the car. There is an explicit reference to 'the huntsmen' which, as in other poems in the collection are granted an almost pan-historical place. The speaker, like the Gloucestershire dairy farmer, finds a badger 'struck down in the road'. Were they driving, and pulled over? Did they hit it? It is because of that 'as if', a phrase which borders on self-reproach which in any case lingers on credulity and here, that 'as if' is 'by some / misgiving'. A misgiving is a doubt or apprehension about consequence. The speaker puts this question on the reader, almost questioning their own sense of complicity in the event. We get an allusion to fabric and cloth in the word 'Tatters', and 'blue / in the face' carries an exhausted sense of appeal to the intractable badger debate. At this point however, the martial blue is dropped off. The blue's presence is temporary,

picked up and rejected, inviting a wider reading of what Sampson dubs a 'reflective awareness'[32] in Burnside's work.

Evidence of Badgers in Britain date back almost 250,000 years. To know that now as many as 50,000 badgers die on the roads each year, this poem accommodates that timeframe. Woad is the dyer's blue made from the plant *Isatis tinctoria*; it was used as a dye by the ancient inhabitants of the north of Britain, the Picts, whose name means 'painted ones'. We then move to the historical locale in Gloucestershire itself where the blue becomes the object of the rifts in English history, as the 'huntsmen // pass' watched when 'young girls would / have put away their work' we have a clear image of workers suspending their labour against the aristocracy recalling the Stroudwater riots of 1825 as well as the aforementioned Royalist blue of the English civil war. The blue here then is used to engender division between civil tribes, Barkham's 'ancient enmities' finds a contemporary invocation in the debates about badger culling. That sense of civility is carried further by 'some old / courtesy' when we return to the speaker who is grounded in that ongoing debate with the hanging 'I' holding the sound of the 'sky' from the previous stanza as a kind of 'nothing new under the sun' timelessness. In then passing over a line break there is a hesitation in the act, but also a betrayal of the power of the animal's heft in the use of the word 'dragged' before the speaker 'stood for a while'. That passing of time is critical to the practice of culling. The 'while' is time for the onset of pain, but also the welling of grief in the witness and it postulates time of death as a degree of 'humaneness' in the killing of badgers. We also get a repetition of 'as if' which is no longer a misgiving, it has become more of a hoped-for Lazarus-like resurrection. This death in life finds a cold calculation in a report published by the Independent Expert Panel (IEP) on pilot badger culls in Somerset and Gloucestershire in 2014 which found that

> the IEP took 5 minutes as a threshold for a humane death by shooting and 95% of Badgers as a threshold for how many Badgers should die in that period as a threshold for the cull being humane. Five minutes is a long time but in humans the onset of extreme pain from firearm injuries can be that long.

In the studies on which they reported, where trained observers accompanied shooters into the field and observed deaths of Badgers, the good news was that just over half of Badgers died within 10 seconds of being shot. However, it was '*extremely likely* [i.e. 95-100% probability] *that between 7.4% and 22.8% of badgers that were shot at were still alive after 5*

[32] Fiona Sampson, *Beyond the Lyric*, p.251.

min, and therefore at risk of experiencing marked pain' and so the 95% criterion was not met.[33]

That wish to 'see' the animal survive is then contrasted by the use of the word 'blunder' which as a verb relates to blindness, from the old Norse 'blundra' meaning 'to shut one's eyes'.[34] The momentum of the word evokes the fear of a mistake with a hint of embarrassment. What follows again in the appearance of 'cloud-blue' cleverly institutes the word passing as passing clouds from the 'sky' in stanza seven; a 'passing' is also a death attached to some form of ascension. It is here at stanza thirteen where the poem turns. Whatever the speaker has brought to the scene, their hopes and fears and extended metaphors are betrayed here.

The word 'stubborn' could quite easily be lifted from Beatrix Potter's description of Tommy Brock, but etymologically the word has an unknown origin. One interpretation is that it refers to something as 'untameable' which pulls us back into the ambiguity of the threshold between wild and domestic. Intriguingly, the word also has a link to 'indelible' re-establishing the association with ink and dye which comes back to us towards the end. It is this line where we find a deep-rooted relationship between the poetic and the ecological, that there might be a language of the openness that beckons some renewed disposition. The fact the word 'stubborn' is followed by 'as a wave' jarringly breaks down that intractableness for some large abstract shift. Infections come in waves, but also when we physically wave, we are seeing something or someone on its way to somewhere else. Is the badger here on its way to some form of rehabilitation? Does this death coarsen our sense of animal agency? The speaker is confronting a moment of deep peace-making, attenuating to a sense of interruption, forcing a confrontation with a suspiciously gambled game of indifference to the animals' fate. The badger is recalcitrant, refractory as it 'refused that resurrection', there's no paradise that waits for such an ignominious end, only 'the rain' which 'came slow and steady' allowing

[33]"Shooting Badgers – Mark Avery." *Markavery.info*, available at: www.markavery.info/2020/07/08/shooting-badgers-1/#:~:text=Based%20to%20some%20extent%20on. [Accessed 17 February, 2021].
'Pilot Badger Culls in Somerset and Gloucestershire Report by the Independent Expert Panel' Chair: Professor Ranald Munro. Presented to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP March 2014, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300382/independent-expert-panel-report.pdf [Accessed 6 July, 2020].
[34] "Blunder | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Blunder by Etymonline." *www.etymonline.com*, available at: www.etymonline.com/word/blunder. [Accessed 10 July, 2020].

time for a process of grief to emerge. The vivid image of ‘ink spots in the dust’ reinforces the notion of the indelible and we’re coming back to a stubbornness dyed in the wool.

The final two stanzas offer an abstracted appearance of human presence which crucially involves touch. In ‘something like a hand’ there is a buried reference to Shakespeare’s ‘dyer’s hand’ from sonnet CXI. I will present lines 6-10 here, showing the *volta*:

> *And almost thence my nature is subdued*
> *To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:*
> *Pity me, then, and wish I were renewed;*
> *Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink*
> *Potions of eisel 'gainst my strong infection;*[35]

This poem allows for a reading which pulls together dye with infection. But for us today this is a prevarication, the badger is steeped in the stained reality of our industrial landscape, a vaccination against its crime of being there is a salve to our own conscience. Is vaccination our cure for our blues for badger? The Latin ‘*inficere*’ originally meant ‘to dye’ and it permits a notion that it is the human who has infected the badger, our conscience stained by the industrial slaughter of cattle. That link is established in the closing line, using colour as metonymic of the combined fates of the two animals.

But I want to pause on ‘smoothing the fur’ – smoothing over/out the animosity we have towards pests, giving it a moment’s grace, applying balm, coaxing with love, the way we might a housecat. There’s a feeling the hand is ‘fulling’, the practice of using fuller’s earth, a whitening or bleaching clay to absorb oils and impurities like lanolin from wool and textiles. The Badger’s pelt is purified by touch that has moved from the speaker’s hand to a dematerialised touch from the rain. That the hand conducts a synesthetic spell to absorb the blue or move away from it to a ‘grey’, a middle or neutral ground which the poem as a whole has sought to position itself, accounts for the abstract connection between species. But it steeps the human in its historical moment; the badger has died, but the human is dyed ‘in what it works in’. Here we can say that whatever form of confession Burnside’s poem is, it is poisoned by a fatalistic grief as to the complicity of our ongoing mistreatment of animals. Taking the cue from the purifying rain here, the following chapter turns to water in Burnside’s poetry.

[35] William Shakespeare, *Sonnets and a Lover’s Complaint* (London: The Folio Society, 1989), p.111.

Chapter Five

'The Water's Answer'

> And as life itself began in the sea, so each of us begins his individual life in a miniature ocean within his mother's womb, and in the stages of his embryonic development repeats the steps by which his race evolved, from gill-breathing inhabitants of a water world to creatures able to live on land.[1]

Rachel Carson

> but what I remember best is the water's answer,
>
> the shadow it left in my blood when it let me go
>
> and the tug in my bones that remained, like a scar, or an
>
> echo[2]
>
> 'Learning to Swim'

Water in John Burnside's poetry acts. In its many forms it is a transformative metaphysical element which occasions moments of grace by screening, misting, engulfing, concealing, and blanketing our field of perception. Burnside's poems observe the drama of water, of the many forms it takes as a conditioning element. In 'Rain', the speaker is 'alone in the car, with the windows all the way down' having driven 'out into the meadows'. The speaker's thoughts emerge transformed 'after hours of rain', beginning from a place of after. But in this, and the cyclical endurance of rain as a renewing force, everything in the poem becomes connected and transformed on the same terms. It is biblical, the rain giving way to a purifying 'spirit', come 'from the still of the / woods', 'creeping, inchwise, through / mortar and blood, / unpicking the fabric, renewing the face of the earth.'[3] The epigraph from The Office of the Holy Spirit, 'And thou shalt renew the face of the earth' comes back to us at the close as if to instil the idea of a new world emerging from the old. The poem is one long sentence, gathering everything up with a kind of monistic vitality from the heights of heaven and

[1] Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964), [1951], p.19.
[2] John Burnside, 'Learning to Swim' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.1.
[3] John Burnside, 'Rain' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.26.

driven into to our earthbound realm. This spilt 'spirit' is apposite of the ongoing drama between humans and their world in Burnside's writing, something he momentarily suspends. His poetry more generally deals in this dissolution and renewal; the body haunted by the possibility of metamorphosis, a sacred 'other' self always lurking at the edge of the known and rational. In this, his writing has been noted for its near constant slippage of any notion of a stable self. In the title poem from *The Myth of the Twin* (1994), as in 'Rain', there is a shift between the known and the possibility of another life, but here it is the death of a loved one which prefigures a kinship as an approach towards natural phenomena as a kind of coexistence.[4] From splitting fossils on the beach 'to find / a live child hatched in the stone'; as white-noise static 'like radio' or 'the whisper of the tide' in the 'pull of the sea', the speaker picks out 'shapes on its surface'. That gloss, or patina, or veil, often occasioned by the effects of water as fog, snow, and rain allows Burnside's speakers an intuited moment of communion with some other-worldly presence. That poem ends with 'a handprint / an iris', where the corporeal meets flora through a process of refraction.

As Jem Poster has found, Burnside's is a poetry 'moving between worlds with an ease that challenges the very notion of their separation from one another.'[5] That separation is in Burnside's poems freighted with loss, in many cases explicitly the loss of a brother. In his first collection, *The Hoop* (1998), the poem 'Brother' directly addresses this lost sibling from the opening line, 'You were dead in the womb. They had cut you loose: / like some diver trapped in a wreck'.[6] It is a recondite posture in his poetics more broadly, 'some half-seen thing / the pull of the withheld'.[7] John Redmond has found as much, saying that '[m]uch of the impulse behind Burnside's writing derives from the death in the womb of his twin.'[8] The epigraph I have chosen to lead with exemplifies this dual shift, the familial as unfamiliar where the water drama balances a universal loss with its vicarious after-effects: scars with echoes. As a foundational trauma, but one ultimately alien to his own experience, the felt presence of the invisible is characteristic in his 'set of linked obsessions with doppelgängers, corpses, the soul, the skin and language'[9] as a condition of revelation; something always lurks

[4] John Burnside, 'The Myth of the Twin' in *The Myth of the Twin*, p.3.
[5] Jem Poster, 'Between Heaven and Earth', review of John Burnside, *Selected Poems* in *The Guardian*, 8 April, 2006, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/apr/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview22 [Accessed 12 August, 2019].
[6] John Burnside, 'Brother' in *The Hoop*, p.55.
[7] John Burnside, 'Fields, IV Otherlife' in *The Asylum Dance* (London: Cape Poetry, 2000), p.44.
[8] John Redmond, 'War against the Grown-Ups.' Review of *The Dumb House*, by John Burnside and *A Normal Skin*, by John Burnside. *London Review of Books*, vol. 19, no. 16 (1997): pp.23-25, available at: https://www.lrb.co.uk/v19/n16/john-redmond/war-against-the-grown-ups [Accessed 8 August, 2019].
[9] Ibid.

behind the given world: 'a muddled patina / of age and colour, twinned with light or shade / and hiding the source of itself, in its drowned familiar.'[10] In this chapter, I will look at the before and after states of being interrupted by water and what that might mean in ecocritical terms. So often in his poetry, redemption, hope, possibility, and transformed political and spiritual circumstances are wet. I want to recall an epigraph from his 1995 collection, *Swimming in the Flood*:

> *Lava quod est sordidum*
>
> *Riga quod est aridium*
>
> *Sana quos est saucium*[11]
>
> *(Cleanse that which is unclean,*
>
> *water that which is dry,*
>
> *heal that which is wounded)*

This epigraph speaks of the desire to mend some deep disconnection to a sundered world and, like 'Rain', there is an attempt to reconcile loss with a post-secular lyric expressed in ecological terms. With recourse to the 1995 collection—the date synchronous with the world's first COP[12]—as a departure point, this chapter will explore the weight of water in its myriad forms in Burnside's later collections to elucidate how water remains a constant theme in the developing ecology of Burnside's wider oeuvre. I begin inspired by Burnside's own approach by exploring drowning, or submergence as rebirth, and then move on to look at the

[10] John Burnside, 'An Essay Concerning Light: I. Scotlandwell' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.14.
[11] John Burnside, *Swimming in the Flood*, attributed to, among others, Stephen Langton (former Archbishop of Canterbury). Set to music by Samuel Webbe (1740-1816) (in the Catholic liturgy) from *Veni, Sancte Spiritus – Come Holy Spirit.*
[12] The first COP (Conference of the Parties) meeting was held in Berlin, Germany in March, 1995. The international political response to climate change began at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where the 'Rio Convention' included the adoption of the UN Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This convention set out a framework for action aimed at stabilising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to avoid 'dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.' The UNFCCC which entered into force on 21 March 1994, now has a near-universal membership of 195 parties. In 2015 the COP (21) was held in Paris. In over 20 years of UN negotiations, the aim was to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C, available at: https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop [Accessed 9 January, 2022]. See also: http://www.cop21paris.org/about/cop21

transformative power of ice, the observance of which is now an index of climatic shifts in the Anthropocene. I want to show how the lyric 'I' becomes dissolved by water in all its forms.

An example of this dissolution over a temporal break can be found in a poem such as 'A Dead Hare, In The Driveway at Over Kellie, 15th October, 2015'.[13] The poem opens at night, the speaker drunk, being driven home in a taxi. In the drive he finds a dead hare in the headlamps of his lift 'almost unscathed, so it seemed'. The speaker confronts the hare's remains the following morning. The first two stanzas situate the 'I' in the night before, 'I got home late that night, so I didn't see / the body', but in the following stanzas that 'I', as we saw in 'Uley Blue', is dissolved, where, standing over its corpse there is an equilibrium between man and animal in the line 'all tenderness surrendered to the rain'.

Across the four collections from 2009-2017 under study here (*The Hunt in the Forest*, 2009; *Black Cat Bone*, 2011; *All One Breath*, 2014; *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, 2017), rain appears 57 times over 140 poems. Recurring themes of renewal speak of a recovery of some kind, echoing that earlier epigraph, be that some form of healing or an anthropological reminder of our saline origins as creatures who emerged from the depths. This 'self shrugged off or pared / away'[14] to a shared animus between the human and the nonhuman is an appeal to syncretic affirmations of nonhuman agency, one which finds a corollary in contemporary debates of environmental criticism. In decentring human agency—absolving the 'I'—it becomes difficult to perceive other entities as mere objects. This is to say that Nature is no longer a backdrop for human history, but is now its principal actor, mobilising everything into the same geo-story. Today, the biblical resonance of a deluge or submergence speaks at once to an eschatological immanence which finds a post-secular register of a coming catastrophe; one which defines one of the features of the contemporary climate crisis as our seas are becoming deeper and warmer due to anthropogenic climate change.

Charting the history of the contemporary environmental movement, Burnside has long engaged with the work of Rachel Carson, championing her work as a pioneer of what he calls 'deep ecological thinking'.[15] Burnside acknowledges that her 1962 work, *Silent Spring*, which led to the banning of DDT[16] has become known as her magnum opus, but 'in terms of

[13] John Burnside, *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, p.53.
[14] Ibid.
[15] John Burnside, 'A Fish Called Wonder' in *New Statesman*, 11 April, 2014, p.54.
[16] *Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane* was developed as an insecticide in the 1940s. Its devastating effects on wildlife weren't fully understood in popular culture until Carson's *Silent Spring* which pointed to the mounting evidence of the pesticide's declining benefits and environmental and toxicological effects of its widespread use. Famously, Joni Mitchell's 1970 track, 'Big Yellow Taxi' includes the lines 'Hey farmer, farmer, put away the

her place in literary history the success of that campaign overshadowed the work she would have considered more her own—the great 'sea trilogy', comprising *Under the Sea Wind* (1941), *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955).'[17] Carson's life was governed by her proximity to the sea, on the threshold between land and water, a boundary at which 'that intricate fabric of life by which one creature is linked with another, and each with its surroundings' becomes an interdependence between all species.[18] In a short essay, Burnside picks up on three key terms from Carson's writing which resonate across his poetics, 'wonder', 'mystery' and 'beauty'; not necessarily words found in the empirical scientific lexicon, but Carson treads the line between science and poetry and Burnside is as much interested in her humanist prose as her 'rigorous observation.'[19]

In the introduction to her sea trilogy, Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald writes of Carson that 'she never thought of herself as a poet. But that, in fact, was what she was. She had the poet's eye, the poet's imagination, the poet's taste for the fitness of words.'[20] Burnside's article picks up on this poetic sensibility in her writing, acknowledging 'this tension between what would be 'objected to in scientific writing' and the desire to make living creatures real for her human reader [is] the key to Carson's art.'[21] It is because of her emotional engagement with sea creatures, how we perceive them inadvertently with anthropomorphic tendencies which, if they are 'to be understandable to us, we must describe it in words that most properly belong to human psychological states'. Doing this inculcates our own psychological being to that of the fate of our distant ancestors.[22] Here, the key to her communicative power is realised in linking the human psyche with the objectively viewed behaviour of animals in that their fate may be all the more real to our sense of kinship with which we share a common fate.

In the opening pages of *The Sea Around Us,* Carson pulls the human back to its shared origins with all creatures which emerged from the blue. Our earthly life ultimately has its roots 'in its warm, dimly-lit waters [where] the unknown conditions of temperature and pressure and saltiness must have been critical ones for the creation of life from non-life.'[23]

DDT now / give me spots on my apples but leave me the birds and the bees' which became, and still stands as an anthem against the acquisitive plundering of natural resources.

[17] John Burnside, 'A Fish Called Wonder', p.54.

[18] Rachel Carson in John Burnside, 'A Fish Called Wonder', p.54.

[19] Ibid., p.54.

[20] Rachel Carson, *The Sea*: *The Sea Around Us*; *Under the Sea Wind*; *The Edge of the Sea* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1964) p,vii.

[21] John Burnside, 'A Fish Called Wonder', p.55.

[22] Ibid., p.55.

[23] Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us,* p.12.

The many forms which water takes, from ticking frost, rain, fog, mist, snow and ice; to bodies of water such as rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, converge in Burnside's poetics as conditioning elements which provide the basis for the emergence of language and the possibility of meaningful dwelling on our blue planet. In Burnside's later poetry, many of his speakers are returned in some form or other to Carson's 'mother sea' as a way of relearning in a kind of platonic process of remembering, 'recovering / mangrove and marsh, and the sonar that runs in the spine'.[24] Furthermore, I want to show how water is a translator of pollutants into different forms, from 'abandoned bowls of lemonade and rain' ('Rich')[25]; 'coal oil and mackerel sheen / on everything you see' ('Soul as Thought Experiment')[26], 'a pool / of verdigris'('Instructions for a Sky Burial')[27], or how in 'dark spots / of rain in a stand of nettles: everything shapes / what it encounters'[28]. The way water effects are filtered through a long-entangled decay, the slow effects of clinical garden management point to a more insidious, encroaching perturbation of the element. This contrasts to the more explicit forms of chemical compounds; pesticides found in *The Hoop*, 'simazine, // gramaxone, diquat'[29], or in *Swimming in the Flood*, 'permethrin', 'phoxim and derris'[30], all of which are insecticides. It is in Burnside's later poetry that the deep ecological thinking of Carson's prognostications come to bear, as if the innocence of water is corrupted by what we have done with it.

Fallen Innocence

According to Deborah Thacker, it is 'the essential, organic paradigm of the child as a plant, introduced by Rousseau that lies at the heart of the Romantic conceptions of the child.'[31] Against a picture of modern man, this is the belief that the values that governed previous societies—in a more primitive sense of humanity—can still be found amongst children. Many of Burnside's poems explore what Jean Baudrillard, *pace* Freud called the 'dark continent of childhood'[32] where, with typical millenarian flourish, he claims that today childhood is

[24] John Burnside, 'Community Pool' in *Black Cat Bone*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p.61.
[25] John Burnside, 'Rich' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.12.
[26] John Burnside, 'Soul as Thought Experiment' in *Black Cat Bone*, p.64.
[27] John Burnside, 'Instructions for a Sky Burial' in *All One Breath*, p.55.
[28] Ibid., p.56.
[29] John Burnside, 'Green' in *The Hoop*, p.43.
[30] John Burnside, 'Wrong' in *Swimming in the Flood*, pp.5-11.
[31] Deborah Thacker, 'Imagining the Child' in *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.19.
[32] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Dark Continent of Childhood' in *Screened Out*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso Press, 2002), p.103.

'disappearing as a phase in the metamorphosis of the human being'.[33] In *Swimming in the Flood*, Burnside deliberately sought to pitch a thrilling, revelatory childhood realm located especially in water against the monotony and drudgery of the adult world with its lack of magic, mystery and potential, something we will see later in the ekphrastic poems of Dutch golden age paintings. In 'Science'[34] the 'sound waves' of a school physics class are transposed to the local baths begging the mystery of how they 'travel through water, lacing the pool / with muffled voices', or how watching a 'light beam […] in a prism of glass' the child wonders 'if a soul can change like that'. Science, or the scientific worldview is a husk for the experimenting child, becoming 'a second skin' to be pared off achieving the submerged 'wave of grace' in the swimmer's strokes. In 'A Swimming Lesson', it is the 'talent for going naked / that lets one body mingle with the stream / till fingers and eyes and even lungs / are water' where the naked body returns to a shared prelapsarian habitus:

> Maybe it's a gift
>
> for transformation,
>
> changing from child to swan at the river's edge,
>
> from swan to fish, from fish to waterweed.[35]

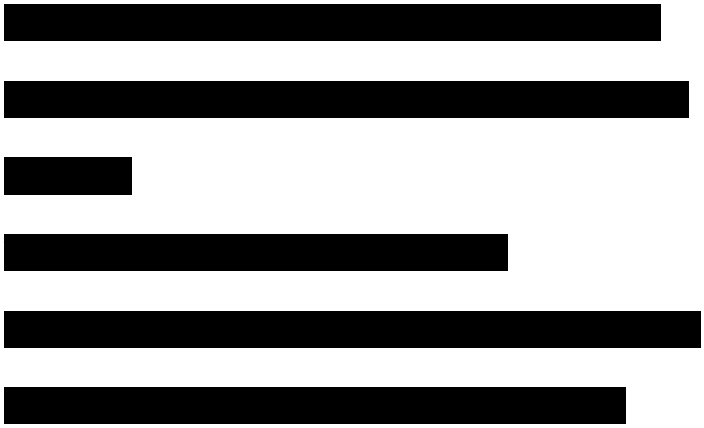
A drowned girl's death is proven by the way the river returns her body days later 'accepting its favours, repaying the debt in kind.' There is a dispassionate sense of happenstance that has befallen the girl, but it serves to highlight the terror that lurks 'where children go for a dare and be unreturned' where that 'unreturned' marks a threshold between the human and the river. The girl will be returned, but only when 'thinking has stopped'.

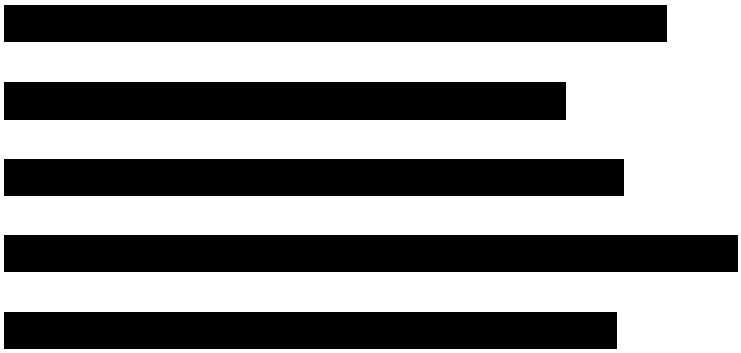
In the opening poem of *The Hunt in the Forest*, 'Learning to Swim', Burnside's speaker, a young boy takes this disappearing as an instance of rehearsing his own death, whereby the adult intrudes on his own childhood recollection to retroactively create this condition of withdrawal. 'Learning to Swim' exemplifies Burnside's thoroughgoing interest in the body as a precarious container. The body, waterproofed by a thin skin, is for Burnside a carapace which conceals all the mysteries of the soul. As such, the opener explores the process of (dis)embodiment, albeit one pitched in a decidedly urbane setting, as in the earlier 'Science', a blighted baptism at the municipal baths. In beginning with the possibility of the end, a near

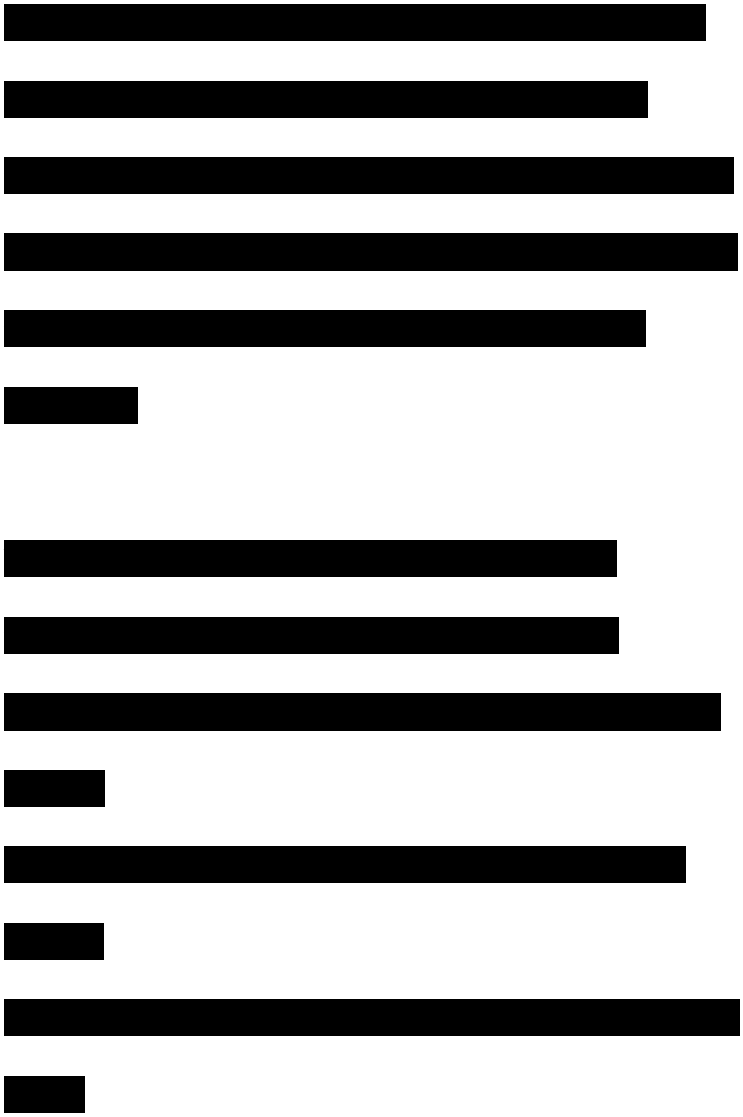
[33] Ibid.
[34] John Burnside, 'Science' in *Swimming in the Flood*, p.3.
[35] John Burnside, 'A Swimming Lesson' in *Swimming in the Flood*, p.26-28.

drowning very quickly suffuses a mundane place with terror, and it is this banality of the everyday where sites of unspeakable horror always haunt the stability of the human-made world. Like the mouth of a forest, the pool is a threshold to an abyss, a boundary between one world and another and this poem demonstrates that condition of instability. The speaker of the poem recalls the moment he is pushed into the water by his older cousin:

LEARNING TO SWIM







The poem is wrought by a rumination on the precarity of life at the limit as the body tumbles further down. From the perspective of the falling boy, language is 'dying away in the hollows and nooks of the roof', disappearing into negative, empty spaces, and in this process of expiration there is a birthing of vision, opened up by 'the water's answer'. The speaker could be improvising of the death of the brother, switching roles and dissolving the self to become the cousin in an imaginative exchange in the womb.

There are other instances of this suspended animation such as the later poem, 'With the Discovery of Cosmic Background Radiation, My Brother Returns from the Hereafter as a Russian Cosmonaut'[36], where the brother initially figures as embryonic, 'You lived in fishponds, tyre-tracks, jars of rain, / the time and tide of you a blurred / repository of what I

[36] John Burnside, 'With the Discovery of Cosmic Background Radiation, My Brother Returns from the Hereafter as a Russian Cosmonaut' in *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, p.25.

might have been'. He's tethered umbilically to the earth as amphibious, able to live or survive in water. The coupling of water with outer space transcends the solidity of *terra firma,* and in this it can be said that poetry that seeks to enact within a place the experience of loss is one that does not land on its object. Instead, at the opening here in the public baths, enacted failure comes with the idea of the event serving as a prelude to some crucial experience or revelation. 'Learning to Swim' opens a *mise en abyme* which engagingly comes before the title poem as if to offer a kind of prelude to the fallen everyman who must undergo a series of trials or rituals bundled loosely together under the idea of a universal hunt or reconciliation.

A confused chronology found in the opening poem sets the rest of the collection as a kind of surfacing of memory, the relief as the memories fade into the distance and a more selective memory chooses what it pleases; as Burnside has stated, 'The older I get, the happier my childhood becomes.'[37] The poem is a warped memorialisation, a speculative death at which the speaker seems thrilled by the possibility of absence, even from oneself, as if that encounter is the taste of something inevitable, yet other-worldly. The poem plays at reversing the acquisition of language with the retreat of the voice as the sunk, nasal 'm's' from the trochaic 'remember' and 'glimmer' are sounds from a sealed mouth where something baser attempts to articulate; the voice vibrating as if just beginning or made speechless by a state of wonder. As the air closes over and the speaker is 'plunged to the black', learning to swim is the cultivation of a technique of survival, a relationship given through instinct, something creaturely or mammalian which comes 'at a stroke, / to the friendship of water'. In the graceful, 'casual ascent', the renewed body resolves the momentary scare. The depths give way to the possibility of a non-verbal encounter, a 'Not Waving but Drowning' perspectival shift where the boy here, having revisited this innocuous moment is recalling his cousin's long-lost memory by being 'much further out than you thought.'[38]

The poem is governed by water not air—the condition for language and speech—; it resides on the side of the nonhuman where the perilous 'shiver of longing' is on the side of expiration not resuscitation like a fish abjectly mouthing out of water. The water is haunting the boy's memory, communicating its transformative power; just as when the speaker recalls the largest memorial imprint, it is the nonhuman object that is speaking to him, 'what I remember best was the water's answer'. The elusive encounter is not safely locked away in

[37] John Burnside, interview in *The Independent* with Adam Jacques, 29 June, 2014.
[38] Stevie Smith, 'Not Waving but Drowning' in *New Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1998).

the past, it is carried through to a kind of eternal present owing its materiality to the physical properties of water, kept in permanent suspended motion because water molecules are constantly breaking and reforming bonds with one another. If the child is the plant, then the memories of childhood are sustained by water.

Identifying a boundary where two entities meet is the hunt for the conditions of spatial encounter and the demarcation of where one thing becomes another. For Burnside, 'space is the locus for transformations: humans become birds, or animals, the old are rejuvenated, the human and the faery are indistinguishable.'[39] Crucially, making that space is the magic out of which language can tumble between worlds. The drowning boy undergoes a blighted baptism, flung into momentary emptiness. It combines physical limits as marks of temporal boundaries, riven through the sensation of loss, and, as the poem casts the spell over the coming work, this possibility of absence creates the condition for a poetry of rescue. The submergence in the pool is a scarred resurfacing, where in the pursuit of description, the poetry begins from a condition of solace, even grief, haunted by 'the death I had lost, but would cherish for / years'. There is self-elegy here. We imagine losing life to death, but the poem does not lose death to life. Death marks a limit, but it also provides source with which to speak back to life in a constant return like a bridge between the language of the here and now and that which forever remains cut off from our own experience. In a sense, this inversion is what is negotiated across Burnside's poetic projects, to stay connected in a constant slippage 'between appearing and vanishing, between remaining in this world and receding into another.'[40] This is as much a sensibility in his writing as it is an aesthetic disposition, the misted world of momentary perceptions and distorted reflections, 'drenched in the distance of heaven' ('In Memoriam II').[41]

It is no surprise then that the dead feature in Burnside's vision as a way of holding fast the ties to the past that allow us to connect our present to the future and see ourselves on the scale of history. In an essay on W.S. Graham, Burnside is arrested by a line of his, 'feeding the dead is necessary' where he goes on to maintain that connection as a way of creating a here and now which brings with it all the ontic urgencies of a lived life with the metaphysical inheritance of a 'live tradition':

[39] John Burnside, 'Place', p.206.
[40] John Burnside, *I Put a Spell on You* (London: Vintage, 2014), p.198.
[41] John Burnside, 'In Memoriam II. Pain Management' in *The Hunt in the Forest*, p.4.

> Surely it is ourselves who are nourished, in this feeding of the dead; surely it is only by feeding those who have gone before us that we begin to understand that time is something altogether other than the linear stream we measure out with calendars and clocks. Feeding the dead is what we do to find our place and time. What we do to find our place in lived time. Feeding the dead is a way to stitch the past and the future together, and so make a now. More than anything else, feeding the dead is what we do when we dream. 'Feeding the dead' is, in other words, what we do to maintain a live tradition.[42]

The memory of the pool feeds that connection. There is an umbilical tie to the dead brother, but in holding this thread, his poetry reaches out in an act of conjuring, right at the threshold of the language of description, which for Burnside forms a kind of intuited 'Credo': 'I know the dead / will gather to our fires at Halloween / and we will meet them, tongue-tied and beguiled /'.[43]

This being-on-the-side-of death is darkly presaged by Burnside's choice of epigraph from Simone Weil to begin *The Hunt in the Forest*: *Aimer la vérité signifie supporter le vide, et par suite accepter la mort. La Vérité est du côté de la mort*.[44] The dread in Simone Weil's aphorism is positing the pursuit of truth as akin to the love of truth, a true *philo-sophia*, and in accepting death as a consequence of handling truth, the resurfacing boy comes to new sense of death-in-life which precipitates the more explicit hunting poems which follow. The collection is bookended by two swimming poems. Notice how the final words of the last stanza of the opener hang independently:

[redacted]

[42] John Burnside on W.S. Graham's 'A Found Picture' Scottish Poetry Library, 2008. Available at: https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/found-picture/ [Accessed 19 January, 2020].
[43] John Burnside, 'Credo', *The Myth of the Twin*, p.39.
[44] 'To love the truth means to bear emptiness, and to accept, as a result, death. The truth is on the side of death.' (*my translation*). Simone Weil in John Burnside, *The Hunt in the Forest*.

The ‘echo’, ‘years’ and ‘old’ are found again in the closing poem as if to carry the memory across the collection. ‘Old Man Swimming’ again finds two characters, a speaker tinged with regret for youthful arrogance and an old man who could be some father figure: ‘He was my model for years / with his gorgeous stroke / and lack of determination’. The speaker recollects his twenty-year-old self as a swimmer on ‘Parker’s Piece’, seeing the world ‘darker and brighter than now’ in which the clarity of these visions is a young condition of seeing things too distinctly. The old man, with his eyes ‘halfway from grey to blue’ becomes the speaker’s other, better self as the poem comes back to the present and we find him looking out ‘across the blue-grey of the park’ resigning to the limits of the self learned through age and experience, ‘an old man’s gift for knowing how much he could / do’. The learned ability to swim could be the subtle inference of ‘knowing’ here. But there is something achieved in this resignation, a grace found through such a memory of water but also an acknowledgement that memory is achieved through synaesthesia, the shared condition between unknown people connected by an immersive blue as expansive as the entire depth of human vision. Through a rehearsal of drowning, Burnside feeds the memory of his lost sibling. The old man swimming gracefully at the close of the collection has come to terms with the near drowning at the beginning. His brother’s death in the womb, an event that happened just before he was born is echoed through attempting to speak just beyond the threshold of death. *The Hunt in the Forest* is the search for grief between two worlds and Burnside finds it in ‘the water’s answer’.

The Cold Rule: The Power of Ice

In a review of Peter Wadhams’s *A Farewell to Ice* (2016), an invective against the effects of the melting polar ice caps, Burnside highlights not only the dates of the tenure of his position as professor of ocean physics at Cambridge from 1992 to 2015, but also the significance of the dates in his investigation, all of which shed light on the indexed dates of the contemporary environmental movement.[45] With this time-frame in mind, I move here from the dissolved ‘I’ in water to the more literal dissolution of ice at the poles, exploring the

[45] John Burnside, ‘Turning off the Planet’s Air Con’, review of *A Farewell to Ice* by Peter Wadhams in *New Statesman,* 30 September, 2016. pp.54-5.

affective turn in ecology and the fall from a childlike lyrical wonder to a cold analytical conclusion. Burnside begins his review with a quote from 'State of the Planet', a 2007 poem from Robert Hass's collection, *Time and Materials*.[46]

In the poem, the speaker is contemplating the thoughts of a schoolgirl in 'unseasonably heavy rain' from his passing car, musing 'we may be doing this […] quite accidentally'. Burnside is alive to the fact that in the space of a decade—long enough for a schoolgirl to come ecologically conscious about the state of the planet, but short enough to lay bare the scrambling of the Anthropocene's bashed geological clock—that that 'quite accidentally' no longer washes:

> By the time Hass published *Time and Materials*, we were already quite aware of what we were doing and certainly those who make the more important decisions in industry and government had enough evidence of species loss, ocean and soil degradation and climate change to know what the risks were of continuing with business as usual.

This could certainly be read as the schoolgirl's maturing thoughts. The questions which mystify the child are amplified in adulthood; time-stamped and bidden to an emergent experience of the material world. For Burnside, such childhood experiences seed what will flower in later life. But his review is making a case for the strength of Hass's poem, to make a distinction between human perspective and what poetry affords. The significance of the car in this example uncovers a critical metonymic element in Burnside's poetics more broadly, and which chimes with the contemporary debate around the anthropogenic consequences to our erstwhile everyday realities. Business as usual is the car in the driveway, the patio heater, electric garage-doors, a day for night bisection of the natural world and its mystery. Alongside our casual usage of these innovations, the polar ice caps are melting slowly. To equate the two confuses 'time and materials' by pointing the finger at individual consumer habits and exposes an impasse in the push for individualised environmental consciousness. Timothy Clark writes, 'someone routinely driving a car may be condemned as an act of more significance on the planetary scale than their voting habits.'[47] It is this macro-scale interdependence at which Burnside's poems approximate to a critique of petrocultures. His poems are discomfited in the act of being in the world, being steeped in the long disaggregation of the modern world. However, Burnside's poetry rejects the directed

[46] Robert Hass, *Time and Materials: Poems 1997-2005* (Harper Collins e-books, 2007).
[47] Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.9.

attention to individual, market-oriented consumption, what Jason Moore calls 'mainstream environmentalism' which emerged from the revolutions of 1968, borrowing Peter Dauvergne's phrase 'environmentalism of the rich', instead aiming at the broader, world-historical epoch in which we live.[48] This is not to overlook the fact that many erstwhile environmentalists use cars, only that such urban fundamentalism short-circuits any deeper perspective about our embodiment in a world-historical ecological dilemma, what Timothy Morton calls 'the mesh'.[49] For Burnside, a perspective is something gained from the seat of the car, allowing for a critique of the limitless horizon of the world in which we inhabit. It recalls Nietzsche:

> I should think that today we are at least far from the ridiculous immodesty that would be involved in decreeing from our corner that perspectives are permitted only from this corner. Rather has the world become 'infinite' for us all over again inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*. Once more we are seized by a great shudder.[50]

In this case, the pronouncement is one of dread at the 'infinite' possibility of perspectives, that humans open up endless ways of interpretation wrought by perspective granted from going where we want and when we want, where nowhere is off-limits. At the same time, the shudder is the paradoxical question of the anthropogenic limit imposed by such a privilege. There is a shudder in the experience of reading Burnside's poems. As Julian Wolfreys has observed, 'Burnside crosses over, getting underneath your skin, infiltrating your perceptions, your apprehensions.'[51] There are ripples and waves across his poems, unwelcome spaces for cold revelation. There is a postlapsarian exposure to snow, frost, ice cracks, ditches, drains, riverbeds. In Burnside's poems the rain always falls; intelligence is wet, hidebound, and fallen. Nietzsche again, 'the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these. We cannot look around our own corner: it is hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there might *be*.' In Burnside's speakers, that 'curiosity' becomes a glistening possibility to become witness to and bearer of something that returns us to the singular subjective stance, what Martin

[48] Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene and Planetary Justice' in www.Maize.io available at: https://jasonwmoore.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Moore-The-Capitalocene-and-Planetary-Justice-2019-Maize.pdf [Accessed 24 May, 2020].
[49] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), p.28.
[50] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p.374.
[51] Julian Wolfreys, ''It was suddenly a hard winter': John Burnside's Crossings' in 'Crossing into Otherness—Outlanding Woolf', *Études britanniques contemporaines*, vol., 48, 2015 https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.2192

Heidegger might call '*Stimmung*' (attunement).[52] Such attunement must have an affective quality in being able to turn private feelings into public discourse. In that sense, this is what Burnside shares with Carson, turning away from cold, objective science to an immersion of how it feels to live in an environmentally despoiled age. Similarly, Alex Lockwood sees Carson's work as playing a part in an 'affective turn'[53] where local, private responses can engender movements towards global action.

In Wadhams's hard science, what Burnside finds is that affective urgency, a quality he admires in Carson's writing, of whom he has written that 'It would be absurd to suggest that the scientist is always the scientist, the poet always a poet: we all have to deal with the *how* and the *that*.'[54] In Wadhams's book, that impasse is no different, as Burnside says: 'The information can be fascinating but it does not stick – and concerned scientists must find new ways of expressing the urgency of our predicament, and the beauty of what is being lost.'[55] Between 1492 and 1610, what geologists now determine as a period of immense climatic change was due to the 'discovery' of and subsequent genocide in the Americas which led to a massive carbon drawdown because of continental forest regrowth. This, in turn precipitated some of the coldest decades in Europe which came to be known as the Little Ice Age. Contemporary poems that re-examine paintings in the context of the Little Ice Age can see how these depicted scenes become part of a larger geostory that moves from the local to the global and back again. What we have then, according to Jason Moore is 'a deliberate abstraction of historical relations in order to clarify the biogeographical relations of humans (as species) and the biosphere.'[56] Climatic changes thus lead to cultural shifts. Here what I want to do is show how three poems by Burnside, 'Hendrick Avercamp: A Standing Man Watching a Skating Boy', 'Pieter Breughel: Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap, 1565', and 'A Frost Fair' interrogate that confluence of history, climatic change and those cultural shifts, seen through the lens of that affective turn.

[52] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/
[53] Alex Lockwood, 'The Affective Legacy of Silent Spring' in *Environmental* Humanities, vol. 1, no. 1, (2012) p.124, available at: www.environmentalhumanities.org ISSN: 2201-1919 [Accessed 22 October, 2018].
[54] John Burnside, 'A Science of Belonging: Poetry as Ecology' in *Contemporary Poetry and Contemporary Science*, ed., Robert Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.92.
[55] John Burnside, review of *Farewell to Ice*, p.55.
[56] Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene and Planetary Justice', p.50.

Burnside gives an example of this poetic translation, a crossing over, in a later passage on how ice-skating is made possible, as a way to understand how water becomes less dense as it freezes: 'the pressure of the skate on the ice "lowers the melting point and the ice just under the skate melts, lubricating it"'. Hard science, when pitched at the level of everyday comprehensibility, reveals its beauty between the *how* and the *that* where lies the self and the auxiliary world. In applying a contemporary perspective of a particular scene of seventeenth century life in the ekphrastic poem, 'Hendrick Avercamp: A Standing Man Watching a Skating Boy'[57], there affords a carefully inured sense of what that life might come to reveal in its relationship to what we now know about the climate.

Figure 9. Hendrick Avercamp, 'A Standing Man Watching a Skating Boy', 1585-1634, pen and ink and watercolour, 12.5 x 7 cm. Private Collection.

Compare the following line to the urgency of the contemporary tipping-points of climate science of the known world: 'For those without power, this is what passes / for wisdom: a homespun mechanics // of knowing how much the world is already decided'. As the standing man in the painting watches the boy zooming by there is an unease about an inevitable loss of innocence of which the boy is yet to be deprived. Here it is freeze-framed, the father allowing himself a still moment of 'guarded pride' which comes after the opening lines, 'No doubt, in year or two this child will be gone'. The poem bridges a coming war or more cogently a blight, with the bravura of enlisting boys to something more abstract, a greater loss or threat, handed down, blindsided from 'those who make more important decisions' which here is:

a black wind off the sea,

a confidence misplaced, some casual lie,

Those days out when the party stays too long

And lets the fever in

[57] John Burnside, 'Hendrick Avercamp: Standing Man Watching a Skating Boy' in *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, pp.30-31. The poem first appeared in *London Review of Books*, vol., 37, no. 6, 19 March 2015.

As prophetic as one could need in a world blighted by a pandemic, where such a lack of joined-up thinking between science and lived reality opens the gulf in translation between hard facts and intuited knowledge. The allusion of the child bearing smallpox that would ravage the continent of Europe in the early seventeenth century is analogous with the seismic change of the coming catastrophe of glacial retreat and loss documented in the poem's opening lines.[58] The poem juxtaposes the innocence of white with a coming 'black wind off the sea', instituting a delicate balance captured in the thin hold of the skate on the ice. For the father, there is a powerlessness that goes unblamed, despite the lines which could show him to be wilfully nescient of the world into which his son will grow. He's a man who

> won't go to war; he's too attuned
>
> to maintenance and sleep, to being here
>
> and knowing not to look
>
> for trouble, since it's bound to look for him.

By emphasising the unlooked-for trouble, the standing man betrays in his ignorance the cruelty that will befall his son as an inevitability, pulling this poem back to its longer geological story. In quoting Jeremiah 14:10, '*Thus they have loved to wander; / they have not refrained their feet*' the inference, like that of the perspective from the car, is that in simply going where we want to go, occasioned by a temporary solid surface, there is a wickedness which will go punished by the malevolent god of the Old Testament. There is also a subtle allusion to John Clare's 'The Mores' with its diminutive tyranny of acquisitive men abasing the land from its God-given covenant between man and all living things, the fall from perfection:

> the rude philistine's thrall
>
> Is laid upon them and destroyed them all
>
> Each little tyrant with his little sign
>
> Shows where man claims earth glows no more divine [59]

[58] Smithsonian Magazine and Lizzie Wade, "A Child From 17Th-Century Europe Might Have Rewritten The History Of Smallpox", *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2022, available at: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/child-17th-century-Europe-might-rewritten-history-smallpox-180962114/ [Accessed 9 February, 2022].
[59] John Clare, 'The Mores' in *John Clare, A Champion for the Poor: Political Verse and Prose*, eds., Eric Robinson, P.M.S Dawson and David Powell (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2000), p.48.

Returning to the 'Skating Boy', the fragility of such a covenant brings us to the wider loss in the Anthropocene as 'the splay-crack in the ice, the hidden culvert' could swallow the boy at any moment, destroying this happy scene. In showing these fragile moments of grace, the poem shows just how little we know of the forces under ice. There is a precedent to this in Wordsworth's 'Skating'[60] where we find that thin hold of the skate 'shod with steel' permitting a momentary innocence where 'we hiss'd along the polish'd ice in games / confederate' betraying the knowledge that such happiness is achieved because it is fraught with danger, a danger known to the skaters' accomplices. This is heightened by the later line 'meanwhile the precipices rang aloud' which becomes 'an alien sound / of melancholy, not unnoticed'. It is as if Burnside's speaker has noticed this too, speaking back to the skating boys as a warning. Contemporaneously, Seamus Heaney has revisited 'Wordsworth's Skates' picking up as a question that same portentous sound, 'Slate scrape / Bird or branch? / Or the whet and scud of steel on placid ice?' [61] The steel of the skate again is the human instrument by which the ice is threatened linking the intense heat of industry with the cold ice as a dialectic. The poet makes the mark on this held transience. Heaney's poem is a tribute to the great Romantic, having left his trace for others to take up, 'As he flashed from the clutch of the earth along its curve / And left it scored.' That curve picks up Wordsworth's 'diurnal round' which zooms us out to a renewed planetary understanding of the marks humans have left on our fragile natural world and what that means today.

Echoing Carson's affective legacy, like Heaney circling back to those skaters, Lockwood shows that today our daily affective responses to the natural world are '"buried in habits of life, interpretative practices, and forms of sociality", and it is in exploring those everyday affects […] private feelings can be channelled by today's environmental writers into a strong, public, political force.'[62]

Happily, for now, we live 'under' the ice in a fragile equilibrium, but it is precisely that fragility in the knowledge that that is under threat where the urgency of the poem's affective power works. Delicately we dwell between two poles which here could also be the two poles that engender poetry itself—grief and joy. As with Clare, the poem's strength lies in

[60] William Wordsworth, 'Skating' in *Parnassus: An Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1880) https://www.bartleby.com/371/25.html
[61] Seamus Heaney, 'Wordsworth's Skates' in *District and Circle* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), p.22.
[62] Alex Lockwood, quoting Kathleen Stewart, 'Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares),' in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), p.245; 'The Affective Legacies of Silent Spring', *Environmental Humanities* 1 May 2012; 1 (1): 123–140. p.127.

disclosing the tectonic forces of history as climate change in its dailiness, its bottom-up view of order from the child's soon-to-be-lost innocence. As E.P Thompson said of Clare, that he 'may be described, without hindsight, as a poet of ecological protest: he was not writing about man here and nature there, but lamenting a threatened equilibrium in which both were involved.'[63] Thompson sees in Clare a communion between man and the natural world which here in the Burnside poem is threatened so delicately in the last line 'such gladness as happens, kindling his mind like the sun' where sun and child achieve an openness to momentary grace, with hindsight, which takes us right back to the ken of our living through our 'forms of sociality' in which is held the world-making balance of the forces of fire and ice. What Burnside picks up in Wadhams's writing is the 'embedding' of such scientific phenomena as they appear to the child's imagination. As a child, Burnside recalls seeing the '*dendritic growth*'[64] of ice crystals as they spread across the glass of a windowpane in winter. It is no less an act of observation, a noticing, but, as in the Hass poem, the schoolgirl perhaps wondering at the unseasonable downpour, the child may be 'not at all conscious of doing "science"'. It is characteristic of the way Burnside locates these small acts of wonder that beguile and ties them to the knowledge behind such phenomena of how ice behaves on a planetary scale, the object of Wadham's inquiry. For the figures in the painting, Burnside makes it a tangible, historical experience with the shudder of hindsight.

In an earlier ekphrastic poem 'Pieter Breughel: Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap, 1565' from *Black Cat Bone*, the scene again is the temporary frozen landscape made available to the community captured in Breughel's famous painting.

[63] E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p.180-1.
[64] From the Greek word for tree.

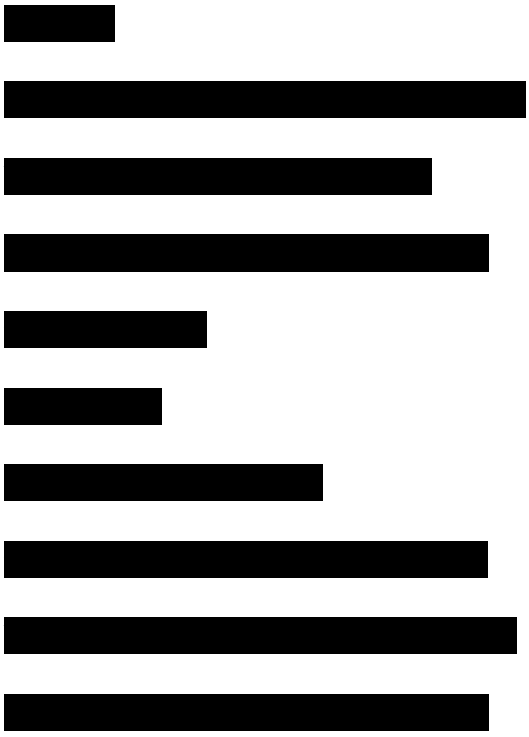
Figure 10. Pieter Breughel, 'Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap', 1565, oil on panel, 37 x 55 cm. Private Collection.

This time, the happy scene of escape is made more explicit than the 'Skating Boy' poem in the peril that awaits the birds that dip and strut by the bird trap, away to the right of the picture where they are obscured from the human figures' view but made available to us as viewers of the painting. With an eye on the birds, the free association or covenant is invoked as

[redacted]

The use of the snake, the serpent's tail teasing its way to the open door of Eden, is the *punctum* of the painting, juxtaposing the warranted freedom by which the man's innocence is won. The inference is that modern man is trapped providing the juxtaposition of the fleeting moment of freedom on the ice. Again, there is the reference to childhood, a retroactive appeal to the grace of presence the young enjoy. But in the last stanza, what is in the 'Skating Boy' poem only hinted at, is made explicit as a ground on which to find a language of grace that grasps at an essential fear:

What that thought returns us to is the lost innocence of the man on the ice, becoming universal, if not a personal reflection of the possibility in all of us to shrug off that other self, the self enclosed by material circumstance, but momentarily there is, in all of us



[65] John Burnside, 'Pieter Breughel: Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap, 1565' in *Black Cat Bone*, p.59-60.

The figure of the man 'near the church' occupies the centre of the painting, our eye is drawn to him. Beside him, closer still to the church are two boys busy at play, each holding snowballs mirroring one other's stance. The 'other' at the close of the poem is not only the child in the man, but instead it becomes 'a man', gesturing towards the indefinite article, a double, a twin; perhaps a metaphysical embodiment of his own conscience, or the double jeopardy of the first sinners, neither to blame as their guilt is indivisible. The guilt in this poem is the violence of the alcoholic man 'his body soured / with last night's schnapps' caught in a loveless relationship in which 'he's beaten her for years', set against the innocence of the skaters. Yet there is also a sense of temporary exoneration of Burnside's own alcoholic father, momentarily forgiven, come down the centuries to 'other' the painting to another age where that guilt is the guilt of man's unspeakable power, unable to balance freedom and responsibility to the planet's forbearance. The 'white / horizon, fair' is an equitable future. What such a painting holds for contemporary viewers is the sense that with huge climatic shifts come political changes which sweep away ruling orders and indentured ways of life. In seeing the intersection of political upheaval alongside climate change there remains the possibility of radical emancipation, as Jason Moore states, 'early capitalism's most serious political crises — until the mid-twentieth century — coincided with the most severe decades of the Little Ice Age in the seventeenth century.' Burnside is pointing to possibility, but also forcing a comparison of the age with our own across time, knowing as we do that those paintings were made at the height of the Dutch empire, where the enslavement of indigenous peoples, the subjugation of women, and the exploitation of labour made possible such a gilded age.

A third poem, 'A Frost Fair' from *All One Breath,* links the two yet deviates from the open spirit of free democracy of which the ice affords.[66] The frost fairs that appeared on the Thames during the Little Ice Age of the period find resonance with the enclosures that befell country dwellers documented by John Clare. Before I present the poem, it is worth introducing an article Burnside wrote around the time of writing the poems in *All One Breath*. The background to the poem is explored here linking the innocent idea of what the fairs could offer Londoners to the encroaching idea that

> instead of offering a vision of equality, as in the Dutch paintings, on the snowy days of my small town childhood, the frost fairs symbolised all that was wrong with a

[66] John Burnside, 'A Frost Fair' in *All One Breath*, p.64. The poem first appeared in *London Review of Books*, vol., 34, no. 16, 30 August 2012.

> nation that would be responsible for the Acts of Enclosure and the Highland Clearances, the privatisation of water in our rivers and even the wind that blows across our neonicotinoid-drenched fields […] When I think about the London frost fairs, I can't help seeing them as a surrender of a transient Elysium to crude and unimaginative commerce, a complete reversal of that democratisation of space found in northern European winter landscape painting.[67]

The young Burnside's response to these Dutch winter scenes was, he says 'emotional and imaginative rather than analytical […] a belonging I had been waiting to experience for years […] it was then, purely lyrical'[68] He articulates a metaphysical change, a suspended notion of time gifted by the appearance of snow. In 'A Winter Mind' he articulates this idea:

> When there was snow, everyday proceedings could be suspended by a burst pipe or a blocked road, traffic could come to a standstill, schools close. Yet the effect was also more metaphysical: the snow made the world fall quiet and the day appear to stand, if not motionless, then still enough for real time to prevail. The spaces between the houses on our estate became wider and deeper. Ordinary townsfolk, passing by in a snowfall, were rendered strangely magnetic.

Snow is a constant feature in Burnside's poems. In the four collections on which I am choosing to focus, *The Hunt in the Forest* (2009), *Black Cat Bone* (2011), *All One Breath* (2014) and *Still Life with Feeding Snake* (2017) there are 140 poems. Snow appears 59 times across all four in over a third of the poems in total. It seems the speakers in the poems are nostalgic for a world where snow and ice were more frequent. As a base element in Burnside's poetic world it represents that renewal of the world, an access to a brilliant magical realm, offering something akin to freedom.

> A FROST FAIR
>
> [redacted]
>
> [redacted]
>
> [redacted]

[67] John Burnside, 'A Winter Mind' in *London Review of Books*, vol. 35, no. 8, 25 April 2013.
[68] Ibid.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Th poem opens ambiguously, offering a take on an old cliché. Yet the cliché is there to be upended, as if clichés offer nothing new, only rehashed truisms handed down by some vague universalistic 'they'. There could also be, in the refrain, an idea that accepted truths are not hard won, in fact they represent language akin to sycophancy; unquestioned, accepting, an acquiescence to the status quo. It is a poised critical opening which locates the poem immediately in its environment of taken-for-granted knowledge, a knowledge which the poem unravels. The hoped-for levelling coming in the following lines is subverted by the 'people we thought we knew' where there comes an expectation of betrayal. In 'A Winter Mind', Burnside draws this parallel between the haves and the have-nots, and in the process opens an idea of time as sacred, 'I knew that time falls into two distinct categories: what I thought of as *real time*, in which I had room to move and to be (which is to say, at my own pace), and what I saw as the *time of others*, which was not necessarily uncongenial but, being imposed, was never entirely true.'[69] The imposition of which he speaks is the intrusion of rules and regulations from a pecuniary sensibility from the ruling classes, overtaking, like Clare, the timeless communion people felt towards the river that was, in effect free from the onslaught of private acquisition.

The intuited idea in the poem that this new phenomenon 'had something to do with the sun', or 'how the planets were aligned' is today an anthropogenic conclusion to such a mystery. Nevertheless, the hearsay element is an appeal to some higher law combining fate with blind acceptance—the ingredients for conspiratorial designs which, like clichés, show the paucity of the imagination for ascribing power where there is none. What the poem then does is confuse the authority of the one speaking with 'strange companions' made eerie and extra-present, the overlooked poor perhaps, but then the 'we pitched our tents and stalls' becomes a right expressed easily as 'bunting' resounds the royal ascent to this temporary commercial endeavour, a God-given right to buy and sell on any given land. The colours 'they'd never seen before', the 'red, and green' are the commercial colours of Christmas, extensions held

[69] John Burnside, 'A Winter Mind'.

almost falsely between the dashes as if to reinforce their synthetic connotation to buying and selling. At the close, leading to the 'magic lantern' there is a counterpoint between the aforementioned colours and the gaze towards 'them', an unadulterated projection of innocence captured in the 'white'. The lack of comma after 'children' creates an ambiguity about where to locate childhood. There is a sense that the 'magic lantern', an early development of camera technology, an enlightenment update on the Camera Obscura which fixes a scene at one remove, is a pollutant in the form of 'light trespass'.[70] Indeed, the dark of the shuttered room could be the beginning of an objectivity of the natural world itself, the children representing the early stages of modernity soon to be conditioned by the perspective of all the concomitant forces of extractive capital that came with it.

I think the crucial word at the close is the 'falling'. A fall from that white innocence, but also a greater realisation that the young Burnside in 'A Winter Mind' comes to realise is an opportunity, as Clare knew, for little acts of tyranny:

> Immediately I saw how naive I had been to imagine a carefree, liberated populace skating out onto the wide expanse of the Thames under a high clear sky. [John] Evelyn's[71] picture was more realistic: as soon as the river was safe to walk on, every entrepreneur with the means to set up shop was out there, filling the air with smoke and noise; the gullible and the idle were to be gently fleeced, as children are fleeced in modern museums by slot machines that churn out polished stones, or pennies stamped with the insignia of some former tyrant.

It again recalls the descent from boyhood into the political, to say 'analytical' realisation that subsumes the 'lyrical' imagination when one comes to knowledge about who owns and dictates the laws of the land. The poem also speaks about the fetishization of history. The postmodern 'time / had stopped' fixes history into a museum or an archive, a dead time, erasing the dialectic where people and Nature have historically been put to work. But in the suspended time occasioned by the frozen river, momentarily there is a forgotten step out of history, as if stepping out of that fetishization of labour, 'out of the cold // to meet us'. Here, that alienation is interrupted, if only for a moment, allowing us to see how the forces of industry work to erase the proletariat base. Burnside is then nostalgic for the transformative snow and ice less frequent now than in earlier times and the poem reveals that something has

[70] Ibid.
[71] John Evelyn's Diaries from 1864, quoted in 'A Winter Mind'.

corrupted the seasons and captured our sense of time as related to the natural world. That last line, 'falling into understanding' is a paradise lost, like the swimming poems at the beginning of this chapter. The poem alludes to the hierarchies of estates and the ruling classes which, if naively in the Dutch paintings, are not inferred. In this sense it recalls Clare's lines:

> Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours
>
> Free as Spring clouds and wild summer flowers
>
> Is faded all – a hope that blossomed free,
>
> And hath been once, no more shall ever be
>
> Inclosure came and trampled on the grave
>
> Of labour's rights and left the poor a slave[72]

Reading Clare's lines today helps situate Burnside's poetry in a long tradition of what we might call enclosure poetry. The link I have tried to explicate here from Burnside's championing of Rachel Carson's humanistic scientific writings comes a poetry on terms with the power of water. It is as if Burnside's nostalgia for snow and ice, those snowed-in days of his childhood carries Clare's 'vision of my boyish hours'. Now that the Anthropocene forces the deep-rooted link between human action and the climate, Burnside's recovery of that memory is to show the reader how to better understand the 'behaviour' of water so that we may live in respect of its metaphysical role in shaping the way we live. In the final chapter, I turn to ideas about the management of water. Thinking through our relationship with water as a civic matter gets to the heart of the sustainability of our everyday practices, from weather reports, sewers, rivers as a wellspring of inspiration for poets, and finally the responsibility to think about the processes which precipitate erosion.

[72] John Clare, 'The Mores', p.48.

Chapter Six

Water Management

'In drains begin responsibilities'[1]

Joseph Chamberlain

For the Dutch, water management has been central since at least the thirteenth century to the governance of national sovereignty. All lives depend on water. As Bruno Latour states, 'there is nothing astonishing in the fact that a country built artificially by means of dikes and polders should give the powers of seas and rivers a degree of representation worthy of their sovereignty.'[2] That sovereignty is dependent on the laws of water, else it would be 'swallowed up under the North Sea as surely as Atlantis.' But Latour is reaching for something even more intractable in the acknowledgment of the power of water. It is respect for water and its laws as they become threatening, invoking fear; the abstract mass of it as the ultimate sublime arbiter of life on earth. The Dutch National Water Authority, (*Rijkswaterstaat*) is a department that represents all interests of the citizens of the Netherlands, and the degree to which it operates is at the level of supra-democratic governance, on which depends the fate of all Dutch citizens. For Latour, and as in the ekphrastic poems discussed earlier in chapter five, the behaviour of water inculcates the people of the entire globe, disrespecting national borders or the impositions of any particular parliament or government creating a kind of temporary democratic space like international waters. As he says 'for a geologist, there is nothing harder to map than an aquifer whose limits never correspond neatly to official land surveys.'[3]

From the *Cloaca Maxima* to present day water boards, the management of water as a means of ensuring survival of civilisations must obey the inescapable fact that life depends on access and respect for the waterways of the world. This final chapter will look more closely at the overlap between this growing awareness of the technology of water management and how our understanding of it can be brought into our midst through poetry. To first make these

[1] Joseph Chamberlain, epigraph to 'Drains' in Sean O'Brien, *The Drowned Book* (London: Picador Poetry, 2007), p.11. J.P. Gehrke, 'A Radical Endeavor: Joseph Chamberlain and the Emergence of Municipal Socialism in Birmingham.' *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, (2016) 75: 23-57. doi:10.1111/ajes.12130
[2] Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p.272.
[3] Ibid., p.273.

links, Burnside takes an imaginative leap between water management and the work of the poet:

> I cannot say for sure why I am so attracted to the technology of water management - and clearly it could only be considered subject for dinner-table small talk in the most exclusive company. I suspect, however, that it is rooted in the same damp corner of my psyche where poetry takes hold. [redacted]

In this there is quiet respect, yet these comments go further, offering an insight into the scale at which water management can only ever be a technique of piecemeal interference to the power of its hold over us. Echoing the epigraph from Joseph Chamberlain, there is in this passage an acknowledged acceptance that water is a civic matter. Much like the *Rijkswaterstaat*, water and its behaviour can only ever be arbitrated to a certain degree. For Chamberlain, it was a matter of the utmost importance, wresting its management away from private hands and centralising its management to the public, 'I am going to say, in the first place, that the health of large towns and the liability to disease of their population are intimately connected with the Water supply'.[5] Today, as an example of a new found respect for waterways linking culture and the natural world, the Dutch authorities in Utrecht have, in 2020 completed a reversal of a project which began over forty years ago. The decision back then was to pave over the *Catharijnesingel* canal that bisects the city to allow access for motor traffic to the shopping districts. These motorways have now been deconstructed to allow for the canal to flow once again through the city:

[4] John Burnside, *The Music of Time*, p.456.
[5] Ibid., J.P Gehrke, 'A Radical Endeavor: Joseph Chamberlain and the Emergence of Municipal Socialism in Birmingham.'

> More than 40 years after parts of the canal that encircled Utrecht's old town were concreted over to accommodate a 12-lane motorway, the Dutch city is celebrating the restoration of its 900-year-old moat.[6]

It is an example of the enduring power of water finding its true course, but it also says something about the contemporary rejection of rampant commercialism. Seen in this way, the decision to pave the canal is now thought of as an aberration, a late twentieth-century mistake which can now be considered in its historical moment by the construction and then removal of the road. It might be said that there now stands a renewed respect for waterways as the example above shows; that something intractable, akin to a kind of accommodation in the world is at stake when we tamper with water too much. Think of how this short poem, 'The Third Thing' from DH Lawrence feels today, giving, as it does the space for the part unknown.

> *Water is H2O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one,*
>
> *but there is also a third thing, that makes it water*
>
> *and nobody knows what it is.*
>
> *The atom locks up two energies*
>
> *but it is a third thing present which makes it an atom.*[7]

That third thing lies out of our sphere of understanding. Lawrence's poem neatly articulates that mysterious other element. It takes writers such as Lawrence and Rachel Carson to locate the blind spot, the mystery which must always remain out of reach if we are to live in respect to water. For Burnside, water is felt material, not just an element. In this final section I want to make this connection between technology of water management and the ways in which, using Heidegger's conception of technology, there is a way in which modern water management systems have obscured the deep-seated connection to water on which our lives depend. Ultimately, like the example in Utrecht, the relationship between ourselves and water is in Burnside's poetry an act of recovery. In this chapter I look firstly at weather, how weather reports exist in a local context but are governed by something much larger than any regional delineation. Weather becomes an index of climate, and as such there is now a

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[6] 'Utrecht restores historic canal made into motorway in 1970s', available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/14/utrecht-restores-historic-canal-made-into-motorway-in-1970s? [Accessed 14 November, 2020].

[7] DH Lawrence, *Birds, Beasts, and the Third Thing*, eds., Alice and Martin Provensen (UK: Viking Press, 1982).

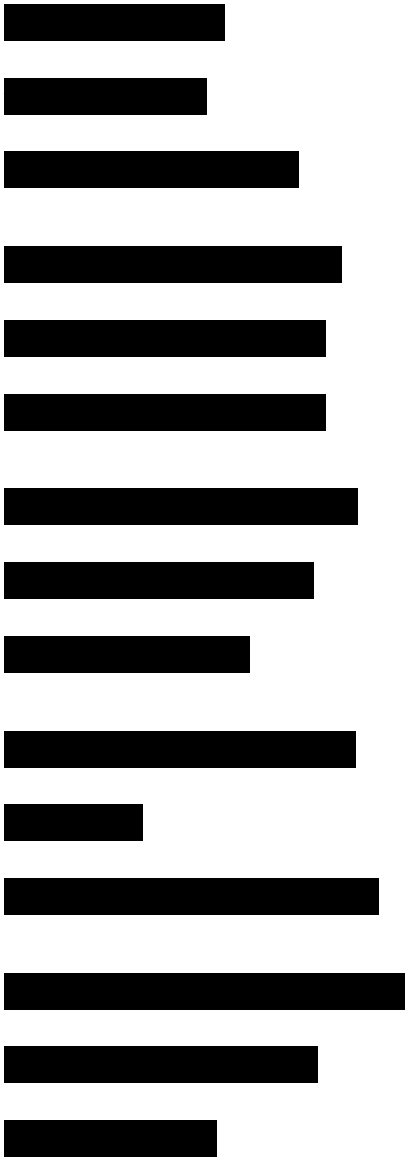
charged element to our understanding of them. I am following the way Burnside's poems which feature water flow backwards to some origin, and how technology interrupts this world-making element, rendering it as something to be harnessed. It is in this process by which the management of water systems become civic matters. I then turn to the idea that rivers provide the source of inspiration for poets more generally, that there may be a way of thinking of poets as carriers of meaning which goes two-ways, from its sustaining properties of the 'dailiness of life', to the spiritual origins of our existence. Finally, I close read the poem 'Erosion', from *All One Breath*.

In 'Weather Report' from *Black Cat Bone*[8], what appears at first hand the mundane repetitive summation of the day's weather comes, on further reading, to reveal something about our relationship to time, anchoring us to the present by the attunement of weather. There is a yearning for the visual gesture, destroying reference in the way a weather report is only ever an approximation of what we might come to expect, but also the fate of our domesticated days governed by what is essentially a non-event, something wholly alien to us. How absurd to make odds on the movement of clouds, but there is something in that need to do so, to master the weather somehow:

WEATHER REPORT

[redacted]

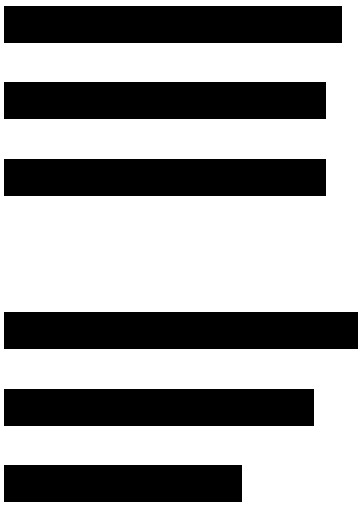
[8] John Burnside, 'Weather Report', first appeared in *London Review of Books*, vol. 32, no. 6, 25 March 2010; *Black Cat Bone*, p.62.



The poem fixes us to a changing time of year, as if there could be a moment pinpointing the end of summer. We're given a palpable grey darkness illuminated by a car's sidelights which suffuses the road with a sheen, rendering it as a new surface. The mention of Beley names a place, St. Andrews in Fife which tallies with the designations of weather reports. In the opening there is a physical, spatial and temporal continuity. But there is something else happening in such a description. If we remember Spinoza's dictum that 'every determination is a negation'[9] we begin to see what the poem is doing to our sense of depersonalising something so familiar. In Wallace Stevens's poem, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction'[10],

[9] Baruch Spinoza, quoted in Charles Altieri, 'Why Stevens must be Abstract or What a Poet can Learn from Painting' in *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*, ed. Albert Gelpi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.98.
[10] John N. Serio, ed. *Wallace Stevens: Selected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), pp.195-220.

commenting on the loose brushstrokes of Dutch Golden Age painter, Frans Hals, an artist not noted for landscapes, there is attention turned to the overlooked: 'Weather by Frans Hals // Brushed up by brushy winds in brushy clouds, / Wetted by blue, colder for white. / Not to Be spoken to.' The weather is just there, abstractedly haunting the painting's edges. Reality is always changing; it requires an imaginative sense of fiction which must be abstract. Stevens then continues, 'It must be visible or invisible, / invisible or visible or both: / a seeing and unseeing in the eye.' The abstraction remains in the eye which becomes then an ideal of embodiment. It does so without losing the sublimity of the subject matter. But in Burnside's poem, after an appearance from the crow in the third stanza, plucking drowned carrion from the river, a determination of its own-*ness* as the carrion crow, the poem swivels at the halfway point, pointing to the abstract:



As with the new reflective 'sheen' on the road, water is a mirror revealing a reflection of the boys' 'phantoms' of their other selves. The rain conditions all the surfaces, including the window which here acts as a kind of eternal picture frame. The weather, repeated, becomes a way of measuring ourselves to its changes inculcating our destiny as governed by the anomaly of weather now seen as a by-product of human action. There is, to borrow a term from Timothy Morton, a viscosity to things now.[11] Even when we talk about the weather, 'the human species is becoming conscious of itself as a planetary force.'[12] This is captured in the line 'This is the weather, today, / and the weather to come' which provides an antiteleological

[11] Timothy Morton, 'Viscosity' in Arcade: Literature, Humanities & the World blog. 'Viscosity here means that the more you know about a hyperobject, the more entangled with it you realize you already are', available at: https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/viscosity [Accessed 28 August 2020]
[12] Alex Blasdel, 'A reckoning for our species', interview with Timothy Morton in *The Guardian*. June 15, 2017. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher [Accessed 3 July, 2017].

view of the poetic form in its moment of creation and tallies with the subject matter. To quote Robert Frost, it is as if 'one clarification supplants and supports another without conclusion.'[13] The comma after the first 'weather' fixes the present to the next line which beckons the future. There is a stasis achieved, or a suspension of temporality. Something similar can be understood when we consider the word 'temps' in Latin languages (*tempo, tiempo, temps*) which can be both used to say both 'time' and 'weather'.[14] As Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro explain, 'the climate' is fundamentally linked, if not the defining 'element of historico-political synchronization of the interest of all the world's peoples. What the weather is like becomes *what counts* (in) the flow of time.'[15] To read this in the context of Burnside's poem is to find in the weather report a higher sense of belonging, echoing Carson's 'Global Thermostat', as she identifies 'the redistribution of heat for the whole earth is accomplished about half by the ocean currents, and half by the winds.'[16] Burnside's site-specific poem in St. Andrews finds a global context opening the idea that every singular embodiment is swept up in the cycle of global environmental conditions.

The rivers are the poets

When Martin Heidegger wrote about the phenomena of technology, one of his first observations was about how the management and interruption of water flow from rivers acts as an *enframing*. This can be understood as a form of parenthesis where natural phenomena become viewed as potential to the extension of the guiding hand of humans to harness its power and make it work, not *as* itself, but *for* us. Contemporary environmental theory owes a debt to Heidegger's conceptions of technology. As Michael E. Zimmerman notes, 'Heidegger's later writings […] envision an alternative to industrial ideologies that justify treating humans and nonhumans alike as commodities'.[17] This is where we find allegiance in Burnside's thinking with Heidegger's conceptions of 'letting be'; as Heidegger says, to allow things to 'manifest themselves according to their own possibilities […] with as little

[13] Robert Frost, 'The Figure a Poem Makes', preface to *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949).
[14] Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, trans. Rodrigo Nunes (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), p.93-4, n27.
[15] Ibid., p.93-4.
[16] Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.211.
[17] Michael E. Zimmerman, 'Martin Heidegger: antinaturalistic critic of technological modernity' in D. Macauley, ed., *Minding Nature: The Philosophies of Ecology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), p.60.

interference as possible.'[18] Compare this to these lines from 'Pluviose' from *Still Life with Feeding Snake*:

> she is living the life I lost on the way to school
>
> in the body I failed to grow up in, her hands in the flow
>
> of the river, finding the current
>
> and teasing it loose, like a story, the word by word
>
> of trains running through in the dark, in the seasonless rain[19]

The poem's title refers to the fifth month of the French Republican calendar, a period that runs from 20th of January to the 18th of February. The word itself means regular rainfall, but it is the conflation of an imagined, not to say lost season ('seasonless rain'); a kind of fifth season when things are returned to natural balance, coupled with the idea of order turned upside down. This 'season' coincides with early lent or Shrovetide in which carnivals take place as forms of ritual; a setting aside or letting be for a moment to enjoy forms of intimate communion. That communion is directed in the poem to the rain, and to the river or in this case, the canal as the speaker sees or imagines 'the lock-keeper's prettiest daughter […] in the clockless silt and purl / of waters her mother fished, before marriage and barter'. That instrumentality of 'barter' is a kind of adulteration in the way Heidegger's conception of technology is form of corruption of the natural flow of order. The river is harnessed to profit-making. Although in the poem, the daughter 'has been dead for forty years', she's kept alive by that suspension in water, preserved in the memory allowing the water to carry forth the past into the present, the way Heidegger talks of the river as a 'being-between' the gods in their high plateaus and the dwelling mortals who live by the courses it carves down in the valleys and bays. It is as if the river is governed by its source which permits the idea of a river flowing backwards, and Burnside's poem holds this tension in play not only to reveal the river by technology—the girl is setting eel traps—but by extension, drawing attention to its manifestness as something apart from us. The poem teases the river 'loose' and it does so through language 'word by word'. Here we see the meaning of Heidegger's peculiar phrasing

[18] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, [1941] 1996), p.60.
[19] John Burnside, 'Pluviose' in *Still Life with Feeding Snake*, p.64-5.

that the rivers are poets. The poet may be something like Lawrence's 'third thing', bringing water into our sphere of understanding. Another comparison, this time with Carson, is found in Heidegger's idea that the river is in a perpetual state of wandering being.[20] Carson reminds us that the word plankton is the Greek word for wandering. There is a dynamic between the originary sources which sustain life in water to the idea of a limitless or unbounded sense of freedom, a freedom which is bisected by the construction of territory and geographical boundaries, or the construction of dams. Phytoplankton is a form of algae, the presence of which is responsible for the production of oxygen and we're back at Lawrence's poem which lays out in no uncertain terms that water is the basis of all life, the extent of which is finally unknowable.

'A Species of Erosion': enmities of mismanagement in the natural world

In Heidegger's influential essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', he seeks not to ask the question about what technology is, its modes *per se*, but aims at thinking behind what technology does to our thought, how it apprehends it to the degree that it becomes part of our worldview. In the case of the hydroelectric power plant on the river Rhine, the river is the object, something that stands outside of the instrumental usage by which it becomes destined as when it is dammed up. More generally, any object that is interrupted by human hands has, in Heidegger's conception, been reduced. This reduction does not obliterate the original object, in this case the river as opposed to the dam that 'uses' it, but it nonetheless loses the dignity it enjoyed prior to human intervention. The following excerpt details this more closely:

> In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River, as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station. In order that we may even remotely consider the monstrousness that reigns here.[21]

[20] Babette Babich, 'The Ister: Between the Documentary and Heidegger's Lecture Course Politics, Geographies, and Rivers', in *Articles and Chapters in Academic Book Collections*, vol 38 (2011). https://fordham.bepress.com/phil_babich/38 [Accessed 20 March, 2019].
[21] Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p.16.

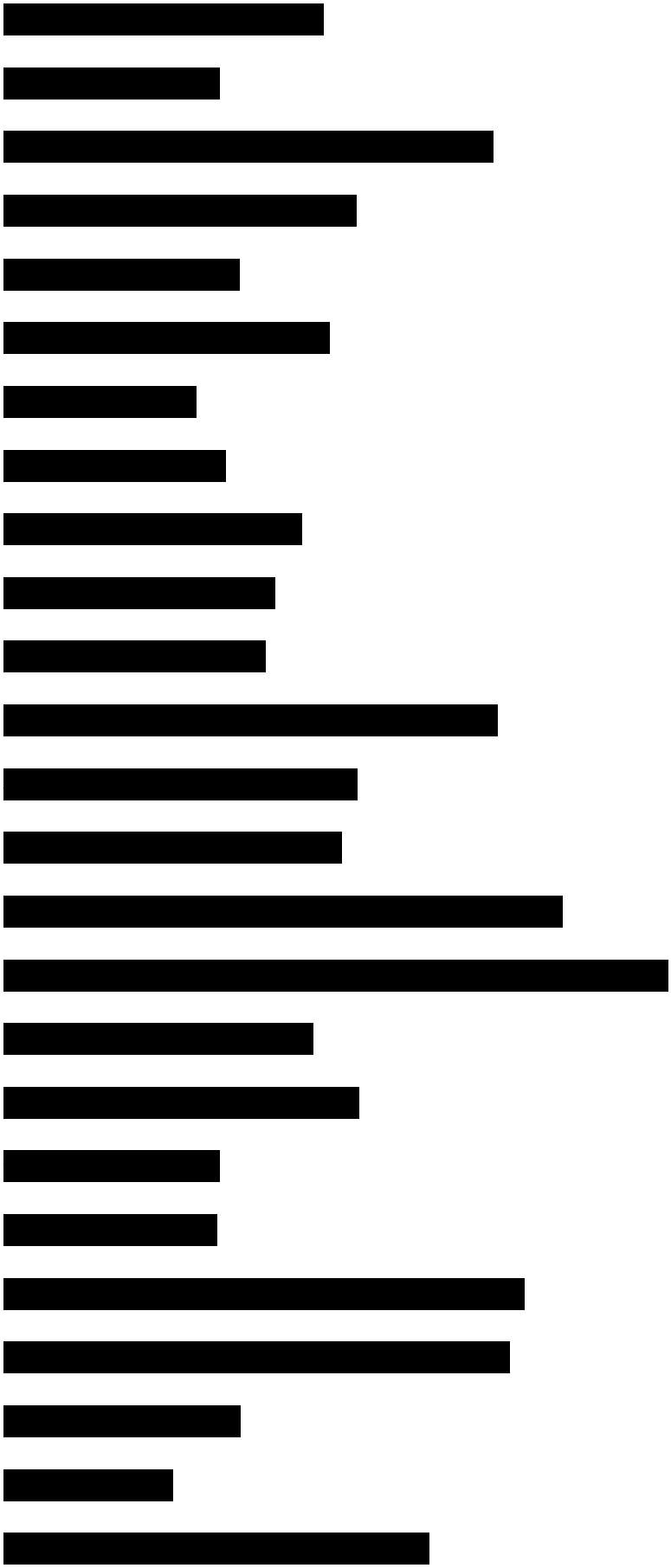
What does Heidegger mean by ‘the monstrousness that reigns here’? It is as if humans have succumbed to the power of technology, forever pushing the origins of our alienation from the natural sources on which we rely further and further out of reach. This ongoing process is what fisheries scientist Daniel Pauly terms ‘Shifting Baseline Syndrome’[22]:

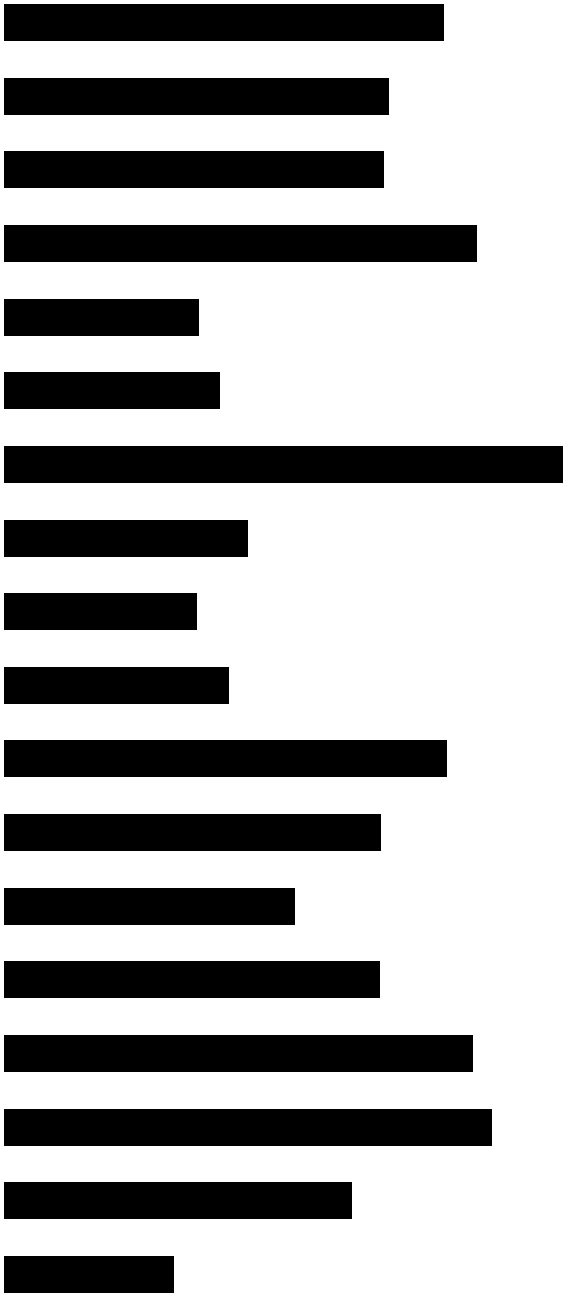
> The people of every generation perceive the state of the ecosystems they encountered in their childhood as normal. When fish or other animals or plants are depleted, campaigners and scientists might call for them to be restored to the numbers that existed in their youth: their own ecological baseline. But they often appear to be unaware that what they considered normal when they were children was in fact a state of extreme depletion.[23]

In this context, in this final section I will read Burnside’s poem ‘Erosion’, from *All One Breath*.[24]

> EROSION
>
> 

[22] Daniel Pauly, ‘Anecdotes and the shifting baseline syndrome of fisheries’, *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 10, no. 10, 1995. doi: 10.1016/ S0169-5347(00)89171-5.
[23] George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea, and Human Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), p.69.
[24] John Burnside, ‘Erosion’, first appeared in *London Review of Books*, vol. 35, no. 23, 5 December 2013; *All One Breath,* ppp.77-79.





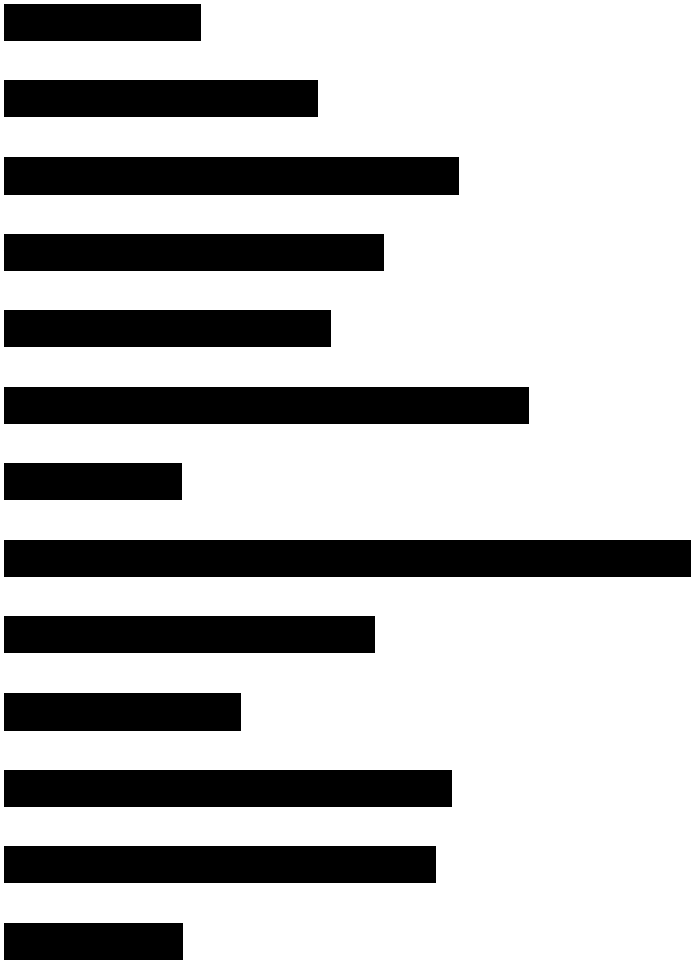
This poem gradually goes further back before these shifting baselines to find an ancient practice of sheep farming as presaging the ravaging of land by a culture of land appropriation and homeownership. It allows for a longer view, which critiques the corruption of natural flows of water and wind in the making and death of landscapes. The poem scopes for a more spiritual category of transcendence with which to reclaim a sense of permanence amidst the fragile and futile wars between individuals caught in the political settlement of our time as we move from late capitalism to a growing era of environmental consciousness. The poem challenges the very economic systems that corrupt our eco-systems.

Burnside seeks always to institute the notion that the body is in living concert with all other living things. As such, there is an inherent two-way process between language and place which is an embodied, affective relationship between the body and the environs which sustain it. One the one hand, the language we use to talk about the environment as a conditioning presence in our lives is necessarily political, tied up with the ongoing negotiation of where we find value in the physical properties of the objects we use that are wrought from the raw materials of the earth. But on the other hand, language must concern itself with the spiritual category of transcendence, to seek ideas that go beyond—in a metaphysical way—the confines of the here and now to speak about the human in the context on a longer, planetary scale. That two-way process is offered in Burnside as a fundamental wager which finds its physical crucible in the natural world coupled with an immediate longing to ameliorate the damage caused by anthropogenic climate change. In 'Erosion', from a collection that speaks to that living concert, the spilt religion coming from the interspersed lines from Psalm 103 creates a tension between a deity who is no respecter of persons with the meagre concerns of the acquisitive human. Psalm 103, as Leonard Maré has it, is a form of 'praise […] born in the crucible of life.' There is a sense of acceptance, an even handedness of love and mercy for the work of god. As he says, 'the praise offered to God in Psalm 103 is not "cheap" praise, but praise born in […] times of hardship and times of trouble. […] Difficult times thus become a birthplace for praise.'[25] I think this kind of two-way orientation, of accepting new life and new beginnings from pain is one of the central motifs I have tried to articulate in Burnside's ecologically attuned poetry. There is an absent god in times of need; there must be a restorative solution to the breakdown in the relationship between the human and their world. This poem resonates with despair at the evidence of environmental damage, forcing the acquisitive human to confront that absence as a space for some form of redemptive knowledge. That such a post-secular worldview has come to replace the failure of religion testifies to this depravity in the moment of our growing awareness of the guilt, shame, and pain we feel about our own collective action towards the earth.

The poem begins with a speaker alone in the world, gazing out across some kind of divide from his yard. There is a settlement, a man and his neighbour, both busy, but one is being observed, and through that we begin to speculate on the speaker's position. The poem could be seen as a thought-experiment, testing our tendency to point the finger at some vague

[25] Leonard Maré, 'Psalm 103: Lofprysing word gebore uit die swaarkry van die lewe.' *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* [Online], vol. 61, no. 4, 2005: pp.1273-1284.

‘other’ as a reflection of humanity’s culpability of ‘laying waste’ over recent decades. The poem opens a space for blame but leaves the target of that blame as ambiguous. Such a revelation arrives through wind and water:



A slow death by the litany of unhealthy lifestyle is analogous to the breakdown of a much larger body, the corruption of Gaia. From his transcendental Thoreauvian plot, his ‘yard’, a gentle, unthreatening ‘breeze’ is then juxtaposed ‘over the road’. An enmity is proposed. The ‘breeze’ is captured in the ‘dust’ and ‘heat’, visible as he ‘can see it / gusting away’. Something as intractable as the wind has been corrupted by its being visible. Loam is a fertile soil, a mixture of equal portions of sand, silt, and clay, and crucially it is the basis for plaster and brick when in the form of a clay paste combining water with sand and, for example chopped straw. The idea of a naturally made product used as the basis for dwelling becoming ‘dust’ shows how the wet conditions for life have become arid. It pulls the poem away from certain conditions of solidity and permanence and, as always in Burnside it is wind and water and weather that speaks. In relation to the Anthropocene, locating a moment when measurable effects of human activity begin to show on global scales, it is worth noting that

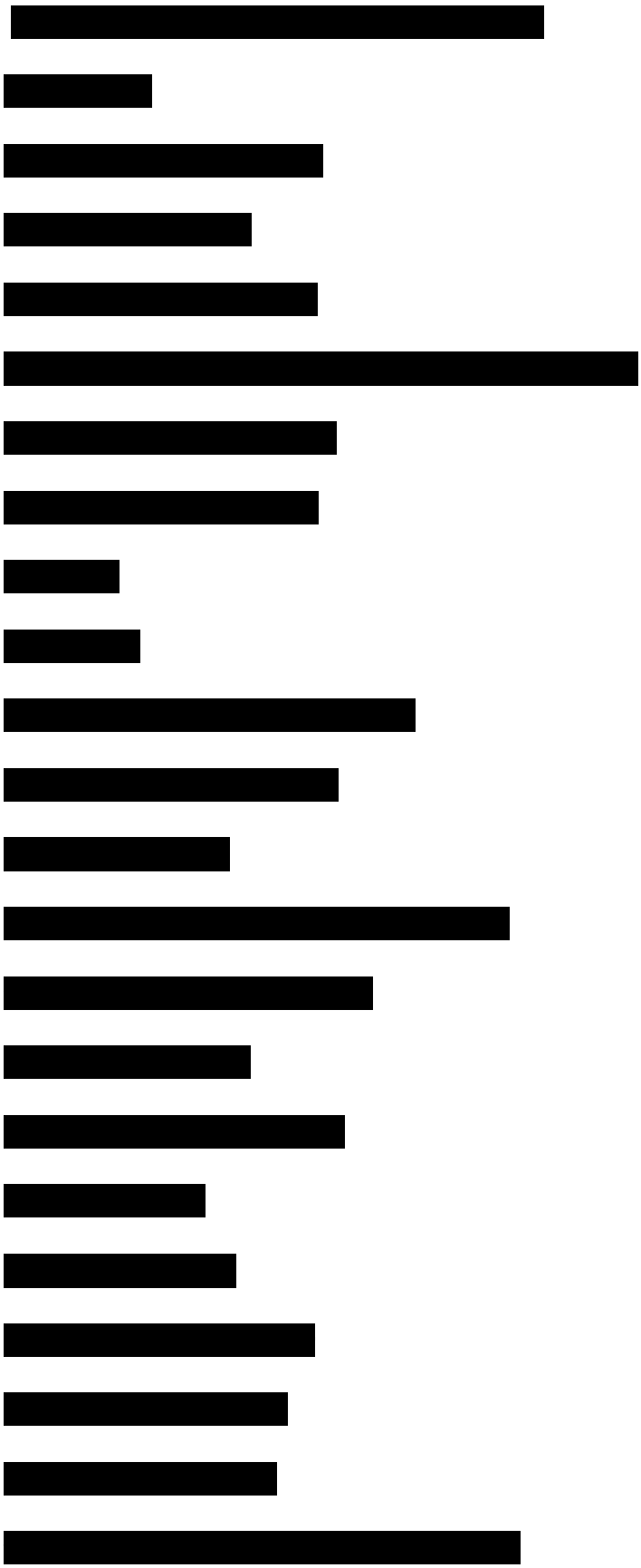
‘[d]uring the period of atmospheric nuclear weapons testing in the late 1950s and 1960s, unique isotopes were formed and distributed globally on lower stratospheric and upper tropospheric circulation patterns and deposited on the Earth’s surface as a function of latitude and rainfall.’[26] Such a global after-effect is a pointed critique of an historical moment; an anthropocentric big bang in the form of nuclear testing which was born from enmity.

The visible dust cloud acts as a kind of screen which makes its way into humanity’s field of vision, even comparable to the dust cloud from a nuclear explosion as ‘man’ becomes an embodied figure: ‘He’s lived like this for fifty years, friendless and hard / in the artery, heart silting up, / a cloud in his eyes / from the effort of grim calculation.’ Here we have a time-frame that corresponds with Burnside’s lament over the onset of neoliberal policy since the middle of the twentieth century. In the ‘artery’ becoming hard there is a clot, a word that, as a noun is a form of obstruction or constriction as well as an insult meaning fool or blockhead. Lifeblood is dammed, ‘silted’, preventing the heart’s natural flow in keeping all parts working. There is also in ‘artery’ a hardness which prohibits the view of agriculture as an art of maintenance, indeed, all art could be said to be made from knowing when to stop. But a reckoning is taking shape, darkening like that ‘cloud in his eyes’ due to his instrumental worldview of ‘grim calculation’. There are signs in the opening of the way in which transcendence and immanence are foundational for a kind of spilt spiritual uncertainty. The ‘silting’ from ‘calculation’ finds at best justification in clairvoyance, nothing but guesswork attached vaguely to some abstract form of order which is nothing but a fabrication, ‘little else’. There is no god here.

The following section sees a list of birds ‘chiffchaff / and starling, dunnock […] the elegant / wren’ before a pathos following the presaging appearance of the murder of crows. This draws attention to the myths we summon in language which here is turned on its head to infer that such a collective noun applies to human action, in ‘flash mob of crows at the gate,’–the construction of the killing motor-vehicle—‘all flutter and strut, / where something has died / in the wheels of a passing car’. It is here we get the first psalm-like refrain which operates by breaking up the poem in place of any line breaks. In so doing, there is a contracted sense that such moments of joy in seeing the native birds comes with the casual acceptance of pain at

[26] D.E. Walling, T.A. Quine, ‘Use of Caesium-137 as a Tracer of Erosion and Sedimentation: Handbook for the Application of the Caesium-137 Technique.’ Department of Geography, University of Exeter, UK, 1993.

the fate of animals in human hands. Notice there's no full stop after 'car', we get a sense of things running on, which appears later to explicate that sense of an ongoing process:



[redacted]

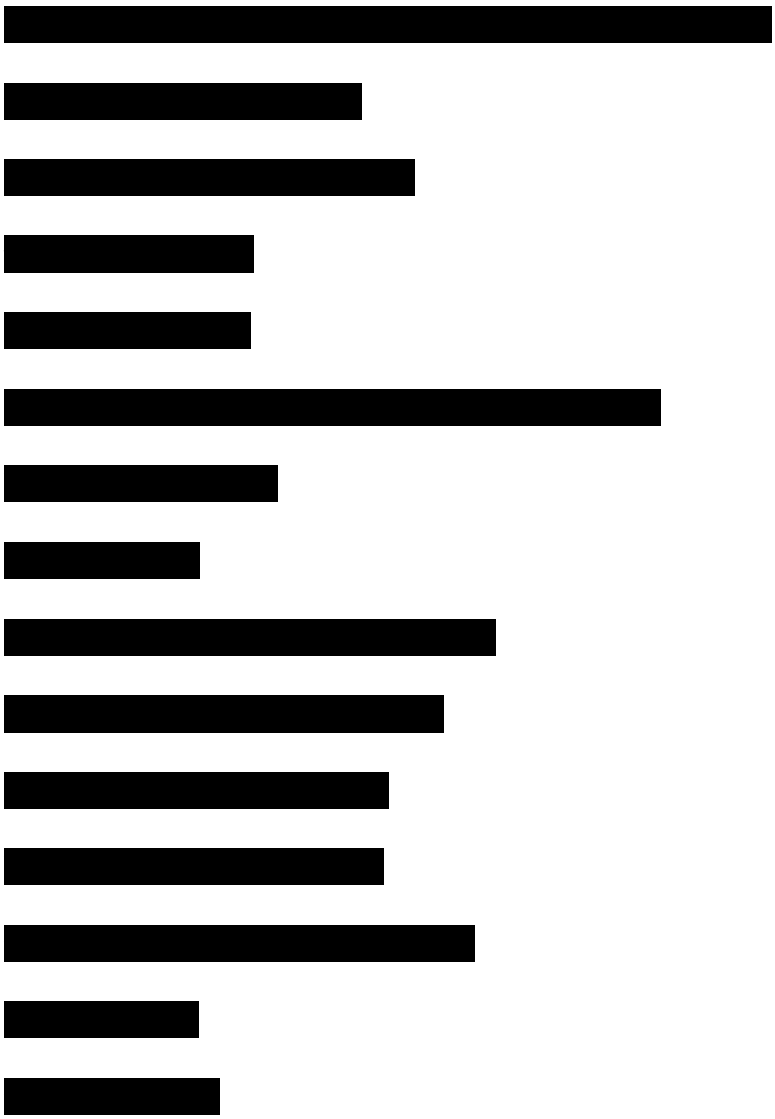
[redacted]

The lines from the psalm take the poem away from the present, instituting memory, and a larger timescale on which to think about 'another season'. The 'sun-paled' works in several ways. It suggests a kind of bleaching, the way things fade in the sun over a long period of time, the faded grace of god's presence tallies with the slow process of the glacial pace of the seasons. The sun's strength measured in ultraviolet (UV) is also an index of the presence of carbon in the atmosphere. But there is a dichotomy here too, that the appearance of the cancer is a kind of 'sweetness' which cannot be viewed outside the parameters of the psalm. There is an equipoise in the cancerous fate that's almost achieved, or in contrast to the neighbour, hard won. The 'bloom' comes through 'new-mown hay' but also through the 'lingering smell' in which a childhood memory 'of whisky / and Oxydol' places a particular culture in a time of consumables. Oxydol, by coincidence or design here was also the first soap to sponsor a kitchen-sink drama, what became known as the 'soap opera'.[27] The image of the dying grandfather is a hymn to impermanence, as if the passing of the human is not necessarily the object of grief in the poem. The grandfather achieves redemption from the lord's blessing in the unquoted lines from the psalm who 'heals your diseases' and 'redeems your life from the pit'.[28] What is deserving of grief is the loss captured in 'thistledown' which could be read as a metaphor for the decline of traditional industry in the lumber, and coal towns of Scotland's central belt with 'part of me gone / in its wake'. The 'wake' is for the land here more generally, for the passing of the building blocks of life from a 'kinship of sea and blood'. That word 'kinship' repeated has the effect of a contranym, like the word 'cleave' meaning to adhere to but also to separate, and in that it balances the next word 'earth'. Something that holds us in a collective and reflexive relationship with the earth, in such a fragile bond as to be 'wind-slender', is lost now there is no more final blessing.

The scorched earth under the wheels of the neighbour's quad bike echoes the car as we begin to move outwards from the individual to a wider reckoning, the speaker almost coming to absolve the figure of the neighbour:

[redacted]

[27] It was replaced, rather fittingly by a brand called *Tide*.
[28] Psalm 103 from *New King James Bible*, available at: https://www.bible.com/bible/114/PSA.103.NKJV [Accessed 26 November, 2021].



With the disastrous effects of the motor-vehicle we find an example of what petrocultures do to fertile land more generally. But the sheep may in fact be the greater threat here. The quad bike may seem like a small infringement, but the poem tracks the long-term effects on the land of an abased, instrumental form of land use. What that does is lift the poem up to a larger crucible and allows for a reading that sees how significant such accumulative, profit-making agricultural practice is when read against longer view. It is a futility that shows up private battles as vainglorious and worthless in a much larger context than the men in their private plots. Firstly, I will show what that long term effect of sheep farming does to the ecosystem. The 'grass scorched' then is not just from the quad, it is not just incidental to the complex process of erosion, it is instrumental to it as Peter Wohlleben makes clear:

> Open grassland and especially agricultural fields, however, are less good at absorbing rainfall. The ground is compacted by wild or domesticated grazing animals, although

> the major cause of soil compaction is heavy agricultural machinery, which compacts the soil much further down than hoof or trotter. [redacted]

In a similar way, although with a longer agricultural lens, George Monbiot documents this gradual process of erosion from the development of farming practices. The result of such compacting of uplands leads directly to the process of run-off where water is no longer absorbed by trees. That flooding in lowland areas of the UK has increased significantly in recent decades, a longer view of the eco-system's interconnectedness unearths a more alarming process:

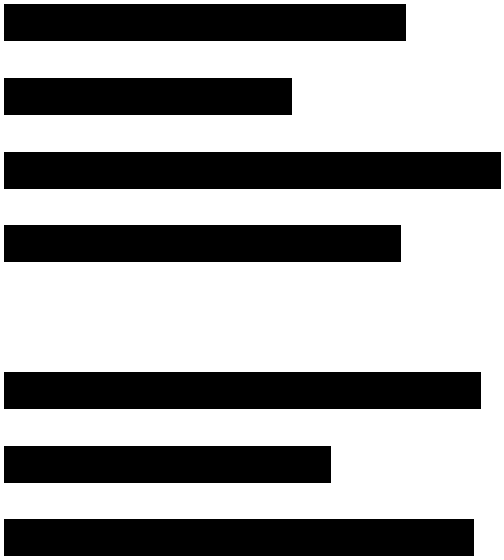
> Because they were never part of our native ecosystem, the vegetation of this country has evolved no defences against sheep. In the uplands they rapidly deplete nutritious and palatable plants, leaving behind a remarkably impoverished flora: little beside moss, moorgrass and tormentil in many places. [redacted]

Monbiot's observation here allows for a reading of the poem which moves away from the *mano e mano* enmity between the two figures in the poem. To pit individuals against one another in the movement towards ecological responsibility is a late-effect of a particular culture of home-ownership. Something larger is at stake as the poem shows, 'it's nothing personal'. The poem seems to retreat from this individualised competition to make a space for seeing how short-term such factional interests are in the long term. To make this point I want to reference here the poem 'Exposure',[31] by Seamus Heaney, the final poem from his 1975 collection, *North*, which in a similar way moves from the present conversation of tribal conflict to the larger view of how this is a merely a result of this careful indifference.

[29] Peter Wohlleben, *The Secret Network of Nature* (London: Vintage, 2017), p.53-4.
[30] George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, The Sea, and Human Life* (The University of Chicago Press, 2014), p.70.
[31] Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), p.67-8.

[redacted]

Heaney's poem points to the role of the poet in times of conflict beginning with an observation of the weather in Wicklow, a town Heaney moved to as a form of self-imposed exile. In the poem there is a gradual move downwards to the fate of something more global like a 'falling star'. After 'birches / inheriting the last light' and the 'comet that was lost' which 'should be visible at sunset' there is a falling night in a fallen world of rain and lost hope like Auden's 'enlightenment driven away'[32] which comes from 'obsessing our private lives'. It is as if Heaney's lost comet is Auden's 'affirming flame' and Heaney's speaker is left, exiled as in a dive 'on Fifty-second Street' to contemplate an Ovidian lament,



This line from stanza seven comes to us at the close of Burnside's poem where 'mutter' becomes 'chatter'. It is the condition of man now that he has become a 'species of erosion'. Those enmities have become wholesale in the destruction of our peaceable relations to the natural world, 'sun-paled' into insignificance the internecine conflicts we inherited from the twentieth century.

To further this idea of an instrumentalised form of enclosure, there is a critique picked up by the word 'subsidy' from where the green-washed idea of wind turbines becomes a subsidised form of desecration of farmland. This is not to say that wind power isn't a noble venture that can ameliorate the damage caused by a fossil-fuel based economy, it is more that such private negotiations with landowners bypasses the interests of others, which institutes the idea of neighbourliness, not so much on terms of proximity, but on the broader idea of brotherhood or shared space. This is one explanation for why the figure of the lone farmer isn't the final

[32] WH Auden, 'September 1, 1939', Poems | Academy of American Poets. [online] Poets.org. Available at: https://poets.org/poem/september-1-1939 [Accessed 15 June, 2021].

root cause of the erosion, like Heaney's speaker who is neither 'internee nor informer', Burnside's speaker is pitted in the longer anthropological lens of the Anthropocene. The neighbour is 'one of many', an embodiment of the private-oriented profit-making from the sell-off of land, a form of enclosure which Burnside's remarks in his British Academy lecture attacks so vehemently as an ideological decision. There's nothing here to suggest wind power is a remedy to that ideology of the individual responsible for the degradation of so much of the British countryside, just as Monbiot's friend's testimony makes clear here, it is the product of a particular neoliberal political settlement:

> But soon afterwards, in the 1970s and early 80s, something even worse happened. The mixed farms started going down the pan, and agribusiness began to take over. The farmer next door was one of the last to go, he still had cattle and sheep and arable crops in rotation. [redacted]

At the close of Burnside's poem we find something similar with the result of this 'proud catastrophe':

[redacted]

The birds falling may be the result of them being caught in the turbines.[34] The 'cloud' from the farmer's eyes is now filling the whole sky. All the trappings of what makes such a coastal environment a place of tourism and holiday-making are caught in the stalling of the 'pleasure boat'. Finally, as the speaker makes his way inside there is a weariness, a *tristia* to his final observations. Interestingly, there is as link here to be made by the fact that the onset of rain has measurable effects on our mood, as Rory Spowers explains:

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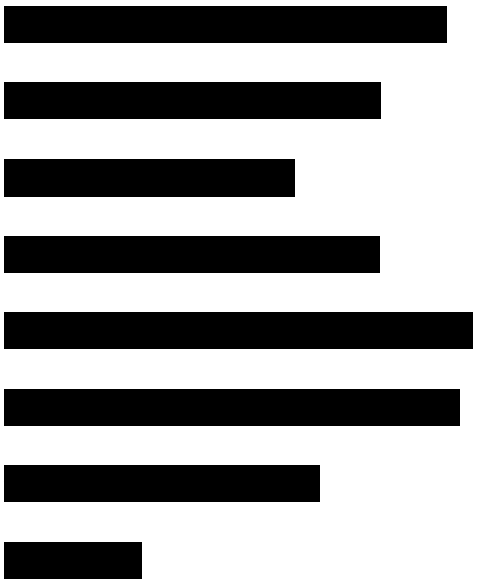
[33] George Monbiot, *Feral*, p.72.
[34] Shawn K. Smallwood. 'Estimating Wind Turbine-Caused Bird Mortality' in *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, vol. 71, no. 8, 2007, pp.2781–2791. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4496403.

> [e]xperiments have shown how the body responds to changes in barometric pressure, often feeling tired just before the onset of rain. Like the planet itself, thousands of biochemical processes are in an endless dynamic flow with external factors, ensuring that the body regulates itself to environmental conditions.[35]

The link Spowers makes here is the subtle knowledge that the human is just a tiny cell within the earth system itself. It again resonates with the collection in which Burnside's poem appears, that the world shares *All One Breath*. To abandon that link is to abandon the idea that poetry is of itself a part of the dynamic consciousness of the way that a species acclimatises itself to the wider environment, beginning from the local to the global. The poem ends:



What I've tried to explicate here is the sense in which some organic process has been 'interrupted'. Humans and their grand projects are reduced to a species of noise and 'chatter'. Our language fails to attach itself to a process that is and has been going on for decades. It is the human itself that is eroding, breaking down humic foundations, bypassing any hope for redemptive assistance. The speaker achieves in his solitude only a momentary calm in the silence. These lines recall Wittgenstein's lines again, 'for that which we cannot speak, we must pass over in silence'. The poem then draws a limit in a limitless world of endless acquisition.

[35] Rory Spowers, *Rising Tides: The History and Future of the Environmental Movement* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002), p.343.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored how Burnside's later poetry has opened a way of thinking about our responses to the natural world and its meaning for us in the twenty-first century. The speakers in Burnside's poems are often suffering from something ineffable, attempting to articulate a thwarted sense of being caught between two worlds: a post-enlightenment world where the human is individuated, fragmented and separated, and a more peaceful, less instrumentalised world where the human dwells on a continuum with the natural and nonhuman. Dwelling is a search for home. In this conclusion, and as a way of reframing the thesis, I want to reemphasise the link I made in the introduction between Heidegger's concept of dwelling, Burnside's poetics, and Bruno Latour's project outlined in his Facing Gaia lectures. For Latour, the facts of the science of climatic change must be translated into what that feels like. In this sense it is affective, and it provides a way of preparing the ground for a poetics of ecology that might respond to this, and one that summons many different actors, including the nonhuman. As such, at the heart of the thesis is my interpretation of that demand through Burnside's poetics of ecology. Ecology is an organising principle around which there must be an intelligible world to inhabit. The link to capitalism and its ongoing foreclosure of any alternative to such an instrumentalisation of Nature is that, for Latour, the global north has extricated itself from the rest of the world by denying the fact that a warming world means global migration and a search for home as a form of justice driven by centuries of exploitation and resource extraction. To sever those historical consequences conditions that severance between two worlds and as such, prepares the ground for climate denial (and thus its continued ruination), the objectification of Nature, and a complicity with inequality. In this context then, the elements this thesis focuses on, air, water, forests and all the nonhuman elements which act within these networks, drives home a shared sense of collective responsibility. My claims are that Burnside's poetry prompts us to feel our way towards an ethics of peaceful dwelling through a radical rejection of any ownership of place, one which stands against the timescales of capitalist resource extraction in search of a deep sense of belonging to the Natural world. In the face of the immanence of climatic change, at the threshold of the Anthropocene, Burnside's work over the last decade calls for a deeply spiritual immersion to the combined fates of humans and nonhumans as a process of moral and affective transformation. The language of that process is found in Burnside's poetics of ecology.

Across the four collections that I have analysed in this thesis there are sensations which vibrate or emit across some cosmic divide. Certain words recur and are reused: 'glimmers'[1], 'judder'[2], 'flicker'[3], 'shimmer'[4], 'skitter'[5], 'waves'[6], and finally 'echoes' which appears over 14 times.[7] These murmurs are like linguistic cilia, catching something protean that vibrates across our senses from a world beyond the human realm, reconnecting us to forms of life that share our origin and destiny. In delving deep into Burnside's tissued language, we can bring them to the surface and see how the speakers of the poems are tuning in to a dark, ecological reckoning.

From that disposition emerges an ecological grief, a grief which encompasses the fate of animals, the climate, the natural world, and to the doomed enterprise of rapacious human activity. His poems, then, offer an appeal to a recuperative grace. The contemporary moment, heavy with anthropocentric guilt, encourages a desire to restore some spiritual balance between humans and nonhumans and their entwined fates. I believe Burnside offers a negotiated space between species connected by poetry as a sustaining element. Through the core chapters of the thesis, I have turned my attention in turn to key aspects of Burnside's poetics. In chapter one I explored sound as disclosing the bridge between species, attuning us to a continuum of noise; I also connect the sonic texture of the nonhuman to ancestral resonances with the dead through the 'music of time'. In chapter three, I examined the place that forests play in the construction of the western imagination, in particular the way that forests provide a border between the white light of reason and the dark environs of the unmapped, intuited world of the psyche. In chapter five, I have shown how Burnside pushes language back to the original dwelling place—in utero—between two worlds, and that ecological grief comes from our being separated, differentiated, individuated. In water we may hope to return to a primordial oceanic oneness with all of creation.

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[1] 'Saint Hubert and the Deer', 'Notes Towards an Ending', 'Dope Head Blues', 'Spiegelkabinett, Berlin 2012', 'Tod und Verklärung', 'Anecdotal Accounts of the Last Northern Dynasty'.
[2] 'The Hunt in the Forest', 'In Memoriam III'.
[3] 'Echo Room', 'The Visitor', 'An Essay Concerning Light', 'In Memoriam II', 'Kapelløya', 'In The Woods', 'Mistaken For a Unicorn'.
[4] 'Fetch', 'The Fair Chase'.
[5] 'Kapelløya', 'Echo Room', '
[6] 'In Memoriam III', 'Night Shift at the Plug Mill', 'Symposium', 'Rain', 'Uley Blue', 'Honeybee Sutra', 'The Fair Chase', 'Transfiguration', 'Neoclassical', 'Amnesia', 'Weather Report', 'Officium', 'Crane Watching in Ostprignitz-Ruppin, November 2014'.
[7] 'Learning to Swim', 'Echo Room', 'The Missing', 'The Bride', 'The Nightingale', 'Insomnia in Southern Illinois', 'First signs of Ageing', 'First Footnote on Zoomorphism', 'With the Discovery of Cosmic Background Radiation, My Brother Returns from the Hereafter as a Russian Cosmonaut', 'Anecdotal Accounts of the Last Northern Dynasty', 'Handfasting'.

Along with these extended readings of air, forests, and water, elements in and through which humans dwell, I have interspersed shorter provocation chapters which have sought to zoom in on closer readings of a selection of poems to bear out these observations: In chapter two the airy world of bees, particularly the honeybee, and what we might see as living symbols of the genesis of humanity in a bid to do as little harm as possible to the fragile converging networks of humans and animals. In chapter four I focus on a particular ancient woodland creature, the badger, and the role of the badger in contemporary debates about hunting and industrial farming as well as their fate in the technological age of the car. Finally, in chapter six I consider the issue of water management. Amid floods, droughts, melting ice-caps, monsoons and access to clean water, there is an urgent call to think about water if there is to be any meaningful movement towards a sustainable future.

Twinning the longer chapters with shorter provocations allowed for a reading that encompassed both the wider context of where Burnside situates his poems and the ways in which each environment plays host to an encounter between species and phenomena. What I wanted to show was that reading the poems closely in the shorter chapters was to demonstrate more directly how they stage a metaphysics of access to those larger phenomenological elements. These close readings show how we come *to know* or *to be* in a certain relation with the Natural world through specific encounters. At the same time, they seem to pull back from any instrumentalised, or idealist mode of inquiry. In this sense, the thesis sought to position the different environs as part of an ongoing pre- and post-dialectical materialism. What I have tried to show is that this is where the Anthropocene and capitalism interdepend, the effects of the latter institute the question of the former. Attuning to this fault line, Burnside shows that thinking with other beings can allow for that disturbance to be part of a project of witness and testimony, to pave the way for a redemptive poetics. This two-way process shows that accommodating ourselves is a physical as well as a metaphysical project. My larger chapters attend to the concretisation of place, but any singular encounter within those places speaks to a more general spiritual comportment, and this pertains to the idea of dwelling. Dwelling then, following Heidegger, is a 'sparing and preserving'.[8] The sparing here means to leave something to its own Nature. This is what unites the chapters here, that Burnside's poetry allows for the nonhuman to exist in its own being, whether that be forests, water, the air itself or the animals and all the nonhuman actors with which we share the world.

[8] Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p.149.

Burnside's latest book of essays, *Aurochs and Auks: Essays on Mortality and Extinction*, takes a longer view of history that the theory of the Anthropocene affords. These essays are far from Burnside's first foray into extinction studies. As I demonstrated, the suspension of rational timescales in favour of a deep, pagan contemplation on the idea of passing has always been part of Burnside's thinking. These very essays, thus, come as no surprise to the reader of Burnside. Indeed, I believe his work over the decade 2009-2019 has pointed more firmly in the direction of extinction studies, proving that Burnside has always kept ecocritical concerns in dialogue with a fascination with what I term elsewhere an ontology of dwelling. I want to draw very briefly on these essays, now, in order to think about the future of Burnside studies.

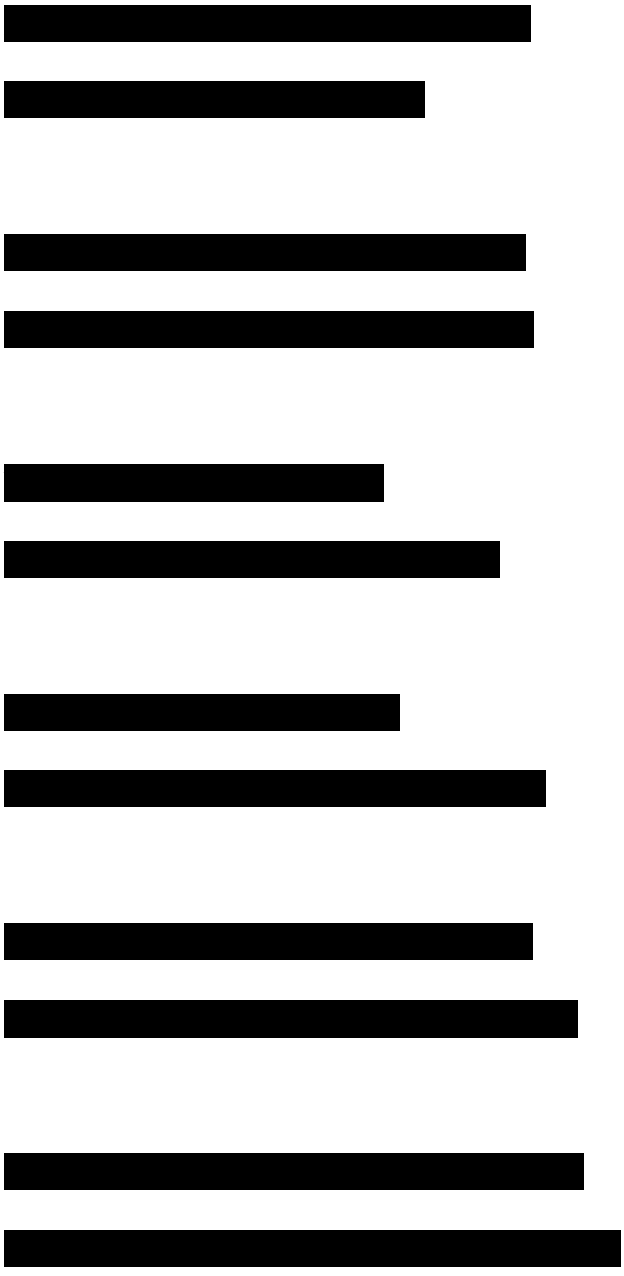
Burnside begins the essay 'Aurochs' with a return to a thoroughgoing theme in the phrase 'Once upon a time'. This preserve of children's stories takes its meaning, as he says, 'in a realm that is both proximate to this world and, at the same time, wholly *other*.'[9] As if to contemplate a time out-of-joint, under this enduring phrase is 'where stories may be repeated ad infinitum and never go stale; originating as it does in a pagan, and so, less reified past'.[10] He is pushing the imagination back once again to the realm of childhood, but in doing so seeks out a place for thought, what he calls 'an Aboriginal dreaming.'[11]

Burnside's long view is also tempered by a more politicised timeframe as I mentioned in my introduction. His deployment of the word extinction has in his view heaved closer into view 'over the last fifty years in particular'[12]. In the era of post-war progress, the horizon of possibility for what Frederic Jameson calls 'the valances of the dialectic' alongside the liberatory potential of art were prominent as foundational narratives in society.[13] As extinction heaves into view, this dark fact may be the source of the ecological grief that conditions a new spatial dialectic of being caught between one world and another. My thesis has attempted to articulate that ontological realisation in Burnside's later poetry, that reading him is to face a radical uncertainty that our own actions are complicit with our end.

Burnside continues to write and create space for a transformed spiritual disposition to the natural world and it would take me no further by identifying this particular period as a

[9] John Burnside, *Aurochs and Auks: Essays on Mortality and Extinction* (Cornwall: Little Toller Books, 2021), p.7.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] John Burnside, *Aurochs and Auks*, p.49.
[13] Frederic Jameson, *Valances of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2010).

definitive marker on-the-way to some completion of his poetics as whole. Instead, it would be more fruitful to say that Burnside's poetic oeuvre points us towards a new post-secular appreciation of our spiritual destiny in the face of eschatological warnings bidden by technology and the rapacious appetite for natural resources by which capitalism leaves us grief-stricken and bereft of meaning. The kinds of invocations Burnside's later poetry conjures are suspended metaphors, bereft of qualifying clauses that point to a new world of life after death. Yet in stalling any sense of closure, these poems imagine spaces for where life may exist on terms not yet sundered by rationalistic, anthropocentric violence of extinction. These lines from 'Self Portrait as Amnesiac' from *All One Breath* typify this later shift:



This long thought sequence begins from a stalled temporality. The preposition ‘at’ expresses a specific place and time, in this case made recurrent through the plural ‘times’. Quotidian moments such as these are not charmed states or singular, epiphanic visions. These are pauses where thoughts can run on. Here, the ‘highest roof-beam’ suggests a proto-religious place, but one that seems aware of the accretions of cliché and the dogma of religious associations such as ‘bridegroom’ or ‘hymn’. We then come down to earth both literally and metaphorically with an agglomeration of human and nonhuman objects. The synthesizing imagery of the ‘bird mask’ or ‘broken violin’ recalls the shapeshifting forms of Man Ray’s photographic subject-objects or Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s mutable sculptural forms, and here the poem begins its alchemy as they move across a threshold ‘into the light’, dissipating and decaying. The speaker’s private meditations are invitations to the reader, to recall Paul Eluard, that ‘[T]here is another world, but it is in this one.’ Such a world is ongoing and communal. This perhaps defines Burnside’s ecopoetics. His writing insists on our relation to the natural world, not as some kind of backdrop to human activity but constitutive of it.

Reading Burnside’s singular poetic intelligence is a deeply rewarding experience, and I want to make room here for some of reading I did during this thesis which I think orbits his writing. I came to Burnside’s work through exploring work that seemed to speak of where we find ourselves in the contemporary moment. My initial proposal for this thesis was not centred around his work. I spent some years before and the first year or so of the project reading a good deal of contemporary British poetry, going back to the American Transcendentalists, and working my way through a selection of theoretical texts from the University of Minnesota Press’s Posthumanities series. I was interested in what kinds of new ideas were emerging in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, as well as new interdisciplinary writing that speaks to issues in animal studies, environmentalism, ecology, materialism, theories of scale and the Anthropocene. Some of my initial research in the early stages of the thesis included ideas from object-oriented ontology (OOO), the work of Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, Anna Lowenhaupt-Tsing, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Marc Augé, Jean Baudrillard, Bruno Latour, Robert Pogue Harrison, Franco Berardi, Paul Virilio, Mark Fisher, Jakob von Uexküll, and Jane Bennett. As a student of literature, I came to John Burnside’s unique poetic voice whose work speaks to ideas across all of these thinkers.

In *The Biblio File* podcast, from January 2022, Burnside talks about the kind of poetic intelligence he enjoys reading certain poets’ work. He offers his own definition of intelligence which he says, ‘means making connections, joining things together [because] our

sense of the world around us is fragmented, damaged, broken'.[14] In this, Burnside appeals to a sense of continuum between us and everything 'out there' in the natural world. He says, as babies, we are defined by that continuum, and that when we slipstream into language we become fragmented and begin to categorise things into taxonomic ranks and classifications which is 'useful, just as it's useful to have a calendar or a clock, but none of it makes sense in the real world out there'[15] and he quotes a lyric from a Jefferson Airplane song 'Eskimo Blue Day', 'the human name doesn't mean shit to a tree.'[16] Again, I think it is this insistence on opening up to the nonhuman that defines his work. Far from being in retreat, his sense of being human is to be an exposed witness to something beyond the material conditions in which we find ourselves. Finding a tipping point or vanishing point into that continuum starts with listening and then finding some form with which to direct that energy into a human made thing. For him, that is poetry. And poets, instead of 'making nothing happen', although he hears Auden's famous phrase, can shift the dial a little, to redirect our culture towards something more peaceful.

I see a great ranging intelligence in Burnside's ideas. He invites readers, through his epigraphs and in his prose, to consider a huge array of poets and intellectuals and gives praise to those who have had a profound effect on him. I mentioned in my introduction writers such as Wallace Stevens, Eugenio Montale, María Zambrano, Robert Frost, and Marianne Moore, but more recent poets Burnside admires include Joy Harjo, Terence Hayes, Charles Wright, and the late Lucie Brock-Broido. From my own reading, I see in Burnside's poetic and philosophical intelligence a neighbourliness with land artists and sculptors such as Chris Drury and Richard Long; the ambulatory, world-ranging Robert Lax with his poetry of epochal resonances, or the ground truthing of walking artist Hamish Fulton. There is an allied sense of reverence for soil, seed, and flowers in artists like Herman de Vries, and I see in Burnside's work the philosophies of gardening in Gilles Clément's ideas of the third landscape and the planetary garden, and Piet Oudolf's human-made perennial gardens – a human need to make ourselves at home on the earth. Burnside's linkages between art, music and philosophy in imaginative revisitations and thought experiments can be found in Argentinian writer Luis Sagasti, or in the restless imagination of the work of Italo Calvino.

[14] Nigel Beale, 'John Burnside on Poetry, Attention and Truth', *The Biblio File*, January 2022, https://open.spotify.com/episode/03STaVAo7QTlBxXsOwtJzK [Accessed 10 February, 2022]
[15] Ibid.
[16] Jefferson Airplane, 'Eskimo Blue Day', *Volunteers* (Revolver Music, 1969).

To the poets emerging from Burnside's influence, it is worth mentioning Amali Gunasekera and her collection *The Golden Thread* (2022), where she balances a desire for the sublime with a post-Romantic knowledge of the precarity of the natural world, 'I refuse to renounce the exquisiteness of this perishable world'.[17] Another is Seán Hewitt with his debut, *Tongues of Fire* (2020) where in the poem, 'Dryad', the Nature spirit is 'waiting to greet us / and offer the frozen circumference of a new / world.'[18] In established poet Jean Sprackland's most recent collection, *Green Noise* she attunes us to a planetary resonance which is analogous to Burnside's plaintive sonority. Both Hewitt and Sprackland's titles are from Burnside's own publisher, Cape Poetry, where Robin Robertson is the current editor. In Robertson's work there is a comparable approach to the natural world which combines folklore, and classical and Celtic myth, as one reviewer from *The New Yorker* aptly writes, that 'in a raked northern seascape, [there is a] language that is simultaneously spare and ample, and reminiscent of early Heaney or Hughes.'[19] Alongside Robertson, and with those two major figures in mind, I think Burnside's singular voice will, in time, come to enjoy a similar reputation to Heaney or Hughes. From his mouse-poor working-class upbringing, his life and writing does not prop up any satisfied middle-class literary culture. Burnside's poetry refreshes the language, and there is a real sense that in his hands, poetry is a divining rod for a form of expression adequate to the seriousness of where we find ourselves in the Anthropocene.

[17] Amali Gunasekera, 'Bonsai' in *The Golden Thread* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2022), (Kindle Edition).
[18] Seán Hewitt, 'Dryad' in *Tongues of Fire* (London: Cape Poetry, 2020), pp.3-7.
[19] Poetry Foundation, "Robin Robertson." *Poetry Foundation*, 18 Nov. 2021, available at: www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robin-robertson [Accessed 10 June, 2022].

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