

The Dialogue between the Discourses of Ecocriticism and Environmental Poetry

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

The University of Leeds
School of Performance and Cultural Industries

October 2009

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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For Jan

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my supervisors Dr. Sita Popat, Dr. Simon Ross and Dr. Harriet Tarlo for their encouragement and excellent teaching.

Abstract

This practice-led thesis consists of a collection of poetry and a critical commentary. Through both parts, I examine the nature of the dialogue between ecocriticism and environmental poetry, specifically, the representation of non-human creatures, the representation of bioregions and the use of binarisms, especially as they apply to gender roles. The critical commentary analyses ecocritical perspectives with regard to these issues before contextualizing them in terms of contemporary, mainstream environmental poetry. My own practice is located within this context to reveal the nature of the dialogue between the two discourses. Although the collection of poetry should be read before the critical commentary, I intend for individual poems to be revisited when they form the subject of discussion within the commentary.

Ecocriticism is a relatively new discourse that has gained increased prominence over the last decade. This research examines the discourses of ecocriticism and environmental poetry revealing that there are a number of undertheorized areas. Additionally, it demonstrates that the characteristics of the two discourses mean that they sometimes have different agendas. The nature of the dialogue shows that, in some instances, there is disagreement, but more frequently, one discourse tests, expands and qualifies the other, revealing biases and blind spots. As part of this practice-led research, I critique a number of prescriptive definitions of environmental poetry in order to propose a more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of environmental poetry, a significant aspect of this project. My own new definition is an attempt to focus the attention of poets and ecocritics, rather than to be prescriptive.

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Places Between

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Peacock Butterfly

On wings of water silk,
 the watching eyes of an owl.
 Our new family pet jittered in
 and tangled in the nets
 one February afternoon
 in a week hot as summer,
 hot as a fever.

Our two-years' son jumps
 into our bedroom, lays flat
 his palms, *All gone?*
 We incy-wincy up, up
 the curtain's folds to the ruff
 where it's tucked itself in
 like a bookmark.

My wife watercolours.
 Its wet eyes dilate
 as she makes its wing.

My daughter's googled it.
The University of Michigan notes
 its *Economic Importance*:
...does not adversely affect humans.
 In the *Observers* book
 larvae on a stinging nettle
 spin a tent of silk. She notes
 adolescence is velvety black
 covered in forked spines.

Courtship is a flight of spirals
and twists before basking,
wings wide open.

One evening, kids away,
we steal to bed early.

Warmed by the heating,
our visitor flicks, flicks
and glides around the lamp.

We bask, wide open.

Why is it so far north?

Before the weather, the news warns
pregnant mothers about mercury
in tuna, then isobars shoulder in
spiking the country cold.

I ring the Tropical Butterfly House.

A telephone voice refuses:

Peacocks have no special status.

Even if the back yard wasn't iron
with ice, there's no marjoram,
danewort or clover fields.

Three kids on all fours.

A curled proboscis probes
a tissue soaked in sugar, turns up
its nose at mashed tangerine.

It hisses, rubbing together
the coastal margins of its wings
against predators, maybe us.

The weather breaks, the slab
of grey breaks into archipelagos
of blue. I stroll for a paper,
feel how the temperature sits,
return with a headline:
Bush Boycotts Kyoto.

The air's buoyant with warmth.
Our peacock butterfly plays dead
in a glass. Sun persists. Wings
blink open. Those batik eyes
see their moment. A step.
One white squirt. Gone.

The children missed its going.
The *Observers* book tells me
what to tell them: *If*
future generations return,
they'll hibernate here
like in a hollow log or tree.
We imagine a brood of hundreds
dancing around our house,
a shower of confetti.

Takoma, the Dolphin

(Based on a story in America's *The Morning News*, April 8, 2003)

Leaping above her handler's dinghy,
 a blue-nosed dolphin is today's soft news.
 We watch the war with a nice cup of tea;
 she sniffs out mines around Umm Qasr docks.

A blue-nosed dolphin is today's soft news:
 Takoma ponders her higher porpoise:
 she sniffs out mines around Umm Qasr docks.
 She's a shoal model for other mammals.

Takoma ponders her higher porpoise
 although no Iraqi called her Flipper.
 She's a shoal model for other mammals
 packed like sardines in coalition tanks.

Although no Iraqi called her Flipper,
 she'll mullet over, in shock and awe, how,
 packed like sardines in coalition tanks,
 soldiers shoot women dead at a checkpoint.

She'll mullet over, in shock and awe, how
 she's become a dead donkey story.
 Soldiers shoot women dead at a checkpoint
 as she heads for the AWOL open sea.

She's become a dead donkey story
 leaping above her handler's dinghy.
 As she heads for the AWOL open sea,
 we watch the war with a nice cup of tea.

Pet Scorpion

For Jim Stone

One Tuesday it scuttled in
as he was reading row on row
of CCTV's nodding donkeys.
Climbing to the top of his stool,
he watched it snapping air.

Grabbing a broom, he cornered it,
curled *The International Telegraph*
into a chute and sent the scorpion
crashing down the F.T. index
into a jar of dried dates.

The scorpion turned around
and around like the ballerina
on his mum's musical box.
Holding it to the window, sun
bounced off it—radiation.

At lunch, he wrote home,
gave it a name for the kids
in a shaggy dog story
with a sting in the tail
and a hero who was human.

As the sun set and melted
into high seas of sand,
he pondered setting it free—
strapped it in the passenger seat
and drove it away in his Jeep.

The perimeter of the compound
glinted with razor wire.

From the veranda, he logged on,
googled scorpions: scorpionida,
that walked the first land.

The scorpion was in the fridge.

It filled the salad tray.

The only creature to survive
The Bomb on Bikini Atoll,
cold had frozen its armour.

Weekends, he drove his scorpion
gently into the Thumama Desert,
parked in the trough of a dune
where they couldn't be seen.
Heat haze rippled like water.

The scorpion lapped up the sun,
thawed, wound itself up
to sting each compass point.
After exercise and the fishing net,
he popped it back in the fridge

under the bottles of blue water
from Hobart, the famous spa.
The kids invented their own stories,
painted it red as a lobster
carrying its young on its back.

Months passed, the desert shifting
grain by grain until the donkeys
stopped nodding to profit.
The black gold was spent.
Tourism was the new oil.

After an hour in the freezer,
he packed the scorpion into
a toilet bag with ice
fearing its stain on the x-ray
going through airport security

or its escape during the film,
cutting a way up the aisle
as bullets ricocheted off rocks.
The kids might build the scorpion
a hutch of chicken wire and

put it out to grass like a donkey
to chew over the canal views.
On a dune of white sand,
like a paper weight of ice,
he set the scorpion in perspex.

Platypus

Kids bicker, doors thump, the camera
crunches gravel. We've arrived to stalk
the rare and nocturnal, follow boomerang signs
across once sacred lands. A pademelon
takes a look, melts into eucalypts.

Russell Falls dribbles through beards of moss.
A chill lifts the skin. The Creek decants twilight.

We're telling the kids what's golden when
something furrows a pool, rippling
stillness. We crash through the bush.

A mad fish zigzags—but no, nothing.
Breath clasped. Stake out. Nothing.

A bill noses from underneath the bank,
under our toes, looking for us, looking.
A platypus glides out, holds
the pool's centre—100 million years
since the continents split—filling seconds.

Maybe sensing us or charged by a millivolt
leaked by its prey, it flouts the current
wagging upstream to where water thins.

A platypus—snuffling under pebbles
for worms and yabbies. Spurs, lean flanks.
A duck-billed platypus. No Victorian hoax
but there, lugging itself over a twig dam.

A new pool of dusk restores its poise.
The Aussie logo paddles away into night.

Silence fills moments with what has been—
then talk is everywhere, a songline for our family.

18.5.2000

Loch Ard: The Movie

Sink it.

But first create a myth—
weld in a welder.
Cue knockings
from the iron hull
that sends the compass loopy.

Cast Captain Gibb
to pace the poop
peering through the grog
of a pea-souper.
Below in first-class
the party tinkles on.

Close-up his stiff
upper lip commanding:
*Let my dear wife know
I died a sailor.*

Cast Eva overboard
with a chicken coop.
Hillocky seas
will tear her Irish accent,
strip her naked—
good as.

For the plot's sake,
a pianoforte is dashed
with her family.

Enter wave right: Tom
 surfing into the sand—
 good as—to pitch back
 into high seas of froth,
 slap Eva and lug her ashore.

Close-up her big breasts
 quivering on the sand
 in fear of abos.

As Eva downs whiskey,
 slow-pan the crowd.
 Wreckage is ravished
 by knotty-boned locals
 who horse-and-cart away
 concertinas, champagne, perfume
 and a six feet Minton peacock
 bound for the Great Exhibition,
 beak chipped, slightly.

For Special Effects,
 The Blowhole. The spout
 of the collapsed sea cave
 tosses up the dead,
 sucks down the corpses
 to the locker of Davy Jones.
 Airbrush on the blood.

The script is written,
 has written itself.
 The sequel is financed:
Settling Terra Nullus.
 TAKE ONE. ACTION.
 The rest is history.

Game Boy's *Ty the Tassie Tiger*

As the last tiger ever,
 escape evil Hobart Zoo
 with your sniper boomerang,
 your upgradeable signature weapon.

In your board shorts and shades,
 explore all 16 levels
 of wild and woolly outback
 and save The Land of Skippy.

Tie up Taipan in the tropics.
 Stab sharks on the Reef
 with frostyrang, flamarang and doomarang—
 all rapid-firing 'rangs.

From the second you're loaded,
 it's a ripper. As the didgeri—
 doos, Vandemolian trappers
 go bush to *quieten the bush*.

Cocky the cockatoo toots
 if the damper's sweetened
 or if they're harvesting pelts
 for gents' waistcoats back home.

Ride a toolache wallaby
 and chase a mob of myalls
 down to the Bay of Martyrs.
 Score bonuses at the cliffs.

You are The Wizard of Oz.
Your quest? To collect all
terra nullus' missing mammals.
Save them from Dreamtime.

Seek out the pouch young
and foetuses pickled in alcohol.
Never say never to cloning.
Extinction is not forever.

An Elephant's Eye

(A True Story)

Mexico.

The Oaxaca Hills are green,
too green. Men in spacesuits
move in slow mo. Breath
crackles like a Geiger counter.

A lab-white coat. Late.
Bloodshot eyes blink,
stare down a microscope
into the abyss. Pupils
dilate. The genes are unstable.
She knocks them off the table.

Mexico City. A Week Later.

The wrong side of town.
A rubbish dump. Pan to
a steel and glass skyscraper.
The lift pings at the top.
Ignacio Chapela is led around
each empty room.

The man from the Ministry's desk
is a door on boxes.
No phone. Chapela's told,
The problem with G.M.? You.
Outside, dogs gnaw a bone.

**The University of California,
Berkeley. A Second Week Later.**

Cue the diegetic sound:

Oh what a beautiful morning...

Chapela has mail, an e-threat
attached to a virus. Outside,
the Italian clock hits the hour.

Bruno, Saskatchewan.

A Year Earlier.

Donning his Sunday best,
Percy Schmeiser cruises downtown
in his pickup that trails
a chain kicking up sparks.

The push-button radio is sure:

*The corn is as high
as an elephant's eye...*

The federal courthouse is swimming
with G.M. city sharks. The press
scrum round. The charge
of stealing air-born canola,
Percy answers: *My friends,
it was blowing in the wind.*
The jury's verdict: *Guilty.*
The fine: his life savings.

**The University of California,
Berkeley. That Night
of a Second Week Later.**

Establishing shot: the Italian clock
tells the time: scary late.

Zoom in to a jittering screen.

Classified, Password, Search:

*Prodigy—burned in its fields
in Nebraska—StarLink—not fit...*

A shifty security man
cuts the darkness to ribbons
with his torch. A leather hand
slowly turns the doorknob.
Chapela hits *Send*,
Send, Send then the floor.

Fade to next morning,
Oh what a beautiful morning...
Chapela's lab-white friends
look away from eye contact,
have received a little visit—
a little friendly sponsorship
from Syngenta, stare at photos
of their perfect wife and kids.

Washington. Next Day.

Chapela's got the offer
he can't refuse. The lift
pings. Steel. Glass.
Photos of Mr President.

The back of the Exec Sec's
chair is gazing up,
clear up to the sky—swivels
round at Chapela. Stars
and stripes waistcoat. Suit
sharp as a knife. A fluorescent
green rose, buttonholed.

He points a finger, announces
his sons Monsanto and Aventis
are making mega bucks,
a killing. Market forces:
fair, strong, pure. And
anywhere can be the future:
bananas to cure cholera,
daffodil rice, flowers
crossed with sharks.

His fat fingers stroke
a monarch butterfly paperweight.
Someone hits the lights.
A green smudge. A shot.
Chapela hits the floor.

Chapela's grave looks normal,
soil pathogens are invisible.
Though grass roots are small,
smaller than before, the grass
will sprout green, too green,
fluorescent green, climbin' skywards,
high as an elephant's eye.

The Phrasealator

*Based on the PS2 keypad,
the militarized P.D.A.
'Voice to Voice Phrase Translator'
is fully war-gamed
for ruggedized conditions
with the spec of a stone,
endurance of a marathon runner,
ears of a fox
and voice of an angel.*

In a ditch near Diwaniya,
the U.S. marines surround
two peasant farmers,
irrigation pump bombers
waving palms at the sky.
Trigger fingers sweat.
Dust licks tongues.

The major calls in the phrasealator.
Its menu lets him order them
out of the car they haven't got,
ask if they're pregnant
or Bedouins stealing bicycles.

The gadget squawks in Arabic:
Do you want water?
The taller one replies in English:
*We should like to co-operate
to save us from the tyrant.*

The major pushes back his helmet,
sees Bush in a bomber jacket:
When Mr. President says go,
it's hammer time.

The major scans the horizon:
dust and dust and dust.
The watery deception of heat.
The soil is stamped
with his boot marks.
A private coughs politely.
The prisoners are offering bread.

The language of engines
is global. The shorter Iraqi
performs the dumb show
of the ignition spark.
Two marines wearing grenades
seek it out on hands and knees
with a torch and spanner.

Hammer time. The Iraqis
crank the oily box.
It coughs up its blockage
and purrs. Everyone
wears the same smile.

A murmur. The pipe stiffens
with water. Dust is stained,
liquefies, takes off as a trickle.

The taller Iraqi who now
has a name, Khaled Juwad,
tugs at the major to follow
the run-away stream,
red as rust and churning,
stolen from the Euphrates,
one of the rivers of Eden.

Around a rise, greenness.
A field of small watermelons.
The major returns to the Humvees
bearing armfuls, their red smell
infusing his khaki uniform,
their taste watery and sweet.

Crayfish on Father's Day

You give me sleep
stretching towards lunch.

I choose the day out:
each century the Wharfe
settles deeper into its bed.
Today it funnels coolness
onto our cheeks.

Barefoot, we turn stones
over for white-clawed
crayfish, not signals—
the invader from the States.

Stones and stones. Clarity
wobbles—there! The five of us
peer down, heads touching
in a circle. Mock screams.
Jack behind legs.

I pin the beauty between
index and thumb, scales
like pebbles, claws
snap the current.

I turn it—*she* over.
Swarming under her belly,
the young, a writhing cream.
Pincers and legs and pincers.

A growl of thunder,
sky bruised purple,
flash-flood heavy.

Signal or white-clawed,
I search for a rock close
to the bank, out of
torrents that'd sweep
the small ones away.

23.6.2005

The Snip

Our eleven-month son rides
my hip, eyes big, pointing
at fat flakes of snow. We see
the shagginess of sky
filling up the ground.

Due at hospital at noon,
I soak in the morning,
these spare hours, this gift
of time. I figure what's passed
away: the last birth, last
first laughter, last first steps
and soon a last first birthday.

Because I still can, I jog
into your first snow. Ice bites
my face. My body warms
to its rhythms, my thoughts
lost in squall balancing
my greying age with rooms
and children and my own
faint voice. And your chuckle
as you squirm your whole
body round the little piggy
going wee, wee, wee.

Today, another first gone:
your face gasping at the white.
All this to the heart's base,
running all the way home.

Diving on Tongue Reef

Remember the coral sea,
sea of language.

Remember the fluttering
shoals switching themselves on
and off in sunlight. Clown,
angel, trumpet and butter-
fly all making sense
with fish. And those beyond
words that just are, their squibs
and spangles arousing vision.

Remember warmth lapping
over our backs. Gardens
of pineapples and brains
mixing metaphors. Leaves
of gold around our heads.

Remember the stony lump,
stiff legs flicking, nosing
over reef and reef, the turtle
needing a verb of its own.

We follow, hand in hand,
slip free of weight.
Between a liquid sky
and the flowers of the sea,
we fly.

Speed and Endurance

All night I pull in
my chill arms and legs
tighter round my heart.
Outside, everything's
pewter, silver, steel:
a curfew on sound.

In the morning sun,
my daughter and I
do not see the car,
blink again, again—
darkness has remade it
so white our eyes ache.

In the t.v. ad, this block
of ice is an Iberian lynx
twisting down a mountain,
its curved back fading
into the dashboard's arch,
music full of legs.

The punchline? The lynx
sits panting in the dust
at the side of the track
as the motor shrinks the distance.

Slide in the slanting font:

Speed & Endurance.

We tiptoe across the pavement
to the car, a wedge of ice
furred over with hoar frost,
glass and locks glued.
It's more than still,
movement seems absurd.

We teeter down the alley
shining like tinfoil
with penguin steps, then
stomp across the park
on the grass, our boots
chomping hungrily.

The moon's a ghost,
a negative in the sun.
Trees thaw from white
to black. Traffic is yet
to blot up sounds,
the faint songs of birds.

My daughter's words form
physically in the cold:
fewer cars lessen
the acid in the air
that thins their eggshells.
Mist hangs like quietness.

This morning, we've walked—
for what it's worth.
When the sun's high,
looking over our shoulder,
our footprints will leave
no mark upon the earth.

Boxing Day with Dad

They're off—my two lads—
along the harbour wall
like a pair of dogs.
You and I take a stroll
slow as your broken step.

Waders tiptoe mud. Wind builds.
A clock tower strikes off an hour.
My boys bounce back with shells,
George tiggling his little brother;
two kids on a piece of elastic.

Out there's the gun emplacement.
I squint at what I cannot see,
the point of infinity, imagine
gangplanks, a metal city
where sea and sky are hinged.

*And that bus shelter thing—
the end of the Victorian pier
a storm took down one winter
stranded in a bulk of water
swelling up and down.*

I see you on the ferry,
sun illustrating the coast,
a Sunday trip to Southend,
holding your dad's hand
before he finally walked out.

The end of the harbour wall.
Wind gets in our clothes.
We hobble back, reel in my sons,
pockets muscled with throwing stones,
make for *Morrellis of Whitstable*.

Cappuccinos cool. We scan
monochrome pictures of the battery:
windows, arms of guns, stilts,
aliens of the North Sea.
It's 'War of the Worlds,' says George.

I could take you come summer,
you say. I gaze out beyond
the steamed up shop window
where a woman sits, her fag ash
drooping before it falls.

Lighthouse

From the moment we cruise into
the disabled spot with sea views
right outside the Visitor Centre,
the day has our name on it.

Years ago my brother and I
would gaze at the tiny ferries.
We'd chew our Marmite sandwiches
and wonder where 'abroad' began.

Dad takes me aside for a word
About your mother overdoing it
and we're away across the Downs,
mum waving her stick athletically.

There are *blue skies over* and butterflies,
more butterflies than I can remember,
peacocks, ones speckled like tobacco.
The heads of the flowers are floating.

We rest above the huge landslip
known as the Scallop Shell. Mum spots
a yellow hammer taking in the sun
and we plan meeting for Christmas.

At the lighthouse, the guide laments
it's now obsolete—all shipping
has sat nav—but the captains
still look up to know it's there.

The cliff leads us down to the Bay.
Dad's driven the car around
and waited. There, there he is
sitting outside the pub, waving.

The Wood

The weather's a gift.
Dad feels we must all
make it to the wood.
Like figures in a frieze.

He hobbles along,
his left foot swinging out.
I tuck in beside him,
let talk follow the path.

The monkey puzzle tree
is the top of the hill
since Dad can remember.
And who planted it?

Ahead, our toddler
tests all directions for speed.
I call him back
amongst our legs.

Stepping into chestnuts,
the plantation is lit:
we wade through
a haze of bluebells.

Branches play
every note of brown,
turn on and off
the near and far.

This is my wood
of bows and arrows,
of the Roman villa
sunk in the brambles.

Among so much blue,
the kids hunt
whitebells, scatter
into the depths.

Beside the bomb crater,
Dad pees a collapsing
arc of sunlight.
And he's telling me

how he and a mate—
thick as thieves—
though he's dead now,
watched over there,

on the bank by the oak,
a couple make love,
a squaddie and his girl.
I promise not to tell.

By the time Dad's done,
he's spotted a whitebell
close to his feet
to show the grandchildren.

We stroll on as if
all on the same string.
The path rises,
bites into the hill.

Stops and starts and
piggybacks and stops.
The view gives itself up
for Dad to point to

the old slag heap
and the pit village,
the coach-house pub
and there—the nunnery.

His leg was bad
last spring. Bluebells
flowered unseen. This year
the wood has reached

out to draw him in.
And in a clearing of sun,
we're all there beneath
the monkey puzzle tree.

The Sacred Tree

(After Black Elk, Oglala Sioux)

The white men hatch out
their eggs every year.
They drive us to rocks
like wounded deer,
their eyes full of mist,
ears full of roaring water.

We keep our word
until the mountains
are rivers. Theirs
we cast in a hole
and cover with dirt.

You cannot sell the earth
on which our people walk,
where nothing breaks
the warmth of the sun.

Nits breed lice,
said Eagle Chivington.
They cut our women,
wore them stretched
around their hats:
the Battle of Sand Creek.

One law lives at a time.
Now we are stones,
broken and thrown away.

From this hill of old age,
we see our women and children
lying heaped and scattered
as plain as when we saw them
with eyes young.

The nation's hoop is broken.
There is no centre any longer.
The sacred tree is dead.

Dreamcatcher

(Pays Plat First Nation, Northern Ontario)

Walter's eyeballs ache
staring at the neon sign:
Cable, Vacancies. Sloping away,
he rubs fists into his face.

He skirts the creek choked
with beer crates. His children
don't see him. They zoom the 4 x 4
with dead batteries a man secretly
gave them for being photo'd.

In the splitting sunlight,
he squints at his wife's stall
buffeted by the backwash,
the twisters of grit from trucks
and tourists with destinations
hard in their eyes.

She hoards glossy mags
trashed behind the motel:
Lifestyle, Makeover. Now
the windows of their box cabin
are screened with veils of mesh,
Walter never bothers smearing on
pine sap against nagging flies.
Seasons don't matter.

Before the old law died
and speedboats cut the lake,
he played the fishing guide,
paddling white men
to empty waters. Once
someone flicked in a stub.
He steered a circle of silence,
lifting it out in his palm.

He weighs the shaman's song
of Nanna Bijou, the Sleeping Giant,
who stirred, churned up Superior
to flood the Sioux's bark canoes
for stealing the secret of silver.

Through a storm of flies, Walter
stumbles home, past the shaman's,
its roof a fire of rust, satellite
locked into porn, nakedness
flubbing at a window.

Far off, his wife smiles into
a trucker's cab, haggles over
a dreamcatcher, a web to catch
nightmares. On his arm, a mosquito
settles for his blood. He just stares.

Change

Tropical North Queensland

was rubbery and lush.
The supermarket—pallets,
trolleys and you slumped, back
against the wall, knees up,
head down. A kind of box
of your own making.

I remember this.
Your straight hair,
unlike most of the blacks
back home. In the Ashmolean,
the coolamons in rows, not
holding witchety grubs,
but stillness, dust.
Teaching my Aussie class
that 50,000 uninterrupted years
was the board's length,
and my thumb nail
since Cook's invasion.
What could I say to you?
Hard luck?

Jan remembers our kids
staring, asking too loudly
what was wrong with you,
tugging them out of your space.
You could've been drunk
like the others in Cairns
under the exquisite palms.

Our milk needed
transplanting to the fridge.
The bus was late.
We both remember it
rounding the corner, painted
like a boomerang, selling
the Tjapukai Cultural Park
and you rising up
much taller than I thought
to ask for the fare.

I don't remember meeting
your eyes. Passengers
were at the windows.
The hot bus throbbed.
Was I getting on?
Fumbling, I picked out
a two dollar piece
stamped with an aborigine's head
to pay you off.

I forgot to mention
I kept my eye on you
in the panes of reflection.
You followed me down the aisle,
tapped me on the shoulder,
said *Thank you*
and gave me the change.

Crossing the Nullarbor

£10 Gets You There!

announced *The Herald's* ad.

And thirty days at sea
in a bucket ship, over
100 proper degrees,
even the Formica sweating.

Docking in Adelaide,
there was row upon row
of spiky palms, prickly
in the heat and my Jack
donning safari shorts and
a hooped t-shirt—no
jacket and tie. I turned
to my girls, *My God,*
is that your father?

Why Oz? To escape the uncles.
Ipswich. A brick terrace. Perce
reeked of bitter and ash,
slipped into my bed and weed
up my back. I thought.

That's me in the snap,
third step up. Just 13.
I had mother's good looks.

After Uncle Percy, Harold.

Uncle Harold. Hands,
he had so many hands,
he had three.

We'd been evacuated to Cardiff.
Harold was a welder, an essential
service. He'd dodged the call.
Always behind me, he wore me
like a shadow. *Monica, if
I can't have you, I'll have
your girls.* I grabbed a knife,
went for him over the table.

The uncles. The uncles. We had
to go. Mother came out later,
bought a place at Coffin Bay.
At the end I asked her—
if she knew. *No*, she said.
I love you. Too late then.
Her heart gave way.
Her white heart collapsed.

Above the mantel, my Jack
on our Golden Anniversary. Here,
we were wiped clean,
bought a tent and combi van,
went all over with our girls.

To dry Lake Eyre—full
of water to the horizon, shifting
like a mirage, white
with wheeling birds' wings
we didn't know the names of,
shore splattered with flowers—
daises like poached eggs—
from seed that lay dead
for decades in the red soil.

Jack? Jack had a stroke
and another. After the third,
I told him it all, why
I'd been up tight in that way,
shy for him. *You slut.*
To think all these years
I've had soiled goods.
And he turned his face away.

You can't dwell, sit around
dusting old photos, gawping
at programmes from back home,
skies bruised black and blue.

Last spring, I made it
to Kangaroo Island. Jack never
fancied the Nullarbor, its 92 miles
without a bend, its maddening
endlessness, road kill of camels
lying among the pretty heath,
a skinny, white shrub
that can survive the desert.

First Death

Peek-a-boo granddad
led his granddaughter
down the garden path
to name his pigeons
scrabbling for height
against leaden skies.

His daughter ended up
in the land of red soil
where in the outback
camels licked dew
off the railway lines.

One phone call joined
both worlds, *Peacefully,*
while he slept.

On the iron veranda,
mercury pushed bursting.
She staggered back,
cried on her daughter who
sobbed raw her heart,
gulping as if drowning.

That night, heat
wouldn't quieten. Something
on the tin roof thumped
across her young sleep.
Did his overalls still
hang behind the loft door?
Smell of him? Granddad?
Every bird had gone—
freed, she thought, not necks
snapped into a wheelie bin.

The funeral evening, mum
was a ghost watching her
from the kitchen window
as she lit a single candle under
the white-limbed eucalypts,
stopping it at the exact
minute, its smoke lost
among black leaves of night.

And if she dreamed of pigeons,
the glossy ones she'd named—
Snowy, Silky, Peter—bursting
into flight, aligning their compasses,
homing, his voice lifting them
from grey skies, she never said.

Mother and Carrier Bags

Just the unplanned baby,
 its white cry tangling
 the night. Staggering
 to the cot, your back
 aching for a new spine.

Pulling dirty pants
 the right way out, emptying
 pockets of litter, unfolding
 his parking ticket—Bath,
 three hours Friday afternoon—
 and saying nothing.

The washing machine's
We've got you now,
We've got you now
 as clothes strangle themselves.

The liquidizer's whine.
 Dead coffee's bitterness.
 Lunch boxes of crusts.
 Boiled veg beneath
 your Tommy Hilfiger.

Keeping fit shopping.
 A dull ache of sun, shades
 for your stinging eyes.
 Same aisle, same packets.
 Tesco tulips to go bald.

The sideboard stacked
with flowers and cards
like white, washed plates.
Tasteful notelets of other lives,
other perfect families.

His fingers stroking
your thigh. Red wine breath.
A lovebite on your shoulder,
a tattoo, a bruise.
Another thing to do.

Dreaming of the single bed
you had at home. Cotton sheets.
Reading into the night until you
wanted to put out the light.

Birthday

All night, the storm broods,
slips below the surface
of sleep. Eyelids flicker.
She drags on her jeans
as the room jitters white.

The darkness is too warm.
Lightning snaps her on the lawn
passing silver hydrangeas,
snaps her lunging along
the beach lumpy with stones.

Near midnight, on a rock,
she faces the storm bringing in
her birthday. Waves implode.
A pine of blackness. Forty
years to get here, to this.

A divorced speed dater,
jobs like photocopied sheets,
years torn off like PostIts—
a slash of electricity. Quietness
splits open and booms.

She slides the bolts. Wind
tugs at loose windows,
has a voice in the chimney.
The fire is cool. For hours
the storm unloads its rage

until it grumbles out to sea.
Sleep comes and touches,
but not sweetly. The outside
is in. Behind her eyes
afterimages, stains of lightning.

Storywaters

Looking for Warluwarru

Our first night in Cairns,
Tropical North Queensland.
Baggage dumped, kids
in the softness of sleep,
we sprawl across the veranda.

Basking in warmth,
we try reading the stars
for the eagle, Warluwarru,
and its nest, the Coal Sack.
The sky's all mixed up.

Waxy greens rustle.
You fidget, blurt out
something to tell me:
I think I'm pregnant.

Something? A numb silence.
Stars fade. *Good*, I say.

You reach out, draw
me in, find a white limb
and make it my arm
around you.

My cheek. Your neck.
A kiss is kisses,
tongues of sweetness,
shedding our clothes,
leading each other
somewhere known as if
we can make tonight
the first night of life,
the night of conception.

A veranda in Cairns.
Rainforest circled around us.
Your untied hair
blonde on my bare chest.
Looking along your arm,
I suggest the way to go.
Your finger joins the stars
trying to find Warluwarru.

The Southern Cross

Rainforest throbs noise.
Iced stubby in hand,
I slouch on the veranda.
A praying mantis
clatters the light, sits
above my shoulder.

The sky, a dust of light.
No Southern Cross
that may have lit
the Wise Men's way.

What—a lizard
skitters over my hand,
jerks up my nerves—
skitters my brain.

Another stubby. Somewhere
it's out there, the Cross,
arching over this evening,
dipping in—the north?

My bearings have gone wild
in this sunburned country
slung under the belly
of the world.

My mind throbs.
Bearings wild—
another child feeding
under the heart.

Test

You dunk the strip:
a school girl
with litmus paper.

A wine glass
of your urine
holds our future.

Moisture creeps
to your fingerprints.
Your mouth twitches.

Seconds are grainy,
molecules of pink
hemorrhaging red.

A line is drawn.
The line. Positive.
You risk a smile.

I push down
your arms around
my neck,

walk out.
The fuse burning
in your fingers.

Secret

What are we doing
holidaying in Port Douglas,
days tanned, beach
fringed with T-shirt palms?

That crouched lad
with a fist of cowries
is our Rob. And there,
Jane skimming a stone.
What of a third?

If only we'd planned
our family, could sit
hand in hand opposite a doctor
as she smiled and began...

Instead, we're shunting
bedrooms, calculating costs,
adding 20 years to 37
and imagining a life, again.

Were the kids
colonizing forces,
fruit of the womb or
both and sometimes neither?

Four Mile Beach.

We've told no one. You say
you'd feel silly, swear.

We're grandparents watching
our grandchildren swim.

Three kids have discovered

a goanna in a palm,

skin flakes of sun,

jewellery head to tail,

a dream spirit dreaming.

Contraception

None at first.
We started with tickling,
ended counting off days.

Condoms. As nervy
about Fruit Cocktail Flavour
as buying you that g-string,
the size of an eye-patch
and half as attractive.

Years ago, curtains drawn,
I tried on for size
a Glow-in-the-Dark Durex
when mum went to Asda.
My mate just shrugged:
his girl never ate
a Mars in the wrapper.

The pill. A male doctor
slapped you on it, prescribed
a shedful for life despite
the big 'C' in the small print;
the wildest event ever
like buying *The Joy of Sex*
and the kitchen swivel bin.
Sweet days of sin.

Middle-aged, I'm back
to condoms—a regular pack—
rhythm and any method—
sometimes during your period.
An afterbirth of blood.

The cap? Strictly
for the shower. The coil?
Its tip, like making love
to a brush—yard or wire.
Next, the knacker's yard
with the dog.

These days my eyes
are used tea bags,
my stubble grey.
I'm more excited
by the weather forecast—
Newsflash: the Contras
have broken through.
I say my mad sperm
all drive tanks.

You say
Jack the fucking lad.

Physician

We sit hand in hand.
He taps his pen.

Facts don't lie:
neural tube defects—
spina bifida to you—
a 2000 to 1 risk
and trisomy 21,
250 to 1. My mind
spills its numbers.

As a geriatric mother
the triple screen or
MSAFP—is pointless,
high false positives
not withstanding.

As for fretting over
missing fingers and toes
with chorionic villus sampling,
you were too far gone.

A scan's merely routine
he tells the traffic
grumbling up Sturt Street,
lead drifting in the window.

The sonographer's trained
in cysts on the brain, a dot
in the heart, light
in the bowel, short limbs,
the neck's black sac—
usual soft markers.

Cystic fibrosis, Down's—
they'll name the rogue
chromosome making three.
After all, two's company.

He glances at you.
It's all quite natural.
He picks up the picture
of his graduating son
to place it face down
and look to the door.

A week Monday.
Send the next one in.
He'd taken us for science.
We'd given you to him.

Nuchal Translucency Scan

The gynaecologist breezes in,
white coat flapping.
Your full-moon belly
is swabbed with iodine.

Images balloon,
are sucked away.
From all ten toes
to a spine of pearls
to a light bulb head:
two centimetres of life.
Our eyes on sticks.

She plots black fluid
curving the back.
Truth is the transducer
she pokes in for more
and more data. We bite
the silence.

Within normal distribution,
she states, *screen negative.*
My face falls open.
You close your eyes.

She's ticked the boxes.
The risk has tumbled.
We grapple the numbers
to our hearts like a certainty.

Perhaps for fun, she colours
the bowels, counts the sacs
of the heart, tickles the nose.

Through the silver, the foetus
flips onto its nearly
non-Down's syndrome back,
its nearly normal back,
tries to sit up.

I step aside the gynaecologist's
stare. The dumb witness.
She hustles past, whispers,
Your baby.

Nothing

In the dead of night
you ring our G.P.
Amnios—safe as houses,
you've nothing to lose.

The gritty hours to dawn:
cystic fibrosis, Down's,
spina bifida. Spiky words.
You name the fears
to gamble with about
this speck of life
on its tight orbit.

Blindness, miscarriage.
Meanings settle,
find their weight.

I imagine two
strapping kids, ours,
Jane and Rob flying
a kite that tugs,
keen for the sky.

At the heart, we grapple
with *termination*, balk
at its sound, the image
of its meaning.

Morning. Light sharpens.
On our *Far Side* calendar,
we tear off each page,
maybe discover the opposite
of a birthday.

You're fifteen weeks.
Twenty the red line
with nothingness beyond
perhaps for—*it*, dare
I say *you*, foetus,
baby, child. Time's
eating its tail.

Chance

I. Echuca

Before flying home
we'd travel—that glitzy
word—to Lake Mungo,
its craters of sand
fished by the clans
40,000 years ago.

Moonscapes, a fossil
of a golden perch
cooked by Mungo Man or
Mungo Woman, maybe
molecules of their bones
in the tread of our boots.
The midden trail once
lapped by the lake,
kids splashing
in the shrieking water.

II. River Cruise

We cannot spend
our unspent youth
in the dusty outback
going bush: the last
weeks cut in half.

The Emmylou paddles us
 along the Murray's bank
 sherbet yellow with wattles,
 white with limbs of eucalypts.

Slumped in a chair,
 you shade your eyes,
 try to rub away
 the sickness in your belly.

III. The Heritage Port

In *Sharp's Arcade*, one
 Australian penny clinks into
Granny's Prophecies. She sings:
A trip round the world is in store,
Bringing more happiness than before.
 Then a lucky number.

Stars shooting around
 Granny's head, I square up
 to her grin, stare
 at my bloodshot eyes.
 We're through with plans,
 pass the number: 401.

Playing God

The jittery line is not
a heart beat on a monitor,
but your signature
on the disclaimers.

Our family circles the bed.
Your belly's polished with gel.
Video in—action.

We peer at a windscreen
on a wild Yorkshire night.
Shapes loom out of grey
half-lit by the moon's skull.

Jane expects kicks,
turns—breaststroke;
our Rob, a willy, a mate
to play for Arsenal too.

We squint into craters,
eyes' silver negative
blind to colour.

Despite the mass of weather,
the doctor pronounces you
the downhill side of 14,
not the 15 weeks prescribed:
We don't play God.

We're shown the door
clutching video, photo
and appointment card for
the day before our flight
to the edge of Europe.
Days are few, feel
easy to break.

Fitzroy Gardens, colours
bleached. A ghost gum.
The kids squabble as we
huddle together, sharing
the close-up of our baby's hand,
palm of pebbles, fingers
of chalk: hello and goodbye.

Calling Home

We get our story straight,
dial the tune of their number,
the grit stone terrace.

Mum answers, sees across
her winter street
summer in Gariwerd
where we've hidden,
where gangs of cockatoos
grate the quietness.

I've got some news.
As I think she thinks
we're emigrating, I tell it
straight, the happy chance,
baby to be called Bendigo,
Warrnambool or Hanging Rock.

Where my spirit cells leapt
into the womb and kept
their secret till quickening time
began a new songline's rhyme.
So the story goes.

Nothing but jumping
static. *Oh*. The echo mimics.
I'm delighted, she adds,
delighted, getting her
story straight. We both
gabble the rest, fail
to dodge the delays,
our words tangling.

I leave it at that,
say *Cheerio*, mum perhaps
clutching the handset after
the line goes dead,
the distance between us
thousands of miles of silence.

Gulgurn Manja

The 4 x 4 is beached
beside the sandy track
that cuts the forest
to show its vastness.

I scabble up a knoll, through
a mass of starry thryptomene
to the Cave of Hands,
the alcoves of Gulgurn Manja.

The hands, the hands greet me.
Twenty-six right hands—
children's hands that slotted
into their fathers' palms.

Stenciled in a southerly wind
while baking possums,
upon returning each year
or, who knows, for fun.

Lines or bars record visitors
20,000 years ago perhaps
and emu tracks when Canopus
drifts into the Milky Way,
the time to hunt their eggs.

Despite the metal grille,
the shelter's full of northern
sun, shaped to my back
and the hands, the hands
applaud around the walls.

In my mind, I add one
bar stroke next to the rest
and place my hand on theirs.

Amniocentesis

You brought the problem,
laid it out on the bed—
you, geriatric pregnancy.

As the receptionist studies
our insurance details,
the gynaecologist appears
from behind a curtain
brandishing a screwdriver
spiked with light.

I stroke your arm.
The syringe angles into
the sponge of womb, pierces
the wet image, stabs
at feet webbed in shadow.

She clicks her knuckles,
grips the plunger and sucks
out cloudiness she holds up,
turns in the light in silence.

She probes your belly
trying to pull an image
from the swirling grey.
Bits of limb slide away.
There, isn't he delicate?

So, a boy? Our boy
in there where the tide's out.

O.K.? she asks
moving to switch off
as we gaze at our son
slipping off the screen.

Arrivals and Departures

I shut off the water.
Dust has already put down
a thin layer of grey.
I close the curtains on
the rope hammock
between the olive trees.
A kookaburra laughs
in the drizzle that deadens
light, a Yorkshire mizzle.

Over a cuppa, next door,
we chat away the last hour:
beach weekends at Lorne,
southern right whales
calving off Logan's Beach
for thousands of years,
nuzzling into each other.

Minutes are spent. Hugs.
Words tremble. Our stories
will keep us neighbours
though continents away.

The airport shuttle steps
up the gears. Friends turn
to outline, turn to black.

Jetting over the outback,
maybe a goanna inclines
its head to the plane's drone.
Maybe we're going home.

Result

Gone midnight, we ring
and ring and ring
the Californian bungalow,
the surgery on Sturt.

A voice becomes a fact,
sings hello, names, dates,
addresses, then pops out
to find our future.

Jumping static. Her voice
smoothes out the crackles:
Yes, everything's good.
The number's normal.

I make some tea
as something to do,
rinse the pot imagining
the doctor flushing your cells—
each of 46, 46, 46—
down the sink, down
into the Southern Ocean.

Weeks later, a sparrow
on the bathroom window sill
sings as you bathe your belly,
breasts and darkening nipples.
Sings as, for the first time,
the baby kicks out ripples.

Conkers

Conkers and more conkers.
Our kids' fists swelled
with each knot of wood
brought by the first settlers
to grow a new home
down under, down there.

There, close to winter,
in a blob of shade
at the water park,
you lay down in stages,
hands round your stomach
while our cartoon kids
screamed at being dunked
in the plunge pool.

Here, in the Old Country,
autumn's plunged into winter,
sky choked with rain.

I walk away from work,
the same office, down
the same road lined
with chestnut trees,
their leaves in tatters.

Perhaps for the children,
I pick the glossiest ones
rippled with contours,
juggling their silkiness
in my coat pockets.

Thinking of my shiny
new son, warm as
down under, warm as
your mum's blood,
soon to be dunked into
the cold of the old world.

Thinking of you
flat out on the sofa,
ready for birth's ruck
with your steel body,
delicate hydraulics
and arms circling
the globe of your belly.

Nursery

The study has to go, my
study with 70s roses,
blistered gloss and damp
leaching the chimney breast
brown as a potato.
My garden shed, smelling
of dusty books and me.

The spike of quartz
from Thunder Bay,
my bubble of pine sap
brittle as toffee, my fossil
of a cockle shell small
as a pea all wrapped
in newspaper, boxed.

Empty, sounds bounce.
Walls step back.
These last days:
the murmur of the radio,
pendulum of the brush.

The finishing touch:
a clip-framed watercolour
of a mob of kangaroos
painted by your mum.

The cot's instructions
baffle an afternoon until
it's perfect. Your room's
done. The first thing
I've done for you.

Now to rest. Let eyes
gather in stretch marks.
Imagine your vanilla scent,
mustard stools, a brittle
cry, your wobbling face.
Alive and so light,
you filling this space.

First Contact

On Christmas Eve,
I sing you a carol,
resting my cheek
on the tight drum
of your mum's stomach.

Her belly button
is inside out,
the knot of the balloon
in which you float,
a naked astronaut.

Bathed in sound,
talked into life,
Silent Night massages
your suit of skin
with water's rhythm.

The thrum of your heart.
Your mum's double bass.
Then a new pattern,
making three, life
from another universe, me.

The Mickey Mouse View

Blood splatters,
flushes water pink.

You sit on the toilet,
creased, my arm
around your shoulder.

A metal room.
The radiologist smiles:
We'll just take a peep.

The scan slices the three
cords of the umbilical.
She crops, rotates:
two ears and a head,
The Mickey Mouse view.

You remember Mickey,
big-headed Mickey
pointing his finger, the camera
zooming past his tonsils
into blackness.

The radiologist—who's
asked to be Kate—
hums, peeks here
and there, magnifies
till her hunch darkens:
petals of bleeding,
the black flower,
a haemorrhage. *A.s.a.p.*,
you'll need a section.

A birthday today.
What fun, I say.
Your face is low.
I touch your belly.
A scalpel. Cuts.

Mickey fires off
a side-splitting cackle,
holding his guts.

Ghost Ward

Afternoon's empty
on the ghost ward. You lie
on the high bed, whiter
than your white gown.

*The incision from hip
to hip will leave a scar
like a smile.* Dr Choudry
ticks the boxes. *Quite natural
these days.* You sign,
consent to surgery.

We swop names for a son,
taste each syllable till it
loses shape and fades.

A stack of magazines.
We read about the Dreamtime,
gaze into The Coal Sack
again, the grainy nebula.
Your finger joins stars,
joins the Southern Cross
to the eagle's foot,
Warluwarru. One's the other.
Difference is the same.
We share the silence.

You feel our child turn
over, nestle against
the cot of the rib cage
in solid darkness.

I climb onto the bed
with you, joke about
being too posh to push.
The Rugby team's warming up
to tackle your belly.

Time's void. The doctor
will restart it at 7 p.m.
when our son's sky will be
sliced and light born,
our ghost take form.

Washing Up

The anesthetist smiles:
*You'll only feel like
someone's washing up
inside your stomach.*

She shoots morphine
into your *lovely spine*,
strokes your cheeks
and calls your name
from the rim of darkness.

The scrum of birth.
Blood is sucked away.
The sticky smell.

This time, no stirrups,
bed pans, bastard
swearing, you thrashing
on the bed like a fish
held down in air.

At 7.13, the magician
reaches in to lift out life.
No warm water birth
into quietness. Our baby's
held by his heels,
weighed as he mews.

Womb-curved, slimy,
floating in my arms,
a boy, a son, our son.
You little bugger, you say.

On his breathing skin,
creams, blood
and my purged fears
shed as tears.

Warluwarru

I drive our children
to meet their brother,
thinking of my wife:
the slack skin,
baby cut out,
storywaters gone.

Standing in a circle,
Jane blurts out:
*He's red as a plum
like he's been cooked.*
Which he has, stewed
for nine months.

A water-fine smudge
of blond hair,
pink shells for nails,
each finger printed
with its ripples.

You, our storywaters:
the black flower,
patterns in water,
your goanna, sparrow,
your hand's hello,
molecules of red dye,
Warluwarru in the sky,
our lucky number 401,
it, foetus, he, our son.

Critical Commentary: The Dialogue between the Discourses of Ecocriticism and Environmental Poetry: Introduction

This investigation will examine the characteristics of the discourses of ecocriticism and environmental poetry in order to understand the relationship between them. It will employ a practice-led methodology to show how there are shared and different agendas in terms of content and how it is treated. In some instances, there is a clear dialogue between the two discourses.

In addition to being a space where discourses intersect, environmental poetry can be personal and emotive as well as being politically orientated. The term politics will be used to denote the political institutions that pass legislation as well as the social groups whose beliefs and values determine the way decisions are made. People are embedded in political frameworks. The scope of politics is such that it includes environmental politics and issues such as environmental justice and environmental racism. Usually ecocriticism and environmental poetry are explored separately. The framing of this thesis to investigate their relationship will produce new knowledge.

This new knowledge is concerned with a number of blind spots and how certain areas are undertheorized. Specifically, I will question the nature of environmental poetry's blind spot concerning which non-human creatures are represented. The lack of political representation of non-human animals and their bioregions will be apparent. I will argue that environmental poetry needs to focus more on

representing urban and suburban bioregions. With ecocriticism, I will question the insufficient attention paid to poetic style by some ecocritics. Ecocriticism's position regarding anthropomorphism and gendered instances of anthropomorphism will be challenged. I will critique the position of some ecofeminists who promote binarisms, polarized ways of conceptualising issues. Such ecofeminists unjustifiably champion the female component in the male/female binarism. Regarding the patriarchal domination of science as it is manifest in childbirth, I will argue that gender roles need to be renegotiated. Lastly, ecocriticism will be interrogated to show that its Western perspective has resulted in non-Western perspectives such as totemism being ignored.

I intend to refocus poets' attention concerning their relationship with the environment resulting in a new, more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of 'environmental poetry.' This critical commentary is concerned with environmental poetry; when discussing poetry more generally, this will be made clear. The term environmental poetry has been used before. I intend to more precisely define this term, partly through my own practice. Hence, in the section 'Ecocritical Definitions: Ecopoetry or Environmental Poetry?' (p 114), I will start to posit a new definition of environmental poetry.¹ Through poetry's creative and political content, it is possible to recognize that environmental poetry can be a direct, powerful vehicle for change both now and in the future. In some instances with my own work, I am promoting change for the future.

¹ Although I use the term environmental poetry, when discussing other ecocritical definitions, I use the term preferred by the particular ecocritic.

At present, both ecocriticism and environmental poetry are in an emerging position; new knowledge will arise from more clearly defining both discourses. Regarding ecocriticism, Louise H. Westling (2006), who is particularly concerned with phenomenology, Deep Ecology and ecofeminism, notes: “Because it is a new critical movement, ecocriticism is still working to define itself precisely, and many serious problems have yet to be resolved. The field is undertheorized” (p 28). Regarding environmental poetry, or ecopoetry to use the term of ecocritic J. Scott Bryson (2002), the position is similar. Bryson, who has written extensively on the history of ecopoetry, states: “Any definition of the term ecopoetry should probably remain fluid at this point because scholars are only beginning to offer a thorough examination of the field” (p 5). This thesis will help to theorize ecocriticism and more thoroughly examine environmental poetry.

At present some critics consider environmental poetry to be mainly an American phenomenon. In the introduction to his recent anthology, Neil Astley (2007), the poet, novelist and editor, argues “There are in fact numerous contemporary poets addressing the environmental crisis with perception and passion, but most are American” (p 15).² My own British environmental poetry addresses this lack in Britain. Astley continues by commenting upon ecocriticism:

In the supposedly holistic field of contemporary environmental studies, it is extraordinary that American critics are paying so little attention to the work by contemporary British and Irish writers...
(Astley 2007: 16).

² In Astley’s anthology, the section ‘Country to City’ includes two poems by dead English writers, John Betjeman and Philip Larkin, plus a poem by Scottish poet G.F. Dutton in a section consisting of seventeen poems.

Similarly, 'Birthday' (p 56) examines the validity of binarisms. It reveals how the opposites of outside and inside are simplifications and, sometimes, unhelpful. The poem's genesis is in ecocritical philosophy and phenomenology; it tests and explores their findings. My poem is also in dialogue with American poet Mark Doty's 'Description' (1986), endorsing his view by showing its validity in a different context. Poems such as 'An Elephant's Eye' and 'Birthday' largely have their origins in ecocritical theory.

Poems resulting from real world events include 'The Phrasealator' (p 27) and 'Takoma, the Dolphin' (p 13). Both are based on newspaper reports and include found language, used in 'Takoma, the Dolphin' in a particularly satirical way. That said, 'The Phrasealator' concludes differently from the report as I have given the poem an environmental perspective regarding the ownership and control of natural resources, food and water. Several poems have arisen from events in the personal realm. 'Crayfish on Father's Day' (p 30) was composed following a personal event and redrafted in the light of research on native and non-native species. The subsequent redrafting secured the connection between the personal and natural worlds.

Some of my work has been written with little conscious regard to ecocritical writing. 'Pet Scorpion' (p 14) was driven by the strength of its narrative. It has clear ecocritical aspects throughout, although the research has been confined to the checking of certain factual details. My environmental knowledge and concerns have come implicitly to inform the poem.

In considering my methodology, I have attempted to show the complex relationship between ecocritical reading that challenges the poet, experiencing real events and researching and drafting. The areas are not always discrete. Likewise, the process and chronology of composition are often interconnected.

In terms of ecocritical context, American and British ecocriticism will be referenced. American ecocriticism has a longer history than British ecocriticism. In 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded. It publishes one of the foremost environmental journals for creative writing and ecocriticism: *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (ISLE). It is significant ASLE was founded in America as it still has pristine wilderness to preserve unlike Britain. The British chapter of ASLE was founded later, in 1999, and publishes its own journal *Green Letters*.

Historically, in America, literary critic Lawrence Buell is widely credited with the first thorough investigation of ecocriticism in his *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), a text significantly referenced here and supplemented by the work of Bryson and ecocritic Leonard M. Scigaj (1999). Of particular importance as an early collection of essays on ecocriticism is *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), edited by ecofeminist Cheryll Glotfelty and ecocritic Harold Fromm. Astley describes Buell's and Glotfelty and Fromm's works as "seminal" (p 16).

Following America's interest, British ecocriticism became more prominent.

Literary critic Jonathan Bate performed a similar function to Buell. His *Romantic*

Ecology (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000) document how William Wordsworth and the Romantics have established an environmental poetic tradition. Bate is supplemented by feminist philosopher Kate Soper (1995), ecocritic and poet Terry Gifford (1999) and ecocritic Greg Garrard (2004). A significant collection of essays on ecocriticism referenced is *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (2000) edited by literary and environmental critic Laurence Coupe. I have also explored two important Australian critics, Peter Hay, who is interested in the history of environmental thought in his *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (2002) and ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood (2002).

In terms of literary context, this investigation will consider mainstream environmental poetry, the tradition within which my own work falls.⁶

Contemporary, British environmental poetry will be considered in the main although the Romantics will be briefly referenced as some argue they are the precursors of environmental poetry. Such a weighting will help to redress the balance towards British environmental poetry, as Astley notes. To generalize, there are some differences between American and British poetry, environmental and otherwise. Partly as a result of the Confessional School of the 1950s and 1960s, as exemplified by Robert Lowell, American poetry generally tends to be more overt and direct. In American poetry, there is also a stronger tradition of free verse with its experimental forms. British poetry tends to be more indirect and suggestive. In terms of form, it has emerged out of the New Formalism of the 1990s. The poets cited in this investigation are, from Britain, Graham Mort (1986), David Craig (1987), Robert Minhinnick (2002), Alice Oswald (2002) and Kathleen Jamie

⁶ Experimental environmental poet Barry McSweeney (2003) is also relevant to my own work in terms of content, see page 182.

(2004); from America, Elizabeth Bishop (1983), Doty, Denise Levertov (1986, 1993), Gary Snyder (1992), and Chase Twichell (1995); and from Australia, Les Murray (1993). These poets are important environmental poets, although not the only ones contributing to the field. In addition to the poets mentioned, I will contextualize my own practice in relation to recent anthologies on environmental poetry that offer historical, contemporary and transatlantic perspectives: Peter Abbs' (2002) *Earth Songs*, John Burnside and Maurice Riordan's (2004) *Wild Reckoning* and Astley's *Earth Shattering*.

In terms of chronology, chapter one considers definitions of ecocriticism and environmental poetry plus the associated terminology adopted by certain positions. In defining ecocriticism, the issue of binarisms is considered, an issue central to this investigation. It will be argued that most, if not all, binarisms prioritize human concerns at the expense of the environment. The questioning of binarisms also occurs in my creative work. Chapter two examines how ecocriticism is undertheorized concerning form and style. Establishing the blind spots and characteristics of the two discourses is important in exploring the nature of the dialogue between them. It is also a prerequisite for more clearly defining environmental poetry. Chapter three analyses whether humans should represent non-human creatures and, if so, how. This entails considering the issue of anthropomorphism. The relationship between humans and the animals and insects we share the planet with is important for environmental poetry as is the relationship between humans and the bioregions humans and non-humans inhabit, the subject of chapter four. This chapter takes up the issue of anthropomorphism as it applies to bioregions. Additionally, it discusses which bioregions are typically represented in

environmental poetry and highlights environmental poetry's blindspots regarding political and urban representations of bioregions. Chapter five addresses how patriarchy is manifest in childbirth. It looks at several manifestations of patriarchy before proposing how gender roles can be renegotiated, something that is partly achieved through 'Storywaters.' Further, it proposes that Western ecocriticism may benefit from how totemism places newborns within a more environmental context.

1. Conditions for a New Environmental Poetry

Before positioning myself with regard to other critics, it will be helpful to define ecocriticism and environmental poetry, highlighting current issues and those that need further consideration. In defining ecocriticism, binarisms will be critiqued. Prescriptive definitions of ecocriticism will be analysed to see how useful they are for environmental poets and what they reveal about the relationship between the two discourses.

Key Definitions: Ecocriticism and Environmental Poetry

The first defining characteristic of ecocriticism is concerned with the pragmatics of environmental improvement, in particular challenging exploitative beliefs and practices towards the environment. This often touches upon socio-economic and gender issues. Ecocriticism, therefore, engages with ethical as well as political considerations. The related issues of environmental justice and environmental racism represent current concerns for ecocriticism. The former considers which environments are preserved and why whilst the latter explores which social groups inhabit environments that are destroyed and polluted. These issues are part of the socio-economic aspect of ecocriticism.

Two critics who have investigated environmental justice and environmental racism are Kamala Platt (1989) and Michael Bennett (2003). Platt, an artist and cultural

fallacy” where textuality is denied and only references to the external world are important, or the “semiotic fallacy” where the world “exists only as signified within human culture” (p 2). Coupe argues both fallacies are reductively flawed; both the world and language need to be part of the way humans engage with the environment. I will use Coupe’s terms in my discussion of other critics’ work.

Literary critic Peter Barry (1987) makes a similar point to Buell stating that language is like a stained glass window that both reflects its own patterning and can be seen through to the world beyond. Barry writes, “literature obviously has both a ‘clear glass’ and a ‘stained glass’ dimension, and cannot be usefully spoken of as entirely one or the other” (p 12). Otherwise, Coupe argues, using John Clare as his example, a poem about the declining number of skylarks would lose its poignancy if it were not accepted that skylarks are a type of bird in the world and their numbers are decreasing. Literature, therefore, is a discourse that is about the world: as Soper (1995) observes, “it is not language which has a hole in its ozone layer” (p 151). Acceptance of both the referential and semiotic aspects of language, therefore, is an important consideration for most current ecocriticism. An either/or binary stance is avoided.

Binarisms are an important issue in this investigation as it underlies many aspects of how key issues are framed. They are also analysed within my own environmental poetry in ‘Birthday’ (p 56), where the binarisms of inside/outside and mental/physical are questioned, and ‘Storywaters’ (p 57), where the male/female binarism is critiqued.¹¹ What is the evidence to suggest such binarisms are invalid

¹¹ See page 113 for a discussion of ‘Birthday’ and page 195 for ‘Storywaters.’

ways of thinking, that they suffer from, according to Coupe, a “tyrannous and dubious logic” (p 119)?

Categorizing experience as a binarism is rejected by phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1973) who analyses the way in which bodily experience and perception are treated. Merleau-Ponty argues that humans are simultaneously perceiver and perceived, not two separate entities like subjects and objects. As is the case when one hand touches another, humans perceive themselves and are the perceiver of themselves: “The handshake... is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well as at the same time touching” (p 142). Merleau-Ponty argues, “there is not in the normal subject a tactile experience and also a visual one, but an integrated experience in which it is impossible to gauge the contribution of each sense” (p 119). In other words, there is a unified experience at the time the person both touches and is touched; hence, Merleau-Ponty argues, “inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself” (p 40). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach is in common with Bate (2000). Bate’s term for environmental poetry is ecopoetry. He argues its “true importance may be more phenomenological than political” (p 75). Additionally, Merleau-Ponty is one of a number of philosophers who question binarisms like David Abram (2007) who posits an ecocritical version of it. It is clear, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty has influenced a number of critics.

In terms of environmental philosophy, typical examples of binarisms cited by Plumwood (2002) include: culture/nature, human/non-human, male/female, reason/emotion and subject/object (p 22). These binarisms privilege one of the two

opposites resulting in significant ramifications for the distribution of power. Plumwood argues such binarisms and their associated human centredness are “a danger to planetary life” (p 100) because humans become removed from the world and too reliant on technology and rationalism to solve environmental problems. Binarisms polarize thinking, setting up opposites where no such opposites exist, where the relationship between the two constituent factors should be, in fact, the subject of enquiry.

Focusing more on philosophical definitions, Soper analyses the subject/object binarism. She argues the “antithesis” (p 47) between subject and object is illegitimate. This is because it presupposes that humans already know what a subject and an object are. As Soper questions, “is this not to bring to the world a prior knowledge of what it is to ‘be’ a ‘subject,’ what it is to ‘be’ an ‘object?’” (p 47) Soper contends this presupposition can and should be dispensed with so that knowledge is not conceptualized oppositionally; by removing such strictures, the world can be known differently, relationally.

Soper has also analysed different definitions of the term nature. Ultimately, she argues binarisms are redundant: humans and non-humans can be thought of as being on a continuum of existence, what she describes as a monist or naturalist position. With such a position there is no discrete distinction between human and non-human groups. Westling’s (2006) perspective is similar: “the humanist claim of our semi-divine distinction from other creatures is absurd” (p 38). She maintains, “we are only one of many kindred species whose basic identities are not even totally distinct from one another” (p 36). This can be an exhilarating prospect,

Westling contends, as humans are not alone and separate from "the myriad creatures around us" (p 36).

Cultural and literary critic Stacy Alaimo (1998) directly builds on Merleau-Ponty's work. She argues the body has a unique two-way role in mediating between the outside and inside. Alaimo argues the body "disrupts opposition between nature and culture, object and subject" (p 126). She contends the body is not mute, but a place of connection, historical memory and knowledge. The body is the site where outside and inside produce a new type of knowledge. It is the site where nature is mediated by human consciousness, where nature and the human meet.

In terms of biology, literary and ecological critic Dana Phillips (2003) points out that empirically some organisms do not have clearly defined cell walls, a clear inside and out:

Many microorganisms have permeable cell membranes and thus have extremely fluid physiological boundaries. Their relationship with things 'outside' them tends to be ambient in a way that makes models based on exchanges between internal organs and the external environment less than perfectly applicable to them (Phillips 2003: 74).

Therefore, he argues that conceiving the environment as that which is outside is dubious: "Using the term *environment* thus introduces a high degree of relativity and ambiguity into ecological research" (p 74, italics in original). The assumption

that the environment is somehow outside of humans is biologically questionable and endorses binarisms.

Environmental poetry also has a role to play in disrupting and questioning binarisms. The questioning of the distinction between external and internal problematizes binarisms. This issue is explored by Doty's (1996) 'Description' that acknowledges the marsh described in the poem is "inside me and out" (p 1). There is no clear distinction between internal and external. Furthermore, within the poem, the term 'environment' itself is reconceptualized as being inhabited by humans and non-humans. The environment and its creatures are one.

My practice as an environmental poet also challenges binarisms. 'Birthday' (p 56) examines a woman's sense of personal crisis as she feels she has achieved little in her life. Such thoughts and feelings find a symbolic parallel in the storm that is an external manifestation of her internal processes. The poem concludes with the acknowledgement that "the outside is in" (p 56). As well as the storm representing the woman, the poem deals with the phenomenon of an afterimage, in this case the impression of lightning on the brain. The poem shows how the internal impression of light can continue to exist even after the external stimulus has gone. The poem has a phenomenological and biological basis for questioning binarisms, science being present within environmental poetry. Here environmental poetry shows it is a space in which binarisms can be explored and questioned.

Overall, I have shown how some ontological frameworks and some ecocriticism question the validity of binarisms. Additionally, I have argued that environmental

ways in which objects are perceived. That said, not all characteristics of poetry are involved in defamiliarizing the object; some techniques such as rhyme and rhythm attempt to enact or embody aspects of the subject they explore. Overall, the techniques at the poet's disposal enable them to write about their subjects in an original and striking way. Such are the features employed in environmental poetry. These features of style and form shape the content and are part of how the content is understood.

As a discourse, environmental poetry differs from other poetic discourses in terms of its treatment of content. At the end of each chapter, I will outline how environmental poetry can engage with its content. Therefore, by the end of this thesis, my definition of environmental poetry will be established. Prescriptive definitions of environmental poetry are critiqued in the next section. In clarifying and defining what I consider environmental poetry is, it will be maintained throughout that although environmental poetry is a discourse in itself, it also is able to be a space where other discourses can meet. For instance, ecological and scientific discourses can enter into dialogue within a single poem. Within environmental poetry, other relevant discourses can qualify, extend and even disagree with each other.

Ecocritical Definitions: Ecopoetry or Environmental Poetry?

As I have argued within this commentary, I prefer to use the term environmental poetry. This term has been used previously in a generalized, unspecific way. Part of

my project here is to more clearly define its characteristics. For clarity and consistency, I employ the preferred terms of different ecocritics only when discussing their work. Before commenting more fully on ecocritical terminology, I intend to reveal the difficulties involved with three definitions of environmental poetry, not least because each definition is associated with its specific terminology.

Bryson (2002) defines ecopoetry as having three characteristics. The first is recognition of the interdependent nature of the world that leads to an appreciation of places and creatures. The second characteristic requires humility in relationships with the land and its non-human creatures. The final one is scepticism about the technological world and its hyperrationality, which Bryson implies is the prioritizing of science to promote an “overtechnologized modern world” (p 6) at the expense of the environment.

The difficulty with this definition is its prescriptive nature. Ecopoetry can, in fact, sometimes be human-centred if the binarism of human/nature is questioned. I will argue that the human is not independent of the non-human world, but part of a continuum of creatures. This monist position maintains, according to Soper, “differences...between ourselves and other animals are all to be theorized as differences of degree, gradations within an essential sameness of being” (p 50). Humans and non-humans are not apart from their environment and separate entities. In addition, Bryson could use the term ‘respect’ rather than ‘humility’ as the former suggests equality rather than privileging one group over another, something that occurs in a culture based on binarisms.

Buell's (1995) comprehensive definition of environmentally orientated writing is not specific to environmental poetry, although environmental poetry would be included in the term “environmentally orientated work” (p 7).¹³ His definition proposes four characteristics:

1. The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history... 2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest... 3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation... 4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (Buell 1995: 6-7, italics in original).

Buell's account is also prescriptive. In some instances, the non-human environment may be used as a framing device. As I argued with Bryson, sometimes the environmental aspect may be imbued in a poem in human terms. Depending on the type of poem being written, it may be difficult to connect the human with the natural world, or even include the natural world at all. If Buell is suggesting his first criterion applies to every poem, poems may be similar, even formulaic.

In Buell's more recent work (2005), he reformulates this one characteristic:

Now, it seems to me productive to think inclusively of
environmentality as a property of any text--to maintain that all

¹³ That acknowledged, sometimes poetry functions in a different way from prose. See page 205.

human artefacts bear such traces, and at several stages: in the composition, the embodiment, and the reception (Buell 2005: 25).

It is hard to disagree with such an all-encompassing criterion. To maintain environmental concerns are implicit or explicit in all human artefacts does not reveal the manifestation of environmentality, how it is represented, which features are omitted and which included. Buell's characteristic has validity on a simple level, but needs to consider such factors to give it shape and form.

Regarding Buell's third characteristic, Buell needs to specify more fully how human accountability is manifest. Hypothetically, if a poet were to describe an environmental disaster, the text may not contain any ethical orientation. Buell is prescribing that poets are positive, even overt, in making environmental statements, rather than being allowed to describe what *is*. Lastly, bearing in mind that some environmental poetry may be brief, it may be difficult to convey a sense of process or environmental change within a poem. These, then, are the difficulties with Buell's definition. If all four criteria need to be present in each poem, poets will feel they are in a straightjacket.

An example may be germane. Rodney Jones' (2004) 'The Assault on the Fields' deals with the poisoning of a valley in North Alabama by dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane. The poem details how the first person narrator's neighbours, the Flowers, suffer:

And when a woman, who was a girl then, finds a lump,
what does it have to do

With the green fields and the white dust boiling
and hovering?

When I think of the name Jenny Flowers, it is that
whiteness I think of (Jones 2004: 26).

The focus of the poem is on the human more than the bioregion. Humans are the victims of environmental pollution; they are not outside of nature. The poem questions the human/nature binarism. The environment is used as a framing device. Human interests are the main, but not only, interest. Humans are accountable for pollution generally and the Flowers are its victims. Jones describes what is. His poem shows the limitations of Buell's prescriptive definition.

Scigaj's (1999) view of ecopoetry additionally places restrictions on environmental poets. Scigaj advocates an atonement or 'at-one-ment' with the environment. He points out that 'at-one-ment' originates from a statement by American poet Wendell Berry. It means that humans should atone for the environmental damage they have caused whilst at the same time living at one with nature (p 38). 'At-one-ment,' therefore, consists of two concepts, whereas atonement consists of one in this context. Atonement and 'at-one-ment' are two different concepts that are not usefully conflated. Indeed, the difference between what humans could do and should do needs to be more fully interrogated.

Considering the agendas of ecocritics Bryson, Buell and Scigaj together, it is clear that poets could face a number of prescriptions if they embark on writing environmental poetry. At times, their views suggest poets should write content that could be suitable for new laws on environmental improvement: Scigaj writes

sustainable environmental poetry "offers exemplary models of biocentric perception and behaviour" (pp. 78-9). However, why should poets show an appreciation of bioregions in every poem? This is a laudable objective, but places restrictions upon the poet who may feel it is necessary to explicitly demonstrate such an outlook.

Poets certainly can consider the political and ethical realms, but this is sometimes achieved by describing how the world is, not how it should be. Most poets do not write to a formula and it would make poetry predictable if they did. In some instances, poets do not, necessarily, set out to write environmental poems or be environmental poets, although they may make environmental observations.

Ecocriticism needs to be more aware of the process by which poets write. There are many variables to consider when writing, not just the criteria for being an environmental poet. Ultimately, the writer must feel that the poem works as a piece of art combining the tools or techniques discussed previously. Environmental poets do exist, but they demonstrate creativity in the ways they approach subjects rather than strictly adhering to the characterizing definitions applied to them by ecocritics. Indeed, much environmental poetry is written by poets who do not consider themselves to be such. Bryson, Buell and Scigaj are too prescriptive in their definitions at a time when they should be more open and provisional.

What has this revealed about the relationship between the two discourses? The relationship is a new one. Ecocritical definitions of environmental poetry are incomplete and undertheorized. At present, some of them are rigid, responding to environmental poetry, but not fully appreciating the artistic process. Creative poets

often invent new ways to write environmental poetry that test and expand ecocritical definitions.

I now intend to shift the focus more fully to ecocritical terminology having rejected the terms ecopoetry and environmentally orientated work as they are associated with prescriptive definitions, as I have just shown. Another reason to avoid the term ecopoetry is that it may suggest it is a sub-genre of poetry generally. A possible danger with this notion is the sub-genre may be perceived only through the filter of the dominant genre and its ideology. The sub-genre may be regarded as ‘Other,’ ‘ghetto-ized,’ different, a minority interest. The poet and critic Jonathan Skinner (2005) subscribes to this view arguing the term ecopoetics instrumentalizes or “pigeonholes” (p 127) poets into a particular area.

As well as Bryson and Scigaj using the term ecopoetry, it is also used by Bate. Unlike Bryson and Scigaj, Bate does not have a specific, set definition of ecopoetry. However, Bate does believe that its most important effect may be its phenomenological aspect above the political aspect, something I contest. Bate argues the role of ecopoetry is “to engage *imaginatively* with the non-human” (p 199, italics in original). Engaging the reader’s imagination comes before practical content. In other words, Bate is interested in ecopoetical consciousness more than ecopolitical commitment. I would argue environmental poetry can have a phenomenological dimension; it can recreate the experience of living in the world. However, this does not prevent it from changing attitudes about the environment. Indeed, Buell (2005) criticizes Bate’s stance by arguing he “may be too solicitous here about cordoning off ecocriticism from politics” (p 104). However, Bate does

not exclusively argue the phenomenological and political are separate, although I would argue his emphasis on the phenomenological is misplaced as both can be important.

Another difficulty with the term ecopoetry is that it is still being theorized and defined. Skinner (2001) is the editor of the journal *Ecopoetics*. In the first edition of *Ecopoetics*, he defines ecopoetry:

‘Eco’ here signals—no more, no less—the house we share with several million other species, our planet Earth. ‘Poetics’ is used as *poesis* or making, not necessarily to emphasize the critical over the creative act (nor vice versa). Thus: ecopoetics, a house making (Skinner 2001: 7).

It is noticeable how different Skinner’s ‘house making’ is from the definitions offered by Bryson and Scigaj. Furthermore, by the time Skinner writes in the same journal in 2005, he has misgivings about the term. He argues ecopoetry is “replicating the ‘eco’ already built into the ecology of words that, presumably is poetry’s business” (p 127). By this, I understand Skinner to mean that the care and sensitivity that poets display in selecting language is akin to an environmental concern or outlook. The difficulty with this view may be that it implies that all poetry is by its very nature environmental.

Buell comments on the term ecopoetry. Some critics, Buell argues, criticize the prefix 'eco' because it connotes the natural world rather than the built one (p 12); it is redolent of the rural. It is used narrowly at a time that environmental poetry could

consider the diversity of bioregions. This concern I would endorse having agreed with Bennett's proposal previously that ecocriticism should address a variety of bioregions, both rural and urban.

Therefore, the difficulties with the term ecopoetry are considerable. It does not have an agreed meaning. As a term, environmental poetry is not restricted by prescriptive definitions. Poets are more inventive than writing explicit guides for planetary survival, though this may sometimes be addressed. Through my own practice-led research, it has become apparent that poets consider style as much as content: the demands of one may modify or even compromise the other. My term, environmental poetry, looks to the future unencumbered by existing positions and historical antecedents. It has a semiotic as well as referential aspect. It is able to encompass the phenomenological aspects of being alive as well as addressing political issues.

As this critical investigation progresses, I will continue to extend and qualify this emerging, new definition of environmental poetry. What light does this chapter throw on my project of arguing for a more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of environmental poetry? It reveals the need to promote an environmental poetry that addresses the so-called urban and suburban, as well as the rural. It can be more than phenomenological as political content is also important; one is not exclusive of the other. Furthermore, environmental poetry can disrupt and invalidate binarisms. My environmental poetry encompasses the natural and human world.

2. Silences and Blind Spots: A New Understanding for Environmental Poetry and Ecocriticism

In this chapter it will be argued that in mainstream environmental poetry form and style are undertheorized by ecocriticism. The nature of the relationship between the two discourses will then be explored as each discourse can learn from the other, there being different as well as shared agendas. Both discourses are multidisciplinary and afford opportunities for different areas of ecological concern to be discussed with a single text. One reason why environmental poetry and ecocriticism overlap is because both discourses deal with similar contents in similar ways. For example, the ISLE journal distinguishes between ‘Scholarly’ and ‘Non-Fiction’ ecocriticism. The non-fiction ecocriticism includes the first person, autobiographical work of writers like Evelyn I. Funda (2006) who is concerned with how gender shapes views of the environment in America in ‘A Farm Daughter’s Lament,’ an approach typical of lyrical poetry. Further intersections between environmental poetry, ecocriticism and postcolonialism, specifically the issue of migrancy, occur regarding their treatment of the environment.

Ecocriticism’s Blind Spot: Poetic Style

Ecocriticism has little to say on poetic style: on form and point of view. Conceived as a continuum of ecocritics, Scigaj (1999) and Buell (2005) would be at one end as

they make few references to the function of style in their ecocritical work. For instance, Scigaj discusses moments of *référance* in the work of Berry's *Openings* (1968), *référance* being “an appreciation of the cyclic processes of wild nature after a self-reflexive recognition of the limits of language” (p 38). Despite considering such limits of language, Berry's environmental standpoint is considered, but not his use of form and style. Buell, in his section on ‘Questions of Mimesis: Environment as Invention and Discovery’ (p 30), discusses how ecocritics often have what seems “an old-fashioned propensity for ‘realistic’ modes of representation, and a preoccupation with questions of factual accuracy” (p 31). He then goes on to discuss examples of poetry by Wordsworth, William Carlos Williams and indigenous Australian Oodgeroo Noonuccal without reference to form and style: issues such as the use of figures of speech, enjambment and metre.

Near the other end of the continuum, Levertov (1923-1997) emphasized the significance of form. A political activist and poet, Levertov's work utilized free verse and its concomitant lineation features. In her literary criticism, she maintained: “Form is never more than a *revelation* of content” (1973, p 317, italics in original). Returning to my working definition of environmental poetry, my own practice endorses Levertov's position: opportunities afforded by form are utilized for emphasis. Levertov's different perspective may be due to the fact she was a poet, perhaps highlighting again the need for poets and ecocritics to be in dialogue.

Between Buell and Scigaj on the one hand and Levertov on the other, Phillips (2003) considers the importance of form. He briefly analyses the correlation between ecosystems and form arguing there are no meaningful similarities. He

writes, "I suspect that the similarity between 'organic' literary forms (if there are any) and organisms or ecosystems is entirely negligible, and is therefore devoid of diagnostic significance" (p 144). Phillips maintains it is difficult to know if ecosystems have form since they are ecosystems, not poetry. They are subject to temporal change and some are in a process of continual flux; they are not fixed or regulated in the way forms are. Therefore, any similarities are minimal and coincidental.

Discussing environmental poetry in particular, Phillips is particularly critical of ecocritic John Elder claiming he too readily applies simplified ecological insights to environmental poetry in a hyperbolic and misdirected way (p 154). Phillips rightly argues that Elder is misguided in seeing environmental poetry as pastoral, relatively fixed, retrospective and elegiac. Phillips maintains: "Elder assumes that poetry's greatest theme and chief source of inspiration is and must be place" (p 153). Elder fails to acknowledge that the study of place, ecology itself, is a reductive science as ecofeminist and literary critic Christa Grewe-Volpp (2006) argues: "Despite their claim for objectivity and their reliance on facts, scientific discourse in general and ecological discourse in particular are themselves socially and historically constructed" (p 73). Similarly, Phillips correctly points out that environmental poetry is a discourse, an art form specifically shaped by a poet in a particular personal context: "Poetry is not a manifestation of landscape and climate" (p 157), but the decisions of the poet and effects of the language he or she uses. Using ecological terms to evaluate environmental poetry's success, to praise a particular poem, is misguided. Ecological terms lack the validity attributed to them. They do not confer objective merit, Phillips maintains. Indeed, what they are purportedly

assessing is another personal and socially constructed discourse. Therefore, Phillips argues, forms are not ecosystems; furthermore, the term ecosystem does not have the objective, positive, scientifically-proven connotation that ecocritics like Elder assume.

However, Phillips' view requires some qualification. With form, it must be acknowledged that enjambment, rhyme, rhythm and line length, and the foregrounding it produces, embody, enact or emphasize key elements of the subject without being the subject in reality. Technique suggests reality and, in that sense, is being used metaphorically. Therefore, there may be some common ground between Phillips and Elder. Although there is not a one-to-one correspondence between form and ecosystems, nevertheless, the utilization of form is an attempt to capture an aspect of the subject, perhaps an ecosystem, being described. Form is used metaphorically; it is not the thing being described itself, but a suggestion of the thing.

In terms of my own practice, poems such as 'Takoma, the Dolphin' (p 13) clearly utilize form to convey meaning. The form is central in conveying effectively the content. 'Takoma, the Dolphin' is a modified villanelle with a rhyming couplet by way of an ending that turns upon itself:

She's become a dead donkey story
leaping above her handler's dingy.
As she heads for the AWOL open sea,
we watch the war with a nice cup of tea (Pickford 2009: 13).

That is, the destructive activities within the poem will be repeated after the dolphin has returned to its natural habitat. The world of the poem is a circular, self-contained, irrational world of distortions. The exploitation of the non-human is conveyed by the creative use of form. Therefore, my own practice questions the strong position taken by Phillips. Furthermore, it perhaps questions ecocriticism to further consider the role of form, rather than being concerned with theme or content.

Phillips analyses another aspect of style, point of view. He considers the work of ecocritical editors of *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* Elder and Robert Finch (1990) whose book contains nature writing in a variety of genres. Phillips criticizes their perception of the nature writing tradition that offers a predominantly first person perspective imbued with what Phillips considers vague qualities:

‘Awareness,’ the ‘psychological’ and the ‘spiritual,’ ‘transcendence,’ ‘sensibility,’ ‘feeling,’ ‘sensation,’ and ‘perception’ are problematic notions precisely because ecocritics and nature writers...have put so very little pressure on them. Like resonance, they have become received ideas, and we are meant to gasp with admiration when we encounter them: *How beautiful nature writing is!* (Phillips 2003: 203, italics in original)

Hence, the writers “betray an unimaginative dependence on threadbare metaphors and scenarios” (p 204). In an analysis that promotes theory over the poet’s personal response, Phillips concludes, “emotion and personal uplift are not the central concerns of ecology” (p 204). Phillips insists, in rather a combative fashion, that

some aspects of good ecological research, rather than environmental poetry, can promote environmental understanding, although they are not objective truths.

I do not fully endorse Phillips' view as it is possible to "put pressure" (p 203) on emotional and psychological responses to nature. These should be considered on an individual basis. In some instances, emotional and personal epiphanies can be valid responses to the environment as has been demonstrated by the tradition of lyrical poetry that is predominantly first person, Wordsworth being a characteristic example. Humans' relationship with nature cannot be understood if our perspective is deemed invalid or unreliable. Indeed, Phillips' view seems to posit a human/nature binarism. One of poetry's strengths is that it can explore the personal dimension. Furthermore, as has been argued, ecology is not more reliable and objective because it seems to be beyond the personal, dealing with so-called facts, as Phillips would argue. Perhaps, the difference is one of emphasis more than kind. If Phillips is irked by the worst instances of nature writing and I am defending the best instances of environmental poetry, there may be some common ground between.

My questioning of Phillips' ecocriticism is also based on my own practice. 'Diving on Tongue Reef' (p 33) is an example of a first person epiphany in the tradition of the lyric that is central to environmental thought. At the climax of the poem, the two divers see a turtle:

We follow, hand in hand,
slip free of weight.
Between a liquid sky

and the flowers of the sea,
we fly (Pickford 2009: 33).

As the seabed falls away, the two characters have the experience of flying, or rather being like the sea turtle they are following. In the turtle's environment, they have a brief awareness of the creature's habitat, a moment of awareness captured by the rhyme. In the last instance, the brevity and simplicity of "we fly" (p 33) contrasts with the two preceding metaphors. This captures the wonder of the moment.

Practice-led research is here questioning the findings of ecocriticism: emotion and personal uplift *are* the concerns of ecology. They are an important part of humans' engagement with nature.

The Intersections between Environmental Poetry and Ecocriticism

Sometimes, as in the case of Berry (1993), it is thought there is no intersection between the discourses of ecocriticism and environmental poetry; in others, one discourse can learn from the other; in others still, a two-way relationship exists. This complex situation exists because there are many types of ecocriticism and environmental poetry. The ecocritical range stretches from the first person narratives of the conservationist John Muir (1992), through the anecdotal, non-fiction essays to be found in the essays of ISLE to the polemical Phillips.¹⁴ The poetic range stretches from the imperatives of Craig (1987), through the inventiveness of Murray (1993) and the political poetry of Levertov (1993) to the

¹⁴ ISLE's anecdotal, non-fiction essays are referred to as 'narrative scholarship' by Buell (2005) who credits Scott Slovic with the term (p 9).

anthropomorphism of Minhinnick (2002). The historical range and number of continents represented is considerable. The spread is diverse: if you compare the fictional, literary opening of nature writer and biologist Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) with Levertov's poem 'The Almost-Island' (1993), it is not certain which is ecocriticism and which environmental poetry. *Silent Spring* begins with the convention of the fictional, once-upon-a-time opening: "There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings" (p 3); 'The Almost-Island' with the overt and didactic, "All of my dread and all my longing hope that earth/may outwit the huge stupidity of its humans" (p 196). Simply to regard ecocriticism and environmental poetry as two discrete discourses is a simplification.

At one end of the spectrum, little exchange occurs between the two discourses. While many ecocritics may read environmental poetry, few poets read ecocriticism with the same vigour, although they may be more aware of environmental developments. Some poets may feel they do not need to read ecocriticism. For example, Berry is a poet hostile to ecocriticism. He dislikes the terms 'environment,' 'ecology' and 'ecosystem' as he thinks they do not convey the sense of responsibility needed by humans. These terms, Berry writes, "come from the juiceless, abstract intellectuality of the universities which were invented to disconnect, displace, and disembody the mind" (p 35). This is an extreme view at the end of a continuum of views. Some ecocriticism is as engaging as some environmental poetry. Also, it may be the case that Berry is emphasizing poetry's ability to be specific and work through examples, rather than being general and reductive, as is sometimes the case with ecocriticism.

Regarding the relationship between ecocriticism and environmental poetry, there can be a fertilization of ideas from one discourse to the other. For instance, in 'Ecothrillers: Environmental Cliffhangers,' Kerridge discusses how the popular thriller genre allows the public to be the "voyeuristic spectators of calamity" (p 244) as "ecological threats can be deployed for their scariness" (p 245). Linking popular media with environmental ethics, Kerridge points out the genre's need for closure and a climatic ending in which order is re-established. However, such an ending may not serve the environment if long term, unheroic action is needed to alter human behaviour; ecocritics "will be wary of the way ecological solutions are replaced by quick, violent fixes" (p 248).

I have taken Kerridge's ecocriticism and explored its application to environmental poetry by way of a poetic challenge. Kerridge's ecocriticism is a direct influence on my poem 'An Elephant's Eye' (p 23) in which I have experimented with the thriller cum science fiction genre. In ecocritical terms, it attempts to do what Kerridge suggests is difficult: to propose that the environmental problems with genetically modified crops are long term. This is attempted with the final image of the pathogens in the soil diminishing the natural root systems and the use of genetically modified fertilizers. Consequently, the grass will grow too high, high as an elephant's eye, a nightmare-like, incongruous image taken from the song by Oscar Hammerstein II, 'Oh What a Beautiful Morning:'

Though grass roots are small,
smaller than before, the grass
will sprout green, too green,

fluorescent green, climbin' skywards,
high as an elephant's eye (Pickford 2009: 26).

Unlike most thrillers, the character who functions as the hero is killed at the end of the poem. This, however, is not the climax, but the sinister image of G.M., fluorescent grass. This darker, ecological thriller does in environmental poetry what may be difficult in popular films. As a genre, environmental poetry may not be as formulaic as some film genres. Although a parody, ‘An Elephant's Eye’ is campaigning for environmental change and critiquing popular culture. It is an instance of environmental poetry responding to and benefiting from ecocriticism.

In some instances, the discourses of ecocriticism and environmental poetry intersect with one discourse qualifying the other. This is due to the characteristics of the discourses, the parameters within which they operate. Both are concerned with ideas. However, environmental poetry is also concerned with the imagination and emotions of the reader. My own practice challenges Bate’s (2000) ecocriticism in this regard. Regarding the pragmatics of how to solve environmental degradation, ecocriticism can more broadly contextualize its views in ecological discourse than environmental poetry. Scigaj makes the point: “Ecopoets distil ecological processes into aesthetic techniques to restore our lost sense of connectedness to the planet that bore and sustains us, but they are no PhD ecologists” (p 12). Poets are not in the position to produce a practical guide to planetary survival. It may be predictable and ineffective if they did. Such a guide can be better produced by other discourses. This is because poetry generally deals with representative and symbolic instances; it is selective and has to be given its short nature. In addition, poetry’s power is in how the message is conveyed, not just the message itself.

It is for this reason Bate rightly criticizes the poem 'Mother Earth: Her Whales' by Snyder. Bate's close reading of Snyder's poem is more specific than the reductive ecocriticism of Buell (1995), Scigaj and Bryson (2002). In the poem, Snyder is too concerned with ideology:

Brazil says 'sovereign use of Natural Resources'
 Thirty thousand kinds of unknown plants.
 The living actual people of the jungle sold and tortured--
 And a robot in a suit who peddles a delusion called 'Brazil' can speak
 for *them?* (Snyder cited by Bate 2000: 199, italics in original)

Bate correctly writes in criticism, "The poem has been written as an expression of a set of opinions, not as an attempt to transform into language an experience of dwelling on the earth" (pp. 199-200). The poem lacks imaginative and emotional engagement because insufficient attention has been paid to its style. It is the use of language that transforms the poem's message into something more than reportage.

However, as has been mentioned in chapter one, Bate goes further in arguing that ideas are secondary to imaginative engagement.¹⁵ Environmental poetry, or ecopoetry, to use Bate's term, may not be political in the sense feminism and postcolonialism are concerned with politics, but more phenomenological, trying to recapture a sense of imaginative empathy. In terms of my own practice, I think Bate should be more demanding of the role political content has to play in environmental poetry. Bate could more fully explore the type, amount of detail and extent to which

¹⁵ See page 122.

such content works in conjunction with style to produce imaginative enactment.

Why would poets avoid political content in promoting environmental improvement?

Bate's ecocriticism could be extended.

In showing how environmental poetry can develop the ecocriticism of Bate, Twichell's (1995) significant environmental and political collection *The Ghost of Eden* reveals how the political can be conveyed poetically. Twichell addresses environmental issues, but not didactically. For example, at the start of 'White Conclusion,' she compares her experience of sunset with what she knows about its depletion scientifically. Using well-selected nouns ("gash") and verbs ("leaks"), metaphors ("gash" and "dreamscape of sky") and enjambment ("but a gash//in the carbon dreamscape of sky"), she writes:

What's left of the day
leaks from an orange fissure overhead,

not the scorched hole
that scientists say is there
above the sunset, but a gash

in the carbon dreamscape of sky (Twichell 1995: 46).

The political here is imaginatively engaging because of the manipulation of style and form. The political can be tackled in the realm of the aesthetic. Theme and style cohere. Additionally, it is worth noting that Twichell does not provide a didactic and comprehensive treatise on carbon footprints or carbon quotas.

Indeed, the imaginative and the political realms are not vastly different. Some political acts may require an imaginative element in order to conceive of the world in an alternative way, to visualize how people's lives could be different. There is a tradition of poetry generally being politically persuasive. Although political legislation often sets minimum standards of behaviour or limits on human activity, its origin resides in the notion that the world can be other than it is. Environmental poetry is suited to handling ideas.

This notion may originate as far back as Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1840). Here Shelley argues "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (p 59). In particular, he argues:

The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the
awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion
or institution, is poetry (Shelley 1972: 59).

Today, this may be questioned in a multi-media world. Nevertheless, drafting poetry and legislation, or, to use an example, conceptualizing how factory hens should be treated differently, all require the ability to imagine the world as other than it is. Overall, it is the case that Bate overstates his view. Environmental poetry can focus on ideas. Environmental poetry is key in qualifying and refocusing Bate's perspective. In the two-way relationship between environmental poetry and ecocriticism, environmental poetry is able to qualify and refocus ecocriticism.

In addition to environmental poetry and ecocriticism having different and shared agendas, it is the case that the discourse of environmental poetry is a space that can

accommodate a number of different discourses. Within environmental poetry, different discourses are explored and have a relationship with the discourse of environmental poetry itself. For instance, sometimes environmental poetry can intersect with postcolonialism casting postcolonialism in an environmental light, an ‘ecopostcolonialism.’ Environmental poetry is a space where postcolonial and environmental discourses intersect.

Diasporas, notions of nationhood and the effect such issues have on personal identity are explored in terms of how the environment is portrayed in ‘Crossing the Nullarbor’ (p 49). John McLeod (2000) outlines such issues in his overview of the main concepts of postcolonial criticism *Beginning Postcolonialism*. He argues migrancy can lead to a sense of discontinuity in outlook, an unclear sense of home or belonging, and a sense of living ‘in-between’ countries or societies that can be painful, perilous and marginalizing. As McLeod observes, commenting on migrancy and the notion of home, “home becomes primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present” (p 211). He concludes, “the migrant occupies a *displaced* position” (p 211, italics in original). In terms of my own practice, ‘Crossing the Nullarbor’ acknowledges this perspective, but also, by the end of the poem, recognizes the alternative view that migrancy can be liberating and enabling. An ‘either/or’ position is undesirable and avoided.

‘Crossing the Nullarbor’ problematizes views of nationhood and personal and sexual identity as the protagonist struggles to reassert her sense of self in a new country with its different weather, landscape and new flora and fauna. The

environment acts as a symbol for her sense of alienation. The protagonist cannot name or categorize some of the native flora, heightening her sense of being without roots. Early in her new life in Australia, she travels to Lake Eyre:

To dry Lake Eyre—full
of water to the horizon, shifting
like a mirage, white
with wheeling birds' wings
we didn't know the names of,
shore splattered with flowers—
daises like poached eggs—
from seed that lay dead
for decades in the red soil (Pickford 2009: 51).

It is a good omen the rain has arrived. Like the seed that has lain dead for years, the main character's own identity can now start to flourish. Using Bate's term from Martin Heidegger, the protagonist can begin to "dwell" (p 216). Bate defines Heidegger's use of the term as follows: "that authentic form of being which he set against what he took to be the false ontologies of Cartesian dualism and subjective idealism" (p 261). This holistic approach to living does not endorse a binary perspective or idealism's emphasis on the validity of the mental world at the expense of the physical one. At the end of the poem, the protagonist can start to live authentically by taking an interest in and caring for the earth. She is open to the possibility of dwelling, taking her modest place as a person who is part of the environment.

Environmental poetry, therefore, is able to accommodate different discourses and examine the relationship between them. 'Crossing the Nullarbor' is a poem about ideas. It considers issues concerned with gender as well as different views of migrancy as they affect the particular personal circumstances of the protagonist. The poem does not use the environment merely as a vehicle to chart migrancy issues. The environment is not used as a backdrop. It is not generalized and treated in a reductive way, but is part of the way in which migrancy is understood. For example, at the end of the poem, the protagonist reflects:

Last spring, I made it
to Kangaroo Island. Jack never
fancied the Nullarbor, its 92 miles
without a bend, its maddening
endlessness, road kill of camels
lying among the pretty heath,
a skinny, white shrub
that can survive the desert (Pickford 2009: 51).

The shrub pretty heath is not merely pleasing visual detail, but a symbol of the character. Significantly, the character names the shrub. Gender, migrancy and the environment are all explored in this poem, often in terms of each other.

In addition to environmental poetry being an artistic space where different discourses overlap and negotiate their different perspectives, some environmental poetry is also able to offer a more holistic and complex outlook than some ecocriticism. The difference in the discourses is evident when considering 'Change' (p 47) that is concerned with a Western family's stereotypes concerning Australian

Aborigines. Cultural critics Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak (2000) argue minority cultures are often commercially exploited: “Too often the effort to salvage ancestral images has been animated by a domineering consciousness, one that insensitively ransacks or even plunders the tribal cultures” (p 224). Ancient images are not explored for their cultural significance; sometimes they are exploited to maintain the dominant ideology in its position of economic and cultural power. This “essentially colonialist attitude” (p 224) is questioned as they maintain new societies should attempt to find equivalent cultural symbols from their own contemporary worlds.

Such colonial representations are explored in ‘Change.’ Set in Northern Australia, the native people who are employed at the Tjapukai Cultural Park to some extent collude with their own stereotyped representation.¹⁶ Hence, the white European protagonists recall,

The bus was late.
We both remember it
rounding the corner, painted
like a boomerang, selling
the Tjapukai Cultural Park... (Pickford 2009: 48).

This surreal image exposes the bankruptcy of the Western perspective with the Aborigines economically participating in their own cultural dilution. Here postcolonialism is shaping environmental poetry in terms of content. As postcolonial issues are often explored through literature, it is not surprising,

¹⁶ Consider their website: <http://www.tjapukai.com.au> [20 January 2009]

perhaps, that they can be explored through environmental poetry, although postcolonialism also draws on wider socio-political frameworks. However, the generalized pronouncements of postcolonial criticism are given particular shape and form in environmental poetry, in a more human way. The nature of the Rozaks' theory is such that it is generalized and unspecific, as is sometimes the case with ecocriticism. However, poetry generally, as has been argued, deals with specific, representative instances where character, setting, plot, form and language cohere to make an experience that is believable to the reader. Environmental poetry's greater complexity in this instance is because it is dealing with several discourses concurrently and examining their relationship regarding how they affect particular characters.

The combination of such factors does not simplify the content, although less content may be considered. In 'Change,' a simplistic pastoral view is avoided. Bate warns about the myth of the idyll:

We look at shepherds or Native Americans or Australian Aborigines
and idealize them, *idyllize* them, into a 'state of nature' which we
have lost. We lament our own alienation and tell ourselves that once
there was a time when all of humankind lived in their happy state
(Bate 2000: 74, italics in original).

Indeed, the idyll is lost; the pastoral is not wished for, but literally consigned to the museum within 'Change.' The Western adults implicitly accept some historical responsibility for the destruction of the Aborigines' way of life, but as parents confront their own prejudices concerning the practical issue of the Aborigine being

drunk and possibly dangerous. In other words, the representation of the Aborigine is a complex one: there is no simple stereotyping of either Aborigine or Westerners. Here, environmental poetry has the latitude to deal with human issues in a qualified way. Environmental poetry is an artistic space in which many factors, psychology, sociology and politics, can be present and interact holistically and simultaneously. My own practice reveals that environmental poetry can be a place where many discourses negotiate their meanings. This occurs not reductively or hypothetically, but in human terms. On the other hand, ecocriticism and postcolonialism are frequently arranged thematically and chronologically. However, readers of environmental poetry do not lead their lives in discrete, thematic, chronological units of time. This results, in this instance, in environmental poetry being more holistic and complex.

This chapter has analysed how ecocriticism has a blind spot regarding the style of environmental poetry, although I have considered a few exceptions regarding form and point of view. Sometimes environmental poetry offers a space where different discourses can enter into a relationship. Environmental poetry may not be able to offer the depth of detail that ecocriticism or postcolonialism can, but it can be more complex in capturing a reader's experience of the world that may be contradictory and non-sequential. Ecocriticism that fails to appreciate the nature of the discourse of environmental poetry may be critically confined to some extent.

Additionally, in arguing for a more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of environmental poetry, poets should continue to utilize the opportunities afforded by form. Form is meaning, as the aphorism goes, and can play an

important role in evincing subject matter. In so doing, the use of a variety of different points of view can be effective, there being nothing inherently good or bad about a particular perspective per se. Poets who are aware of how the discourse of environmental poetry works can cover diverse areas in a holistic, complex way that the reader may acknowledge is relevant to their world.

3. Forcing Dumb Animals to Speak

This chapter will focus on non-human creatures or the animals and insects humans share the world with. The term non-human is a useful ecocritical term that includes all living creatures whether animals or insects. By being inclusive, it refocuses attention on the fact that other terms like animals or mammals are associated with a finite number of particular creatures that are often regarded in a positive way. This chapter considers whether it is legitimate for one species to represent another it can never know fully. If it is legitimate, *which* non-humans should be represented? Furthermore, if they are to feature in environmental poetry, *how* should they be represented? This discussion will be framed by considering largely contemporary environmental poetry from the last forty years.

Should Humans Represent Non-Humans

To cite just a few historical examples, William Cowper (1731-1800) lamented the death of his pet hare in 'Epitaph on a Hare' (1783, p 84), John Keats (1795-1821) wrote about the human significance of the nightingale in 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819, p 112) and Edwin Muir (1887-1959) declared in 'The Horses' that since the coming of horses, humans' lives had been enhanced: "Our life is changed; their coming our beginning" (pp. 246-7). There are many other examples that show poets have felt they can and, perhaps, should write about non-humans. Is it to be assumed this literary tradition is without environmental justification? This question might be

better understood by making explicit the reasons behind poets' representation of non-humans.

Although many ecocritics argue humans should represent non-humans, one exception is feminist Donna Haraway (1992) whose field is male bias in scientific culture, biology and technology. Hers is a scientific discourse engaged with theory, a different type of discourse from both literary criticism and environmental poetry. In 'The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,' she argues against a narrow type of representation of nature in which "the whole world is remade in the image of commodity production" (p 297). To enable this to happen, two preconditions are important:

- 1) unblinding ourselves from the sun-worshiping stories about the history of science and technology as paradigms of rationalism; and 2) refiguring the actors in the construction of the ethno-specific categories of nature and culture (Haraway 1992: 297).

In reconfiguring what the term nature means, Haraway believes it is important to examine the way in which it is fashioned by "a co-construction among humans and non-humans" (p 297). In deconstructing the terms nature and culture, and whether non-humans should be represented, Haraway deals with two questions concurrently: firstly, who speaks for the jaguar and, secondly, who speaks for the foetus. She is critical of the common, usual framing of both questions as an advocate, a "ventriloquist" (p 311), who could be a poet I assume, often conveys his or her "fondest dream" (p 311) of the jaguar and foetus being represented. The ill-informed advocate distorts the subject represented in the framing of the question.

Haraway contends other closely related agents to the jaguar and foetus that could do the representing, like the Kayapo Indians, in the case of the jaguar, and the mother, in the case of the foetus, are “disempowered” (p 312). They are “reconstituted as objects of a particular kind—as the ground of a representational practice that *forever* authorizes the ventriloquist” (p 312, italics in original). In other words, they “disappear” or are “reconstituted as beings with opposing ‘interests’ ” (p 312). The Kayapo Indians and mother are thought to be unable to represent the jaguar and foetus fairly; they become “often threatening” (p 312). So, the only empowered person is “the spokesperson, the one who represents” (p 312), the ventriloquist poet.

Haraway’s position is problematic in a number of ways. In qualified and complex instances of representation, the surrounding contextual factors, namely the Kayapo Indians and mother, do not necessarily need to be cast as Other or “threatening” (p 312). It is an assumption they are inevitably constructed as actors incapable of rational, balanced judgements. Next, it seems to be a misunderstanding of the role of point of view in environmental poetry to assume the ventriloquist poet needs to be “disinterested” (p 312). A poet can explore a number of different positions, “fondest dream” (p 311) or not. Haraway’s critique of the scientific paradigm does not fit the literary one; hers is not a critique of environmental poetry. Lastly, although there might be a space or separation between that which is represented and its surrounding contextual factors, it does not follow that the Kayapo Indians and mother are always disempowered. A single poem might represent jaguar and Kayapo Indians, mother and foetus. Arguing the jaguar cannot be represented is unproven.

Opposing Haraway, cultural critic and activist Jan Hochman (1997) insists that it is possible to represent animals without giving them a human voice, the ventriloquism criticized by Haraway:

I believe or at least hope that most environmentalists and animal-rights advocates...do not think of themselves as ventriloquists putting words into the mouths of (dumb) animals. Environmentalists and animal-rights advocates might be better characterized as representing jaguars or speaking...in the name of jaguars; for this, as I see it, means speaking for the survival and the continued well-being of the jaguar, which, with or without a jaguar's sanction, is less problematic than not representing them at all (Hochman 1997: 92).

Hochman's phrase "in the name of" (p 92) is important in revealing that he considers it possible to speak on behalf of non-humans. For example, in his *Translations for the Natural World* (1993), Murray captures aspects of the non-human and plant world using a range of devices to enact the characteristics of his subjects. In 'Shoal,' the collective shoal is written about in the first person to suggest the unity of its identity. At the end of the poem, the fish are

...all earblades for the eel's wave-gust
over crayfishes' unpressured beading,
for the bird-dive boom, redfin's gaped gong— (Murray 1993: 22)

Here, the use of coined nouns (earblades) and verbs (wave-gust), the enactment created by the enjambment (wave-gust/over) and the onomatopoeia (boom) all capture the imagined experience of the shoal. Murray goes further than speaking in

the name of non-humans by imagining the ‘voice’ of non-humans. Speaking in the name of non-humans means using diction and sentence construction in a conventional fashion to convey the non-human’s point of view. Giving non-humans a voice means using imaginative empathy to manipulate the diction, sentence construction and form to organically utilize the opportunities afforded by environmental poetry. This type of representation is less likely to be conventional. Murray’s approach shows Haraway it is possible to be more than a ventriloquist.

Plumwood (2002) also supports Hochman’s stance regarding the representation of non-humans: “The problems of representing another culture’s or another species’ communication...pale before the enormity of failing to represent them at all, or of representing them as non-communicative and non-intentional beings” (p 61).

Readers of ‘Shoal’ obviously accept it is not the language of the fish, but an attempt to imaginatively empathize with them using a poetic voice and its concomitant foregrounding. Humans have an imaginative, empathic quality. Many humans feel saddened when, for example, they see an animal in distress; they imagine what it is like to be another creature. Humanity’s respect for non-humans is based on the reciprocal realization that humans can have empathy for non-humans in the same way some ‘higher’ functioning mammals may recognize shared qualities with humans. For the ‘lesser’ creatures and insects, respect is extended to them in the same way humans confer status on mentally-challenged people and fetuses despite their lack of empathetic or intellectual ability.¹⁷

¹⁷ This view is based on the insights of philosopher Peter Singer (1993: 131-2).

Therefore, Hochman and Plumwood make a strong ecocritical case for the non-human world to be represented by the human world. Indeed, the discourse of environmental poetry is able to represent the non-human world in a unique way from other discourses as Murray demonstrates.

The Argument for Inclusiveness: The 'Which' Question

This section moves beyond how poets feel they can and, perhaps, should represent the non-human by sometimes directly speaking for them. It considers more broadly the grounds by which some non-humans are excluded from representation and whether or not this is legitimate.

Lisa Leb duska (2003) offers an environmental critique of which animals are represented in the commercial media including environmental pressure groups. In attempting to avoid a type of representation that privileges some non-human creatures above others, she argues that the visual and idealistic representation of 'popular' non-human creatures like the dolphin should be critiqued as being commercially motivated. Leb duska argues that with such a creature the representation should be comprehensive, non-idealistic and not primarily visual. However, typically, the dolphin is "filled only with its ability to produce a how-cute, anthropomorphized smile" (p 153). In other words, only certain popular creatures are represented in the media and only in a limited fashion.

Before progressing, Lebduska's position requires a number of clarifications. Firstly, Lebduska seems to insufficiently acknowledge that in the majority of instances of representation, whether in environmental poetry or a Greenpeace booklet, the representation will be selective, something especially important in poetry that is typically short. Poetry is also symbolic and uses a limited number of details to best represent an overall impression or concern. Secondly, in political and commercial terms, I suspect Greenpeace has selected its exploitative representation to raise money. A pragmatist may argue this is justified; an idealist, this action undermines the very project of environmental protection. Lastly, Greenpeace may take the position that a simplified representation is better than no representation at all. Although Lebduska is not discussing environmental poetry, it is possible to explore how her ideas are relevant to the discourse.

Lebduska analyses which non-humans are represented and how they should be represented. In the media and frequently in environmental poetry, so-called popular, iconic, large non-human creatures often feature rather than smaller animals or insects. Pandas and dolphins are represented in an idealistic, commercial, visual way without contextualizing some of the environmental issues concerning the creature, Lebduska maintains. However, she argues, the representation does not need to be of exotic, putative fashionable creatures as this may privilege one creature over another.

I have taken Lebduska's analysis and shown how it finds particular expression in my environmental poetry, especially in poems like 'Pet Scorpion' (p 14). Here, the 'unfashionable' scorpion is the main subject of the poem. The details within the

poem deal with the different aspects of its life: its evolution, the destruction of its habitat and its treatment by humans. The representation is not idealistic, neither does it highlight the most ‘exciting’ aspects of its life such as hunting, mating and giving birth.¹⁸ Throughout my work, there is an attempt to be inclusive regarding the selection of non-humans and, consequently, crayfish, birds, butterflies and pigeons are all represented, albeit briefly in some instances.

Such inclusiveness is important as poets do not frequently focus on common, smaller and putative less iconic species. It is unusual for poets to write about the “slimy things” (p 7) mentioned in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) that, initially, so appalled the bearded seaman in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem. Interestingly, the ancient mariner realizes at the end of the poem, “He prayeth well, who loveth well/Both man and bird and beast” (p 32)—and other ‘lowly’ creatures such as insects, he might add today! As with Elizabeth Bishop (1983) and Kathleen Jamie (2004), the emphasis tends to be on encounters and epiphanies with larger non-humans such as moose and whales.¹⁹ In Jamie’s poem ‘The Whale-watcher,’ quoted in full below, the ‘iconic’ whales are encountered, giving the narrator a renewed determination and hope:

And when at last the road
gives out, I’ll walk—
harsh grass, sea-maw,
lichen-crust ed bedrock—

and hole up the cold

¹⁸ This view is informed by Garrard’s (2004) analysis of ‘ecoporn’ (p 127).

¹⁹ See Bishop’s poem ‘The Moose’ (p 173).

summer in some battered
caravan, quartering
the brittle waves

till my eyes evaporate
and I'm willing again
to deal myself in:
having watched them

breach, breathe, and dive
far out in the glare,
like stitches sewn in a rent
almost beyond repair (Jamie 2004: 25).

The whales are inspirational. Such large and so-called popular creatures have a significant and positive effect on the humans. It is interesting that poets do not encounter whales and have an indifferent or negative experience. For this reason, Andrew Motion's (2004) 'Sparrows' is uncommon as the birds are small and not typically as revered as birds of prey. He represents them as follows:

No longer
daily greeter
scratch singer
piebald shitter,
bib bobber
cocky bugger
boss brawler,
gossip spinner,
crowd pleaser,

heaven filler,

wing dancer.

No longer (Motion 2004: 143-4).

The first use of “no longer” refers to the cessation of the birds’ actions that typify their character; the second use refers more to their extinction.

One reason ecocriticism has not dealt with the underrepresentation of small animals and insects may be because there are so many of them. Another reason may be concerned with the Romantic tradition of poetry with its focus on the lyrical, first person, human perspective. Lastly, the reason the panda is preferred above insects may be due to the lack of information that exists about some insects and the societal and media bias towards larger creatures. Consequently, it might not be surprising that environmental poetry has not paid sufficient regard to the full range of non-humans, something my practice is challenging to some extent.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that popular creatures should not be represented at all. Dolphins, giant pandas, elephants and whales, for instance, can be the subjects of environmental poetry; to champion just the small and less commercially desirable non-humans would be positive discrimination. For this reason, I also have a small number of poems that are concerned with platypuses, Tasmanian tigers—now extinct—and dolphins. If ecocriticism and environmental poetry want to give special emphasis to so-called higher order creatures, they should have clear justification for this. Singer (1993) has attempted to define which creatures should have the same status as humans, namely those that experience pain, have a consciousness, can form relationships and have a sense of self or identity over time:

Some non-human animals appear to be rational and self-conscious, conceiving of themselves as distinct beings with a past and a future. When this is so, or to the best of our knowledge may be so, the case against killing them is strong, as strong as the case against killing permanently intellectually disabled human beings at a similar mental level (Singer 1993: 131-2).

If mammals that display these characteristics should have an elevated position in the human scheme of things, ecocriticism needs to discuss the ethical and anthropological reasons why a panda is more worthy of representation than an insect.

To some extent, my own practice challenges ecocriticism and some poets to focus more fully on the smaller animals and insects. 'Crayfish on Father's Day' (p 30) is an exploration of an environmental representation of an underrepresented non-human. The female crayfish is central to the poem and is not described in an idealized, passive way: its young are "a writhing cream" (p 30). With such a poem, my practice shows how environmental poetry can be more inclusive and liberated to teach ecocriticism the gradations of Coleridge's "slimy things" (p 7) and their important place in ecocritical discourse.

Conditions for Representation

As I have argued against the human/non-human binarism in my definition of environmental poetry, it follows that the human perspective should not be an elevated, superior one when considering how non-humans are represented. A human perspective is not necessarily a privileged one, just a human one; all creatures, including humans, have their own perspective. Therefore, in 'Platypus' (p 17), the non-human creature is looking for the humans:

A bill noses from underneath the bank,
under our toes, looking for us, looking (Pickford 2009: 17).

In this instance, the same verb is used to show the equality between the human and non-human. The non-human world is watching as well as being watched, just as the humans are, the difference being humans can write about the experience, though, with other abilities, they obviously lack some of the 'superior' functions of non-humans, like a dog's ability to smell. Scigaj (1999) argues humans are not privileged in their outlook; they are both watchers of the world and watched; sometimes, "ecopoets experience the oneness of life as a paradoxically reciprocal state of seeing and being seen" (p 76). In other words, treating humans and non-humans equally means accepting the validity of their perspective whether it is similar to our own or not.

The acceptance of difference, but respect for equality, occurs in other environmental poets' work. Snyder (1992) captures the moment of connection

between a deer and himself in 'We Make our Vows Together with All Beings,'
cited in full below:

Eating a sandwich

At work in the woods,

As a doe nibbles buckbrush in snow

Watching each other,

Chewing together.

A Bomber from Beale

Over the clouds,

Fills the sky with a roar.

She lifts head, listens,

Waits till the sound has gone by.

So do I (Snyder 1992: 350).

There is no privileged perspective; both creatures are eating to sustain themselves and are threatened by the destructive bomber plane. The unity of outlook is captured by the simplicity and brevity of the last sentence. Minhinnick (2002) explores a shared perspective with a bear in his sequence 'A Natural History of Saskatchewan.' His first person narrator, upon encountering a bear, reflects:

So I looked at the bear and the bear looked at me

At the edge of the tamarack

Where the six months snow had made its last redoubt,

And silence was a language we could share (Minhinnick 2002: 45).

The silence is shared between the two creatures and is the poet's focus, rather than the bear's lack of language. Minhinnick highlights similarities rather than differences. These important environmental poets show a respect for difference and an awareness of shared perspectives, both of which avoid the objectification of the non-human.

I would like to extend this notion by arguing that environmental poetry not only can deal with non-humans in an empathetic, respectful, non-objectifying way, it sometimes is more suited to representing the non-human than some types of ecocriticism. Within my own work, meeting a non-human sometimes enhances human understanding. The human receives from the relationship with non-humans a clearer insight, a sense of commonality, a shared perspective, a sense of connection. This is especially clear in 'Crayfish on Father's Day' (p 30). On Father's Day, the unity of the family is reflected in the empathy the father shows regarding his treatment of the female crayfish. Even though the crayfish may be a signal crayfish, a non-native some argue should be destroyed, the poem concludes:

Signal or white-clawed,
I search for a rock close
to the bank, out of
torrents that'd sweep
the small ones away (Pickford 2009: 30).

Here, environmental poetry's personal locus reveals how non-humans contribute to the quality of human life. More than the abstract and generalized ecocriticism of Hochman, the specific particularities of environmental poetry test and expand ecocriticism by showing how environmental poetry not only can represent non-humans, in this instance, it can do it more effectively than some ecocriticism. Hochman argues for the possibility of representation; environmental poetry demonstrates the detail of this, how it is possible.

Plumwood acknowledges in her generalized environmental philosophy that it is possible for a close relationship to exist between humans and non-humans, something I demonstrate in my own work. Non-humans can be regarded as "familiar" (p 165) in our lives: "A familiar could be an animal with whom we can form some kind of communicative bond, friendship, protective relationship, companionship or acquaintance" (p 165). Sometimes such a relationship is portrayed in poetry. The ancient mariner in Coleridge's poem celebrates how the albatross, "every day, for food or play,/Came to the mariners' hollo!" (p 4) The aspect of play here is noteworthy, although unspecified.

However, in contemporary environmental poetry, such relationships are rarely portrayed, although I have demonstrated they are possible and Plumwood endorses this position. For instance, one of the foremost British nature poets of the twentieth century, Ted Hughes (1982), mainly presents the competitive and bloody aspects of creatures' lives, the strong life-spirits, but there is little or no companionship. For instance, in 'Hawk Roosting,' the hawk's territory is "the allotment of death" (p 43). Snyder, Bishop and Jamie are similarly inspired and reflective in their

interactions with nature. The representation of non-humans is often imbued with awe, respect and gravity. Such serious concerns are removed from Plumwood's qualities of friendship, bonding and companionship. In addition, few poets seem to approach non-human familiars in a light, playful way. One exception to this is the Scottish poet Norman MacCaig (1971). A typical example is how he speculates that frogs

...never
panic so much that they fail
to make stylish triangles
with their ballet dancer's
legs (MacCaig 1971: 99).

MacCaig is frequently bold and witty in his conceits using human metaphors.²⁰ The type of representation in 'Peacock Butterfly' (p 10) is similarly light and humorous. By the conclusion, the family have formed a protective relationship with the butterfly:

If
future generations return,
they'll hibernate here
like in a hollow log or tree.

We imagine a brood of hundreds
dancing around our house,
a shower of confetti (Pickford 2009: 12).

²⁰ I do have a reservation about MacCaig (1971) using the non-human as a vehicle to demonstrate his own stylistic dexterity. In other words, the poem may be more about the human, the poet, than the non-human, the frogs.

The butterfly's life cycle becomes linked with the family's. The simile of confetti is celebratory, dispelling the subdued tone created when the butterfly departs, as is the use of rhyme, used for the first time. Furthermore, the representation of the butterfly is not reverential: it tucks itself into the curtains "like a bookmark" (p 10) and "turns up its nose/at a mashed tangerine" (p 11). Before the peacock butterfly departs, it defecates, an unsentimental, earthy farewell. Therefore, my own practice sometimes counters the approach taken by many poets who observe non-humans. Such observations tend to be serious reflections. My own environmental poetry explores the particularities of Plumwood's generalized ecocriticism. Although not specifically writing about poetry, Plumwood challenges poets' existing representation and my environmental poetry shows how ecocritical theory can be enacted in practice.

Anthropomorphism in environmental poetry is an important issue to consider when looking at the representation of non-humans because it does not always have to result in a simplified, cartoon-like representation. Similarly, anthropomorphism is an issue concerning the representation of bioregions, something that will be discussed in the next chapter. With regard to non-humans and their bioregions, I will argue that anthropomorphism is an acceptable and effective practice.

Plumwood defines anthropomorphism as "attributing to non-humans characteristics only humans have" (p 56). I understand this to mean the former having the human ability to form relationships, the latter, the ability to manipulate language. However, Plumwood quickly points to the limitation of such a definition as it "presupposes that there is no overlap of characteristics between humans and non-humans" (p 56).

Higher mammals live in social groups, communicating in a limited fashion. To assume there are two discreet groups would be to posit an oppositional binarism.

Plumwood continues by arguing that with any language used by humans there will be some anthropomorphism present at a “background level” (p 57). That is, humans’ language use results in non-humans being known through the filter of language. However, this should not be a reason not to represent non-humans, Plumwood insists, otherwise there would need to be one universal language agreed upon by all that would be the only means of discussing cross-species or even cross-cultural difference.

Anthropomorphism can be used effectively to represent the non-human world. Plumwood thinks so because, firstly, the human and non-human have shared qualities and, secondly, humans cannot avoid using language in representation. For humans to use anthropomorphism in representation is not necessarily to adopt a colonizing or privileged position in which non-humans are perceived as Other and secondary to humans.

Apart from Plumwood’s background level of anthropomorphism, carefully considered poems avoid imposing human values on non-humans. To return to Murray, he attempts to fully manipulate language and form to convey the non-human perspective. No privileged position is implied. With such translations, to use Murray’s term, non-humans are not reduced to ways in which they are like the humans, neither are human qualities imposed upon them. Indeed, Phillips (2003)

makes the point that our enjoyment of the non-human is due to the very differences that exist:

...difference is one source of the pleasure we take in encountering birds and other wildlife, which suggests that things can be different from us without being other than we are—without being, as different things are sometimes said to be, *the Other* (Phillips 2003: 224, italics in original).

Otherness implies not just difference, but also the fact that one element or category is superior. Murray avoids such notions of superiority or there being a hierarchy. Yet, at the same time, he respects and appreciates the differences between humans and non-humans. Indeed, if all human and non-human properties were common, poets would always be dealing with the same animal, themselves. When poets use sophisticated and inventive techniques to represent the essence of non-humans, this is not anthropomorphic, but an empathetic and creative venture. On the other hand, poor, often child-like representations of non-humans use anthropomorphism to simply project human qualities onto non-humans whether or not they are appropriate.

Ultimately, poets can deal with both differences and similarities between humans and non-humans. For example, in Hughes' poem 'Thrushes,' he makes a connection between the birds and the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:

Is it their single-minded-sized skulls, or a trained
Body, or genius or a nestful of brats
Gives their days this bullet and automatic

Purpose? Mozart's brain had it, and the shark's mouth (Hughes 1982: 57).

Hughes is exploring the quick and single-minded nature of thrushes and Mozart's brain at the same time; one is understood by drawing upon our understanding of the other. Plumwood agrees the human/non-human relationship can be two-way: "In crossing anthropocentric boundaries what is required is a double movement that seeks to understand both similarity and difference 'in dynamic tension' " (p 59). This dynamic tension occurs in my work at the end of 'Crayfish on Father's Day' (p 30) and in 'Peacock Butterfly' (p 10) where the connection is made between the courtship of butterflies and humans:

Courtship is a flight of spirals
and twists before basking,
wings wide open.
One evening, kids away,
we steal to bed early.
Warmed by the heating,
our visitor flicks, flicks
and glides around the lamp.
We bask, wide open (Pickford 2009: 11).

The same terms are used to refer to the actions of the butterfly and the humans. Indeed, the butterfly's actions entertain and embellish the human experience. Environmental poetry here is refining ecocriticism. Plumwood's tentative acknowledgement that similarities and differences may be realized is confidently

seized upon by poets. Furthermore, poets can exploit the opportunities afforded by being anthropomorphic, for want of a better term, without being anthropocentric.

On the whole, the non-human world is rarely represented politically by environmental poetry. The extent to which the non-human world is controlled has been generally overlooked for representations of non-humans as autonomous, free spirits. Surprisingly, there is little environmental poetry on non-humans and militarism and vivisection, although the exception is concerned with poems on hunting.²¹ Who makes the decisions behind the exploitation of non-humans? Who maintains that their exploitation is acceptable? Regarding such political and commercial issues, that are sometimes related, environmental poetry is largely silent.

Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring* documents how commercial and political imperatives resulted in pesticides, specifically DDT, killing animals and insects. However, there is no poetic equivalent of *Silent Spring*, credited by some with starting environmentalism and described by Garrard (2004) as a "decidedly poetic parable" (p 1). The anthology *Wild Reckoning* (2004) reveals environmental poetry's blind spot. Subtitled "An anthology provoked by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*," it contains many poems written before 1962 and others about non-human creatures, but few are responses to *Silent Spring*. Many of the nature poems represent healthy animals in their 'normal' habitats.

²¹ See Clare's 'The Badger' (p 162) and Canadian poet Alden Nowlan's (1996) 'The Bull Moose' (pp. 28-9). Vivisection and vegetarianism are addressed by Twichell (1995) whilst militarism is addressed in my poem 'Takoma the Dolphin' (p 13).

Although there is little investigation of the exploitation of non-humans by environmental poetry and poetry generally, a small number of exceptions exist. There are single poems: D.H. Lawrence's (1964) 'Elephants in the Circus' (p 425) and 'Two Performing Elephants' (p 426), Edwin Brock's (1977) 'Song of the Battery Hen' (p 41-2), Gillian Clarke's (1982) 'Friesian Bull' (p 36) and Hughes' (1982) poem on zoos, 'The Jaguar' (p 15). In terms of full collections, Craig's (1987) *Against Looting* and Twichell's (1995) *The Ghost of Eden* (1995) are important.

My own practice, therefore, is questioning contemporary environmental poetry's omission. In 'Platypus' (p 17), I call into question the commercial representation of non-humans. The platypus not only is an "Aussie logo" (p 18), but a totem, a dreamtime creature. Although the platypus is a 'popular,' iconic Australian creature, this type of representation has been countered by exploring other aspects of the creature's life. Political exploitation is questioned in 'Takoma the Dolphin' (p 13) and commercial in the parody 'Game Boy's *Ty the Tassie Tiger*' (p 21). Satire is employed in both poems as a method to critique the world. In 'Game Boy's *Ty the Tassie Tiger*,' Nintendo, the company that produces Game Boys, signifies the industrial, capitalist world. The poem exploits the hyperbole of commercial copy in trying to sell the game to its young, mainly male, audience, but in so doing, reveals its own ethical bankruptcy. The Tasmanian tiger is portrayed as a fashionable human character on an action-packed quest that involves eliminating indigenous people and 'unpopular' non-humans. Ironically, the Tasmanian tiger is extinct due to the attitude expressed by Ty, the main character. The poem begins:

As the last tiger ever,
 escape evil Hobart Zoo
 with your sniper boomerang,
 your upgradeable signature weapon.

In your board shorts and shades,
 explore all 16 levels
 of wild and woolly outback
 and save The Land of Skippy (Pickford 2009: 21).

The other non-humans that populate the poem are represented in a stereotyped, hierarchical fashion. They can be killed for bonus points. Additionally, some of these expendable creatures have simple, alliterative, anthropomorphized names. A game of action and adventure has been fashioned regardless of environmental values. Overall, the non-human world has been simplified and misrepresented for commercial profit.

Non-human creatures are inextricably connected to their habitats. Although the next chapter defines and considers bioregions, it is germane to outline here how the largely apolitical, non-commercial representation of non-humans is also reflected in the apolitical, non-commercial representation of their bioregions. It is noteworthy that in British poetry, there is little political environmental poetry about bioregions, unlike in America. English born and naturalized American Levertov (1973, 1986, 1993) as well as Snyder and Twichell all write overtly and politically about environmental degradation on occasions.²² Here, Craig's *Against Looting* has

²² See Levertov's collection *A Door in the Hive* (1993). Of particular interest are 'In California: Morning, Evening, Late January' (p 49), 'Those Who Want Out' (p 51) and 'Tragic Error' (p 168).

political aspects with Jamie, Burnside (2002) and Oswald (2002) writing about environmental concerns, but not directly and overtly protesting. There are single poems that address such matters, but these are exceptional.²³ Some poets like Norman Nicholson (2003) and Clarke focus more on what is left of the traditional environment, where we have come from, rather than what is the present environmental position. Like the silence regarding animal welfare and rights, there is a silence regarding the places where these issues are manifest. The locations of factory farms, fast-food abattoirs and high security vivisection laboratories do not feature in environmental poetry. Although it is important to avoid journalistic reportage, environmental poetry and ecocriticism could focus on the political and commercial exploitation of non-humans and their bioregions.

Overall, my own practice, to some extent, has challenged environmental poetry to be more inclusive regarding which non-humans it represents. I have argued that environmental poetry can represent non-humans in an empathetic, respectful, non-objectifying way. As a discourse, it is suited to showing specific relationships between humans and non-humans. Environmental poetry can learn from ecocriticism in terms of how non-humans are represented. The awe, respect and gravity typical of much environmental poetry are questioned by Plumwood. However, there is a different emphasis with regard to how the two discourses deal with anthropomorphism. Ecocriticism's tentative acceptance of the practice is different from environmental poetry's embracing of the technique, a practice poets also use when representing bioregions, the subject of the next chapter. Furthermore, environmental poetry and ecocriticism seem to have a blind spot regarding the

²³ See Lavinia Greenlaw's (1993) 'The Recital of Lost Cities' (p 15).

political and commercial representation of non-humans. I do not intend these conditions for representation to be regarded as an argument for prescription. Creative poets subvert and extend set criteria. Suffice to say, any type of representation that consistently ignores such considerations will be probably compromising the subjects they purport to represent.

These conclusions will give clarity to the project of arguing for a new, more clearly defined, comprehensive type of environmental poetry. Environmental poetry has been challenged to go beyond observing non-humans to showing they can be companions in humans' lives. In achieving this goal, anthropomorphism can continue to be used. In terms of subject matter, an environmental poetry that is relevant and contemporary can avoid the predilection for representing mainly significant moments in the lives of non-humans. Environmental poetry, also, can be more comprehensive in terms of the non-humans it represents. Lastly, I have suggested there could be an increased awareness about how non-humans are represented politically and commercially: where are the poems on vivisection and militarism?

4. England's Green and Pleasant Land

Literary critics like Barry (2000) use the general term environment to describe the large areas inhabited by humans and non-humans. This term is imprecise giving no sense of physical boundary or features of demarcation. Other terms such as country or territory denote political states, agreements or imposed borders. Buell (2005) uses the term bioregion to be more specific and divide the environment into different, but connected bioregions. Buell defines a bioregion as a place possessing a similar climate throughout with similar plants and species. It is often shaped by a river, mountain range, watershed or significant geographical feature. In terms of size, Buell states, it will be "relatively small scale" (p 135). The term Buell uses is also unencumbered by political considerations. For these reasons, I will use the term bioregions when examining the issue from the end of the last chapter: anthropomorphism. In revisiting anthropomorphism, I will particularly focus on gendered instances of anthropomorphism. I will then broaden the discussion to *which* bioregions are represented and *how*, a discussion that will involve environmental racism and environmental justice.

Beyond 'Mother Earth'

In the previous chapter, it was argued that anthropomorphism is, in some cases, an acceptable and effective way of representing non-humans. Anthropomorphism will now be considered to determine whether or not it is acceptable to represent

bioregions as 'mother earth' or give them human attributes. The gendered inflection of anthropomorphism will be analysed first before broadening the discussion to anthropomorphism generally.

Critics of gendered anthropomorphism include cultural critic Annette Kolodny (1975) whose analysis of cultural history advocates a feminist perspective in analyzing how the New World has been characterized as a fecund, female presence. Kolodny's analysis has been given a more ecocritical perspective by Soper (1995), and Westling (1996).²⁴ However, not all critics oppose anthropomorphism. Some ecofeminists, sometimes known as radical ecofeminists or spiritual ecofeminists argue representing the 'special' relationship between women and the earth is acceptable and even desirable. According to ecofeminist Karen Warren (1987), radical ecofeminists

...applaud the close connections between women and nature, and urge women to celebrate our bodies, rejoice in our place in the community of inanimate and animate beings, and seek symbols that can transform our spiritual consciousness so as to be more in tune with nature (Warren 1987: 14).

This type of argument has come to be known as 'biological essentialism'.²⁵ Such ecofeminists argue that the same forces that exploit women cause the exploitation of the earth. To regard the earth as 'mother earth' or a female presence like Gaia is legitimate. The basis for this close relationship may be innate and/or cultural.

²⁴ Westling and Kolodny's analysis is based on fiction and non-fiction writing.

²⁵ Hay (2002) mentions Ariel Salleh and Susan Griffin as supporting this view (p 77).

I do not accept the radical ecofeminist endorsement of gendered anthropomorphism. The 'mother earth' perspective sometimes presupposes a more environmental perspective without clear justification. As Hay (2002) argues, it assumes women are born closer to nature even though this may not be true of all women and may be true of some men (p 80). Secondly, the tradition of Gaia and other such legends may be well documented, but such conceptualizations may not be the best way to theorize present environmental issues. Such perspectives may be culturally and temporally specific taking a romanticised and simplified view, Hay maintains (p 80). Furthermore, to appropriate a different culture's perspective, as with Gaia, may be an act of cultural colonialism serving the needs of a dominant ideology. The radical ecofeminist position posits a binarism that unjustifiably prioritizes the position of women.

What, then, is the case against gendered anthropomorphism? Kolodny argues that in the depiction of the American landscape, the single dominating metaphor was the "regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of the womb or breast in a feminine landscape" (p 6). Garrard (2004) also considers representations of landscape with regard to the sublime and argues it is often a gendered concept. He details how the sublime is imbued with masculine values that approve of the vast and overwhelming power of the landscape (p 54). Hay similarly argues against the conception of 'mother earth.' 'Mother earth' is a result of patriarchal linguistic structures, is part of the exploitation of women and nature, and is connected with the notion that if the earth is regarded as our mother, then it is anticipated she will forgive her polluting children (p 79). Overall, a significant

number of ecocritics believe women are identified with and exploited like nature reinforcing existing stereotypes and political gender imbalances.

This gendering of the environment is one of the causes of environmental crisis according to Westling. She proposes the landscape is first perceived as a pastoral idyll, then the male presence attempts to subdue, conquer and dominate it and, lastly, when such domination has occurred and the land has not produced the idealism sought, the male feels guilt and loathing, feelings concealed by resorting to further idealism:

...[the] cultural habit of gendering the landscape as female and then excusing their mistreatment of it by retreating into a nostalgia that erases their real motives, displaces responsibility, and takes refuge in attitudes of self-pitying adoration (Westling 1996: 5).

Anthropomorphizing the earth as 'mother nature' is to be questioned, according to Westling, as its starting point is male domination that is exacerbated by the teachings of the Bible as "Man has the creative power in the Bible to name the other animals and have formative dominance of the garden and its creatures" (pp. 24-5). Furthermore, this domination has increased, Westling continues, due to the historical shift from a preindustrial method of farming to intensive crop cultivation and animal husbandry that requires a yield from the land. Consequently, the productive land is viewed as a fertile resource to be controlled. These attitudes are transferred to gender roles in society. Therefore, gendered anthropomorphism places women in a secondary position in terms of the distribution of power. They are characterized as being fertile, comforting and forgiving. Men, also, are

disadvantaged, according to Westling, by seeking to avoid adult responsibility.

They feel guilt and self-pity, unable to realize their unrealistic goals.

Kolodny and Westling present a convincing case regarding the exploitative use of anthropomorphism in the prose tradition since the 'settlement' of America.

However, when considering contemporary environmental poetry, their view that gendered anthropomorphism is unacceptable seems an overstated, binary position. Their view is based on the period the prose fiction and non-fiction was composed rather than the genre.

Anthropomorphizing the earth as 'mother earth' is not necessarily to be avoided *per se* assuming poets are able to represent their subjects in a sensitive and particular manner. The connection between birthing and an aspect of a bioregion or 'mother earth' can be legitimate if correctly theorized and skilfully handled in environmental poetry. This is the case as environmental poetry is a self-conscious art form in which images can be employed as well as critiqued. Poets do not set out to be stereotypical, although they can be regardless of the stylistic guile displayed. Anthropomorphizing itself is neither acceptable nor unacceptable; it is how it is executed that is key. Poems that persistently and stereotypically portray women as comforting and forgiving and men as powerful and unrealistic, as Westling outlined, are misrepresenting both sexes regardless of how skilfully the techniques are employed.

My own practice supports a gendered type of anthropomorphism, something that is rarely used by other contemporary poets. In ‘The Southern Cross’ (p 61), the main character feels confused at the news he is to be a father:

My bearings have gone wild
in this sunburned country
slung under the belly
of the world (Pickford 2009: 61).

Here, there is a connection between the conceptualization of the world and the pregnant woman. The disorientation of living in a different, hotter country in a different hemisphere is akin to the personal confusion felt by the character. In addition, the shape of the earth and a pregnant woman are similar; one is seen in terms of the other. This does not lead to simplification and a loss of sensitivity for the world; rather one element illuminates the situation of the other in helping to understand the predicament of the character. Such an image employed in a narrative poem describes and explores how people perceive their situations.

In terms of more general anthropomorphism that does not involve conceiving bioregions in a gendered way, this approach is also legitimate and revealing. Anthropomorphism does not mean anthropocentrism. Within poetry generally, there are many examples of bioregions being anthropomorphized. Usually this anthropomorphism is of a single aspect of the bioregion, not the whole bioregion. For instance, Clare talks of the “laughing sky” in ‘The Thrushes Nest’ (p 139) and, more boldly, in ‘Lamentation of Round-Oak Waters’ (p 39), a brook speaks, while it is the land itself in ‘The Lament of Swordy Well’ (pp. 93-9). In contemporary

environmental poetry, Mort (1997) takes this notion further by focusing on the plants of the bioregion, one of the characteristics in Buell's definition of bioregions.

He describes dandelions in an anthropomorphized way:

This one clings to the outhouse roof,
 Gulping in heat from the May sun
 With grateful little nods,
 Downy as a new duckling,
 Its baby head lolling
 In a faint breeze
 That teases it to fall (Mort 1997: 31).

The verb “gulp” is associated with the animated world. The dandelion nods, has a “baby head” and can be teased, all human characteristics. Furthermore, Mort not only makes connections between the human world, he also compares it to the non-human one in the simile “downy as a new duckling” (p 31). The image is an effective one: the gulping reveals the dandelion's elemental need for the sun that sustains it, producing approving nods in the flower. The world as represented by the dandelion is not decentred, but understood more completely due to the empathy involved in the human comparison. Levertov (1998) in ‘Protesting at the Nuclear Test Site’ charts how she has learned to re-evaluate her view of the desert: “I began to see what I saw as ugly were marks/ of torture” (p 53). She explicitly remarks that she feels “anguish” (p 53) over the treatment of the desert:

Slowly,
 revulsion unstiffened itself, I learned
 almost to love

the dry and hostile earth, its dusty growth
of low harsh plants, sparse in unceasing wind;
could almost have bent
to kiss that leper face (Levertov 1998: 53).

Levertov imagines the desert has a face for which she feels pity and compassion. In a more light-hearted way, Minhinnick's (2002) sequence 'A Welshman's Flora' gives weeds, flowers and trees a voice of their own. The thistle remarks how "I swell beneath the blue pins of my hair" (p 83). Daffodils are aware of how they are perceived by humans:

Saint Peter's leek?
I want to be cool
Yet people speak
Of a polite child
Embarrassingly dutiful.
It's time I ran wild (Minhinnick 2002: 95).

In the poem, obviously written by a human, daffodils speak and reflect on humans' attitudes to them, almost as in a dialogue.

In these instances, the anthropomorphism is not wholesale, but relatively modest; a sense of proportion or qualification has been maintained by the poets. Each instance must, of course, be considered on its own merits, but in these examples, anthropomorphism is an effective technique, one technique among many at the poet's disposal. It allows the poet to show concern, regard, respect and empathy for a particular bioregion or aspect of a bioregion as if it were human. Neither must the

simple point be ignored that, as Phillips (2003) points out: “The plain fact is that, unlike women, ethnic minorities, and queers, texts and trees cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (p 139). It would be prescriptive to suggest poets could not use anthropomorphism at all. Also, the modest use of anthropomorphism does not suggest the human perspective is the most important. If a bioregion is used reductively, only as a symbol or device for exploring human values or perspectives, then it could be justifiably argued that the representation of a particular place in an anthropomorphic way was anthropocentric. However, if anthropomorphism is used sensitively and, perhaps, occasionally, the human perspective does not necessarily dominate.

I have used the natural world as a metaphor for the human in ‘Birthday’ (p 56); that is, symbols have been drawn from the natural world to explain the state of mind of the female protagonist: “All night, the storm broods,/ slips below the surface/ of sleep. Eyelids flicker” (p 56). The storm is used as the vehicle to explore the woman’s sense of crisis. Given nature, like other areas of life, can be diverse, complex and recognizable, it is telling to employ it as the vehicle in a metaphor. Here, the natural world and the woman have something in common, shared processes and states; there are points of connection. The world is like the woman and the woman is like the world. However, the poem is not anthropocentric as the landscape exists as an element in its own right within the poem. If, on the other hand, the bioregion was only described as an adjunct of the human, it could be argued that the poem was anthropocentric. Indeed, in ‘Birthday,’ I have not projected human qualities onto the landscape. The relationship works in the opposite direction: the qualities of the landscape are transferred to the human.

The poem raises an additional point about language. There is a presumption that if humans perform any action, it is primarily or even exclusively human. For example, in an earlier draft of 'Birthday,' the waves were described as "sighing." Why is sighing anthropomorphic? Humans certainly can sigh, but why is the word only applied to the animate? Why cannot the verb be conceived of as describing actions performed by humans as well as the natural world? Perhaps a redefinition of anthropomorphism is required as it is engrained in language. Even though other agents can perform them, some words are only used to describe the human. If the meaning of words was renegotiated or 'reclaimed' to apply equally to humans, non-humans and bioregions, it might foster a greater environmental understanding by decentring the human. Environmental poetry may be the discourse where this could happen. Environmental poetry's creative aspect could show how language does not need to be entirely anthropomorphic. Poetic language could more fairly represent bioregions and non-humans in an appropriate way.

Plumwood (2002) writes thoughtfully about the way in which anthropomorphism can be a legitimate way of representing non-humans: "Miscommunication and assimilationism is not the inevitable outcome" (p 60). Similarities can be explored without the human overwhelming its comparison or recasting it in human terms. I agree with Plumwood's view and have extended it to apply to bioregions, a subject that she does not address. My own practice has extended Plumwood's ecocriticism and modified the conclusions of Kolodny and Westling. As such, it is an analytical tool. Environmental poetry is an intelligent forum between the generalized perspectives of some ecocriticism and the simplified, cartoon anthropomorphism of

the popular media. The effective, specific examples of anthropomorphism in some environmental poetry modify some of the conclusions of ecocriticism.

Weeds in the City

Wildlife ecologist Aldo Leopold (1970) wrote, “The weeds in a city lot convey the same lesson as the redwoods” (p 292). Some ecocritics propose there needs to be greater emphasis placed on the way in which urban and suburban bioregions are represented. Westling maintains ecocriticism is “yet to seriously engage the technologized urban environments where most of its practitioners live” (p 28).

As was mentioned earlier when discussing binarisms’ polarities in my definition of environmental poetry, Bennett (2003) argues it is important to avoid “wilderness fetishism” (p 297) as Deep Ecology has failed to transfer many of its insights to the cities. Bennett points out how ecocriticism should focus more on “socioeconomic structures, and the densely populated ecosystems that shape urban environments” (p 296). He argues, “Gratuitous swipes at urbanites and claims that only wild nature can ‘humanize’ our sorry lot are all too common in ecocentric thinking” (p 301).

This is especially important as the majority of people live in cities where a tree on a street corner might be an important environmental feature. Urban minority cultures, Bennett argues, suffer environmental racism as their neighbourhoods are polluted. These neighbourhoods are not subject to the same environmental standards that apply to affluent urban areas or wilderness.

Why, then, does the unpolluted country feature so predominantly in environmental poetry? In no small measure, it is due to the way Wordsworth and the Romantic Tradition are perceived. Barry makes this point:

Our present notion of ‘nature’ is crystallised by the Romantics, as is the perceived association between poetry and nature: I mean by this the widely held assumption that ‘nature’ is the natural subject of poetry (Barry 2000: 42).

Barry, however, argues that it is possible for cities to be represented as positive places that create healthy internal landscapes for their inhabitants. More recently, has the poetic tradition changed? In deconstructing the polarities of urban and rural, Barry argues that rural bioregions have declined, “all of us live in an urbanised environment (digitalised, on-line, image-bombarded) and mere physical location is less and less a determinant of way-of-life” (p 30). Referring to the poet John Barrie, Barry concludes that the city is less of a place and more of a state of mind.

Is this view reflected in contemporary environmental poetry? George Mackay Brown’s representation of Orkney is rather simplistically described by Gifford (2005) as “a retreat into an unchanging mythic past away from the problems of the present” (pp. 43-4). Like Mackay Brown, R.S. Thomas and Nicholson (2003) do not celebrate bioregions in urban and suburban contexts. Gifford refers harshly to Thomas’ work as “pastoral escapism” (p 77) while Nicholson conveys “a cosiness in the constancy of his Cumbrian mountains and in the nostalgia for childhood” (p 40). This is somewhat overstated regarding Nicholson who criticizes nuclear power

in 'Windscale.' Nevertheless, Nicholson does not primarily represent the urban or suburban. These significant poets follow the perceived Wordsworthian tradition of writing about the rural landscape in a positive, filtered way.²⁶

An exception to the representation of the rural in an idyllic, nostalgic way can be found in MacSweeney's sequence 'Pearl' (2003). MacSweeney's representation of the Wear Valley shows how the city has come to the country. The rural is not a pristine bioregion, but contains disused lead mines "No longer mastered by men" (p 207). Industrial decline is lamented; the government is criticized for it: "They...are killing everything" (p 202). MacSweeney's "broken /ovens of manufacture and employment" (p 203) are not omitted from the rural representation by the narrator, Pearl. Most poets represent the rural without reference to industrial workings, inclement weather and hard labour.

In terms of exceptions, in mainstream environmental poetry, Douglas Dunn (1969) locates "Urban flora and fauna" (p 21) in an urban bioregion. Dunn describes working class Hull in his collection *Terry Street*. Although the references are relatively few, Dunn notices the blossom and hawthorn. In 'A Removal from Terry Street,' he observes his neighbour moving house, escaping the worms that come up through cracks in the concrete yard at night. As the man removes from his shed an unneeded lawn mower, Dunn concludes: "That man, I wish him well. I wish him grass" (p 20). He wishes his neighbour something living, something green. Barry calls Dunn's collection "a paradigmatic 'city' collection" (p 15). It analyses how the

²⁶ I find Gifford's view of these poets exaggerated. Astley (2007), in reference to Gifford's view of Mackay Brown, prefers to see Mackay Brown as "rooted in a specific historically conscious culture and place" (p 17).

working class live in an unattractive, confined, neglected area in which their lives are impoverished. Dunn addresses environmental justice and redresses the perception of the Romantic, rural tradition. Its critical legacy focuses less on poems dealing with cities, railways and constructed environments and more on mountains, lakes and the lone individuals who interact with them.

This raises the question why are there so few poems that represent urban bioregions, however meagrely, as being important to their inhabitants. There are poets that write about the urban; Barry cites Phillip Larkin and Tony Harrison as being important. However, their focus is not on the city as being a positive, sustaining bioregion in itself. Barry argues that

...frequently, the poet, when *in* the city, is not *of* it, for the inner eye (or ear) is elsewhere, a rural elsewhere with the daffodils, for instance, or mentally hearing the lake water lapping, while pacing 'the pavements grey' of a city which is fastidiously screened out of the poem (Barry 2000: 24, italics in original).

Environmental poetry seems to have a blind spot regarding the positive representation of nature in an urban context. Urban characters do not acknowledge and value their relationship with nature. This may be why Buell (2005) argues, "For ecocriticism to recognize 'the city' as something other than a non-place is itself a great and necessary advance" (p 88). Ecocriticism may share environmental poetry's blindspot.

My own practice addresses this area. Environmental justice is the central concern of 'The Sacred Tree' (p 43) while 'Dreamcatcher' (p 45) is concerned with environmental racism, the erosion of a way of life by a dominant, capitalist culture. In 'Dreamcatcher,' children accept gifts to have their photograph taken, something that was prohibited by native custom, dreamcatchers are exploited for their commercial potential rather than cultural significance, the shaman's tribal position is eroded and traditional remedies become redundant. Walter's wife is drawn away from her cultural inheritance:

She hoards glossy mags
trashed behind the motel:
Lifestyle, Makeover. Now
the windows of their box cabin
are screened with veils of mesh,
Walter never bothers smearing on
pine sap against nagging flies.
Seasons don't matter (Pickford 2009: 45).

Additionally, the poem reveals how the ways of the city are present in the rural community; there is internet access and cable television. This shows how the typical characteristics of the rural and urban are simplifications. These poems would be suitable material for ecocriticism's new focus on environmental justice. Barry's criticism has informed my own work and been explored through my own practice. It is possible for environmental poetry to locate the urban in the rural and vice versa.

In ‘Speed and Endurance’ (p 34), the city streets are represented along with an urban park. This urban bioregion is described on a cold and inspiring morning when the lead poisoning of exhaust fumes is discussed by the characters. The commercial imperatives of advertising are exposed as containing dubious natural references and claims. Looking at their frozen car, the characters reflect how their experience of it is removed from its media representation:

In the t.v. ad, this block
of ice is an Iberian lynx
twisting down a mountain,
its curved back fading
into the dashboard’s arch,
music full of legs.

The punchline? The lynx
sits panting in the dust
at the side of the track
as the motor shrinks the distance.

Slide in the slanting font:

Speed & Endurance (Pickford 2009: 34).

The long term, irreversible damage humans can cause is the central issue of the poem, set in an urban locale where the park is a significant and positive place.

Poets can refine their perspectives by engaging in conversations with ecocriticism.

Hence, I have started to explore the particularities of environmental racism and environmental justice as they impact on bioregions. Furthermore, I have questioned

environmental poetry's long established and polarized representation of the urban and rural. Environmental poetry's blind spot is challenged by some ecocriticism regarding the representation of urban bioregions and my own practice-led research.

Overall, I have endorsed through practice the use of anthropomorphism with certain caveats, whether it is gendered or not. With regard to ecocritics who argue gendered anthropomorphism is unacceptable, I have shown their arguments require a greater understanding of how poets write. Other ecocritics like Plumwood remain silent about anthropomorphizing bioregions, a blind spot in her view in which she argues it is acceptable regarding the representation of non-humans. Additionally, my own practice, along with a survey of largely contemporary environmental poetry, has revealed poetry's blind spot regarding its representation of bioregions as rural and, generally, unpolluted. Taking my cue from ecocriticism on environmental justice and environmental racism, in some instances I locate poems in urban and suburban bioregions.

A more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of environmental poetry can be written as a result. I have argued anthropomorphism can be legitimate and effective when representing non-humans and bioregions. In representing bioregions, successful environmental poetry can be complex, sensitive and recognize the importance of the subject in itself. To reduce bioregions to a human adjunct or symbol may privilege the human perspective and result in anthropocentrism.

5. Reimagining Gender Roles

In questioning binarisms in my working definition of environmental poetry, it was evident that male and female roles are sometimes conceptualised in a polarized fashion. As part of the examination of this polarity, this chapter will examine gender issues as they relate to childbirth. My poetic sequence ‘Storywaters’ (p 58) is central to this renegotiation of gender roles in alignment with the main tenets of ecofeminism: environmentally-aware feminism. Before continuing, rereading ‘Storywaters’ will give focus to the issues to be discussed.

My sequence offers the space and depth to explore several issues. In deconstructing the gender binarism, the case against patriarchy as it is manifest in the medicalization of birth will be considered. In contextualizing ‘Storywaters,’ I will question contemporary male poets’ lack of engagement with patriarchy and birth. Additionally, I will propose that totemism offers an environmentally sensitive paradigm in relation to childbirth, an issue relevant to how bioregions are represented in environmental poetry. Totemism moves outside of the Western tradition of representing bioregions, something that has not been considered by ecocriticism. Within ‘Storywaters,’ such gender and cultural issues are located within the matrix of personal and family concerns.

Claiming the Natural and Normal

The medicalization of birth is an instance of where ecofeminism identifies the presence of patriarchy as controlling. Brian Easlea (1981), an academic with an interest in the history and application of science, states,

...modern science, as it has developed in the West, has not only been a male-dominated activity thereby conferring a masculine identity on its successful practitioners, but, in addition, it has been a ‘masculine philosophy’ which allows its practitioners to claim and indeed to demonstrate an impressive male virility (Easlea 1981: 61).

This “masculine identity” (p 61) can be conferred on both men and women. According to Easlea, it is suppressed sexual and even pathological male behaviour that is responsible for science’s ideology. Historically, therefore, patriarchy has dominated for psychological reasons. Hay (2002) outlines how science is inherited in a masculine paradigm that posits a subject/object binarism. Its methodology proposes that there is an expert, the subject, often the doctor, and non-expert, the object, often the patient, who needs to be investigated and cured. Hay argues

...the mechanistic paradigm not only leads directly to ecological catastrophe, but it also carries much responsibility for the creation of a structure of political and technological power that systematically manipulates, devalues and oppresses women (Hay 2002: 140).

A different type of science that is more holistic and less reductive could challenge this paradigm, according to Hay. Such a science, in practice, would not be

dominated by masculine values, but would seek to empower those involved in negotiating decisions more fully. Ecofeminist Arisika Razak (1990) makes a similar point, “We have failed to insist that all technology be developed within a culturally sensitive paradigm that stresses positive human nurturance, ethical behaviour, intergenerational needs, and holistic and ecological analysis” (p 168). Science is profit-centred and serves the dominant ideology. Ecofeminist Patrick D. Murphy (2004) in his essay ‘Nature Nurturing Fathers in a World Beyond our Control’ comments on the gender aspects of this paradigm, “Men are credited with creating, but are not expected to nurture what they create, while women are expected to nurture what men create without being credited for participating in that creation” (p 197). The paradigm of science does not sufficiently acknowledge that women create, or that men should nurture. Overall, patriarchal structures have prevailed and become a significant factor in decision-making.

One of the instances of patriarchy is the way in which medical science uses the terms ‘natural’ and ‘normal.’ These concepts need to be interrogated or they can be appropriated by patriarchal science to do its bidding. Sometimes they are validated statistically, sometimes ideologically. The issue of normality occurs in my poem ‘Nuchal Translucency Scan’ (p 69). Here the doctor clinically describes the measurement of the foetus’s spine as “within normal distribution” (p 69). This statistical norm connotes what is healthy and desirable. The medical receptionist in ‘Result’ (p 84) also has a sense of numerical normality when she informally reports on a chromosomal test with, “Yes, everything’s good./The number’s normal” (p 84). Medical science, as represented by the doctor and medical receptionist, is

promoting a view that what is common is normal. Normality is equated with success and does not require intervention.

If patriarchal science can validate its procedures as natural, it has an unjustified rationale for action. In 'Ghost Ward' (p 92), Doctor Choudry refers to medical procedures involved in a caesarean section as "Quite natural these days" (p 92). Naturalness is given connotations of healthiness and success as if there was a single definition of the term. Although the character is speaking colloquially, this view of what is natural should be examined. Medical procedures should not be justified by unsupported claims of naturalness, neither should naturalness necessarily be the sole criterion. To use Soper's terminology (1995), the 'realist' concept of nature is being employed in 'Ghost Ward' rather than the 'metaphysical' one. The metaphysical concept of nature is "the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity" (p 155). This philosophical concept of nature is invoked in "the very posing of the question of humanity's relation to nature" (p 155). This differs from the realist concept as it is used in my sequence. Soper defines the realist concept as follows:

Employed as a realist concept, 'Nature' refers to the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, that provide the objects of study of natural science, and condition the possible forms of human intervention in biology or interaction with the environment (Soper 1995: 155-6).

Within 'Storywaters,' medical practices are validated according to the realist concept. In other words, with 'Ghost Ward,' medical procedures are deemed

natural; the caesarean is regarded as a common form of human intervention. However, it is my contention that the metaphysical concept should be considered. Medical procedures should be subject to enquiry and debate. If the concepts of normality and naturalness are not investigated fully, they can reinforce patriarchal structures. When used generally, the terms have positive environmental connotations that can be exploited by patriarchy. However, with patriarchy prioritizing the male perspective over the female and science over nature, there may be little environmental in how it operates.

My own practice is critiquing patriarchy by contextualizing the uses of naturalness and normality within the sequence. 'Storywaters' explores how, in human terms, patriarchal domination occurs in the conversations and the situations the characters find themselves in. Soper's realist concept of nature is more readily accommodated in the character-based narrative; the metaphysical concept is only by implication. Certain types of environmental or ecofeminist poetry, such as 'Storywaters,' are more suited to investigate certain types of ecocritical or ecofeminist theory. Ecocritics need to be aware that certain types of poetry can accommodate the analysis of certain issues.

The term natural is also used in a realist fashion in Soper's sense when referring to the womb as a natural, safe environment. Gifford (1999) speculates as to whether the womb may be the last home of the post-pastoral dream. The post-pastoral is not anti-pastoral, but the subsequent development and re-evaluation after the pastoral phase, Gifford's own term for environmental poetry. The post-pastoral avoids the simplified, positive representation of the pastoral. He writes, "For many post-

pastoral ecofeminist writers Arcadia might be located within the body” (p 166). This view assumes the unborn child's environment within the womb might be an unpolluted, sustaining environment. Such an ecofeminist position would be in keeping with radical, ‘mother earth’ ecofeminists whose position has already been critiqued as assuming a privileged position without justification.

Within ‘Storywaters,’ I have taken a different position, more in line with political ecofeminist and activist Irene Diamond (1990) who argues, “Babies are the best ‘canaries’ we have” (p 210) to test environmental pollution. The unborn child in ‘Storywaters’ is exposed to the harmful effects of the ozone layer and lead pollution. The womb is not Arcadia, an unpolluted, protected environment that Gifford speculates ecofeminists desire.

What are the alternatives to patriarchy? Ecofeminism argues that the destruction of the environment is predicated upon patriarchal structures that are embedded in society, structures that suppress women. This reinforces the gender binarism elevating the male’s position above the female’s ensuring the domination of the male perspective over time. Coupe (2000) writes of the patriarchal “ ‘...master story’ ” that “privileges male over female just as it privileges reason over nature: indeed, it identifies rationality with masculinity, and justifies the absolute rights of both” (p 119). Women, therefore, are secondary and associated with nature.

However, not all ecofeminists agree with this perspective. There are several different persuasions of ecofeminism, most notably radical ecofeminism that is closely associated with spiritual mysticism. In chapter four, it was shown that

radical ecofeminists endorse the representation of the earth as ‘mother earth,’ something I contest. Radical ecofeminists believe women’s close relationship with nature is innate and emotional, rather than subject to rational enquiry. They attempt to challenge the male supremacy in the gender binarism by revaluing the female element. However, I do not accept radical ecofeminism’s solution for the reasons already given.²⁷ I am not disputing ecofeminism’s view of the dominance of male patriarchal structures as an interpretation of social structures, but I am arguing some renegotiation of gender roles needs to occur to reduce the impact of polarized and reductive binary positions, one of the objectives of ‘Storywaters.’

Environmental literary critic Scott Slovic (2004) has defined his position as an ecomasculinist perspective, ecomasculinism being the equivalent of ecofeminism, both positions examining the intersection between ecology and gender studies. Slovic writes that in the past,

Scholars, artists and activists have been left with two viable, politically correct choices: identify with the ecofeminist critiques of patriarchy/masculinity or keep silent with regard to issues of gender (Slovic 2004: 72).

Slovic has moved the argument on by arguing there is a need for an “‘ecomasculinist literary criticism’...to rehabilitate the role of men in the world” (p 75). Bate (2000) makes a similar point about the abandoning of a separatist ideology, commenting how it will be beneficial for ecofeminism as “In ecofeminist terms, this realignment of gender roles clears the way for a caring as opposed to an

²⁷ See page 171.

exploitative relationship with the earth” (p 112). It is, of course, the case that discourses evolve and their perspectives become more qualified. Such a process may be underway here. It may be true to say broadly that ecofeminism is more relevant to present day concerns than feminism and that Slovic’s ecomasculinism will be more relevant still. Slovic ends his account with a call for an ecomasculinist literary criticism and, to some extent, ‘Storywaters’ and this critical commentary take up his challenge.

‘Storywaters’ explores how patriarchy is manifest in expedient decision-making and the use of the terms natural and normal. The physician in ‘Physician’ (p 67) and the gynaecologist in ‘Nuchal Translucency Scan’ both focus on the medical more than the personal. Citing statistics and employing clinical, euphemistic language, they presume that parents will unquestioningly acquiesce to what is typically accepted as normal and natural.

In ‘Physician,’ the male physician is impatient and insensitive; his manner is distracted and his communication skills poor. He proposes that “facts don’t lie” (p 67) even though the so-called facts are medical opinions. No time is given to discussion during the meeting; the couple are curtly dismissed after he presumes they will agree with his assessment. In ‘Nuchal Translucency Scan,’ the gynaecologist is brusque and preoccupied with collecting data. When she does communicate with the couple, it is using formal, medical terminology: “*Within normal distribution,/she states, screen negative*” (p 69). These two medical practitioners, one male and the other female, epitomize the patriarchal outlook. To

avoid simply associating patriarchy with male behaviour and endorsing gender stereotypes, the gynaecologist in ‘Nuchal Translucency Scan’ is female.

However, ‘Storywaters’ does not present all medical practitioners as endorsing patriarchy. In ‘Washing Up’ (p 94), the anaesthetist displays a sensitivity that focuses on the individual. The narrator observes:

She shoots morphine
into your *lovely spine*,
strokes your cheeks
and calls your name
from the rim of darkness (Pickford 2009: 94).

Her language is phatic and her actions tender, not functional. Her behaviour is untypical, outside of patriarchy’s assumptions.

The sequence also charts how the knowledge produced by patriarchal structures can be reassuring and even desirable. ‘Storywaters’ explores the tension between being coerced by some medical practitioners and procedures and the usefulness of the knowledge produced. The couple are captivated by images of their child. In ‘Playing God’ (p 76), they examine a photograph of their scan; the narrator describes how they

...huddle together, sharing
the close-up of our baby’s hand,
palm of pebbles, fingers
of chalk: hello and goodbye (Pickford 2009: 76).

The parents of the unborn child want to make informed decisions. They opt for and find helpful the medical knowledge produced by tests for spina bifida and downs syndrome. Despite some of the medical personnel and procedures, the knowledge produced is informative.

Therefore, 'Storywaters' critiques patriarchy as one of its concerns among many. Patriarchy is not simply the product of male behaviour, neither do all medical personnel contribute to it. Additionally, patriarchal science can produce knowledge that can be desirable and helpful. 'Storywaters' reveals how the unqualified criticisms of patriarchy by ecofeminists, among others, find a more nuanced, qualified exploration in environmental poetry.

Leading Men into their Lives

In terms of what my own environmental poetry demonstrates, some contextualization may be helpful. The poet and critic David Kennedy (2000) in his study of the masculinities in the work of Tony Harrison writes of the collection titled *V.* that the discussion between the poet and the skinhead within the text is "to a large extent...an argument about the place of conventional masculinity and working-class masculinity in a post-industrial society and culture. Harrison's solution...is...a blend of masculine and feminine" (p 127). Like Harrison, I have attempted to redefine the oppositional model of gender roles, or, to use Kennedy's

phrase, show that people contain both traditional feminine and masculine traits. My work is developing an existing concern.

Positioning my own work within current practice, it is apparent there is a limited tradition of presenting the paternal perspective. In *The Virago Book of Love Poetry* edited by Wendy Mulford (1990), there is a minority of individual poems by men showing concern, awe and emotion during childbirth in relation to the health of the mother and welfare of the child. Take, for instance, Mike Jenkins' (1993) poem 'For Bethan' that concludes with the father's tears at the arrival of his daughter who is being held by his wife: "You whispered 'There, there!'/ My tears washed your blood/from her hair" (p 135). This paternal tradition goes back at least as far as Coleridge who represents the father caring for the newborn during the night in 'Frost at Midnight' (1798). The father exclaims: "My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart/With tender gladness, thus to look at thee" (p 41). Bate writes of this poem, "What is truly radical about 'Frost at Midnight' is Coleridge's self-representation as a father in the traditional maternal posture of watching over a sleeping baby" (p 112). What is interesting about Bate's comment is that he feels the necessity to use the adjective 'maternal,' rather than 'paternal,' to make his position understood. It is such a tradition that is being renegotiated here.

It is possible to make a similar claim for 'Storywaters' when considering the dearth of poetry that deals with men's perspectives regarding childbirth. Individual collections as well as four anthologies of birth poetry have been studied: Rene Graziani's (1983) *The Naked Astronaut*, Laura Chester's (1989) *Cradle and All: Women Writers on Pregnancy and Birth*, Rosemary Palmeira's (1990) *In the Gold*

of Flesh: Poems of Birth & Motherhood and Margaret Otten's (1993) *The Virago Book of Birth Poetry*. 'Storywaters' is one of only a few sequences on childbirth. There are other sequences by Muriel Rukeyser (1982), 'Nine Poems;' Erica Jong (1984), 'Foetal Heartbeat;' Christine Evans (1989), 'Cometary Phases;' and Eavan Boland (1994), 'Night Feed;' but none by a male writer giving a male perspective. This may be due to the limited number of poems written by male poets as well as the decisions taken by the editors of anthologies.

It is the case, however, that there are a minority of poems on childbirth in the anthologies on birth, specifically, Jennings ('For Bethan') and Jon Stallworthy ('The Almond Tree') in *The Virago Book of Birth Poetry*. Jennings, in the section of his poem titled 'Midwife,' celebrates the caring perspective of midwives who negotiate care needs as opposed to the scientific, more impersonal patriarchal structures within hospitals that may circumscribe choice. The midwife, who narrates both of the following stanzas, remarks:

Yet, you see, I'm not one
to view patients as machines
with faulty parts.

The metal ear of the machine
lays heavy on her gloved womb,
but its digits reassure
as they bleep heartbeats (Jenkins 1990:134).

The midwife does not view her patients as inanimate problems to be solved, but acknowledges the tension that despite wanting to keep medical intervention to a

minimum, the knowledge gained from such tests can be reassuring. Similar tensions are explored in ‘Storywaters.’ Stallworthy’s poem charts the birth and realization that his “*son is a mongol,*” as the doctor puts it (p 88, italics in original). ‘The Almond Tree’ explores the acceptance of this knowledge described as “a first death” (p 88) and the regret that communication with his child will be difficult:

In a numbered cot
 my son sailed from me; never to come
 ashore into my kingdom
 speaking my language (Stallworthy 1993: 89).

Finally, the male narrator identifies with an almond tree outside the hospital, an interesting metaphor in itself as he realizes he shares characteristics with the natural world. Acceptance has now been reached, his definition of love transformed and liberated:

I, too, rooted in earth
 and ringed by darkness, from the death
 of myself saw myself blossoming,

 wrenched from the caul of my thirty
 years’ growing, fathered by my son,
 unkindly in a kind season
 by love shattered and set free (Stallworthy 1993: 90).

The father had died and, like the tree, been reborn after thirty years of assuming he understood fatherhood and love. Out of an unkind season, kindness results.

Paradoxically, the father is fathered by his own son; he is given new insights to understand the world. In my own sequence, I address the concerns of Jennings more than Stallworthy, but share with both of them the representation of men as emotional and receptive. The final poem of the sequence, 'Warluwarru' (p 96) ends with the father charting the journey to birth: "it, foetus, he, our son" (p 96). The newborn has developed from medical case to child.

Patriarchy as it impacts on childbirth is infrequently the subject of poetry whether the author is male or female, whether their position is feminist, ecofeminist or even ecomasculinist. The medicalization of birth and the patriarchal domination of science do not significantly feature. This is surprising as the anthologies, edited by women, contain a majority of poems written by women that might suggest the presence of a feminine perspective. Nevertheless, few poems deal with aspects of the medicalization of childbirth; 'Storywaters' does explore this concern as one among several others. Exceptions are few. Rachel Hadas' poem (1993) 'Amniocentesis' examines the invasive procedure, but only deals with the personal consequences with the male and female characters talking "of death and birth,/of terror and of comfort, their equation" (pp. 37-8). Sharon Thesen (1989) captures visiting an impersonal specialist performing an exploratory operation in 'Elegy, the Fertility Specialist.' The narrator imagines the specialist "cross-hatching impediments on his diagram/ of the uterine pear" (p 144). Similarly, Alicia Suskin Ostriker (1993) details how she is examined insensitively: "I submit to indignities,/Skirt up, feet in stirrups, one look, one rotating poke--/Examination of the entrails? Quite right, due process,/My cow" (p 25). Symptoms are treated more than patients. Medical 'problems' are corrected. These few poets briefly address some aspects of the patriarchal medicalization of childbirth.

The reason for the lack of engagement with patriarchal domination might be concerned with the intense personal nature of the experience of birth. The majority of poems in the anthologies are character-based, first person narratives. They function almost entirely in the personal realm, not questioning the patriarchal world. Personal statements by their very existence can counter political ones by implication. However, with personal poems, there is some scope for the political or patriarchal to be critiqued as well. This infrequently occurs in the four anthologies cited. Although it could be argued the editors are responsible for the personal locus of the anthologies, there is also a dearth of poems on the patriarchal domination of birthing or aspects of this in single collections by poets. The work of Anne Sexton (1969), Alta (1974), Ostriker (1980), Rukeyser (1982), Audre Lorde (1993), Louise Gluck (1997) and Kate Clanchy's *Newborn* (2004) are all directly concerned with personal reactions, engagements and negotiations regarding personal responses to childbirth. Yet, these poets largely avoid contextualizing the issue more broadly by considering how the individual is located in a larger matrix of patriarchal structures. These poets, mainly American and some of who may have been influenced by the Confessional Tradition in American poetry, rightly make birth the subject of poetry. They validate female experience and legitimize childbirth as a subject for poetry, perhaps a groundbreaking and political act in itself. However, they do not document the workings, biases and coercion of medical science as it sometimes occurs in 'Storywaters.'

Therefore, regarding patriarchy's role in childbirth, 'Storywaters' has enabled me to contribute a male voice to a field partly overlooked by poets, both male and female.

As will be shown in the next section, within ‘Storywaters’ the medicalization of birth is treated in a complex, qualified, ecomasculinist fashion that many ecofeminists may support. Both male and female poets can question binarisms and what Coupe called the “ ‘master story’ ” (p 119). It will be more radical and transforming if they both do.

A Place for the Environment in Childbirth

‘Storywaters’ attempts to show how men can be involved in caring relationships based on mutual respect and consideration in a particular context. This is similar to relational ethic of care, an ethic that acknowledges emotional needs and their political consequences rather than rights that are strongly emphasized in the masculine world.²⁸ Concisely put, the personal is the political, to cite the mainly American feminists of the 1970s. Warren’s (1987) relational ethics gives priority to consideration and love:

... ‘loving perception’ presupposes and maintains *difference*—a distinction between the self and other, between human and at least some nonhumans—in such a way that perception of the other is an expression of love for one who/which is recognized at the outset as independent, dissimilar, different (Warren 1987: 137, italics in original).

²⁸ As precursors to relational ethics, Hay (2002) cites issue frameworks concerned with the politics of women's bodies and reproductive technologies, the psycho-social aspects of birth and mothering, issues of peace and disarmament, questions of population and female infanticide, economic and social conditions of women in developing countries and the nature of Western science/technology (p 84).

This issue-based approach is not predicated on a hierarchical structure, but places at the centre “values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity” (p 143). It is significant that such an approach validates emotions. In this way, the discourse is close to the discourse of poetry generally in that it is individual, issue-orientated and recognizes emotions as well as reason.²⁹

In ‘Storywaters,’ a striking aspect is the characterization of the male from whose point of view the story is told. The husband and father is involved in all stages of pregnancy articulating his fears and concerns for his wife and son to be. The penultimate poem ‘Washing Up,’ ends with the father looking down at the child and observing: “On his breathing skin,/creams, blood/and my purged fears/shed as tears” (p 95). This is in keeping with Razak’s view (1990) in ‘Towards a Womanist Analysis of Birth:’

Nurturing is not a genetically feminine attribute. Tears and laughter are not the province of women only. The last time I looked, men had tear ducts. They had arms for holding babies. They cared about their children. And they cried at birth (Razak 1990: 172).

My environmental poetry is an instance of how it is possible to take up the challenge of ecofeminism by presenting male concerns in a believable way that attempts to redefine their role in society. More than this, the male is not just conforming to a more enlightened position, but personally is enriched by his engagement with childbirth and his concomitant relationships. Practice-led research

²⁹ As with ‘Storywaters,’ there is an exploration of male values and filial relationships in ‘Crayfish on Father’s Day’ (p 30), ‘The Snip’ (p 32), ‘Boxing Day with Dad’ (p 36) and ‘Lighthouse’ (p 38).

is here challenging the boundaries of ecocriticism. Apart from Slovic's undertheorized ecomasculinism, there is little theory on the role of men in childbirth that questions the gender binarism. My own practice is an instance of the personal making a political intervention. Environmental poetry has a particular place in challenging existing ideas. Change is not largely underway; my environmental poetry reveals its possibility.

In addition to challenging some aspects of patriarchy, 'Storywaters' tentatively suggests a more sensitive and holistic ethic inspired by the Aboriginal clans and how they employ non-human totems. In chapter three, I suggested that non-human creatures could be represented by humans without enforcing a human/non-human binarism. Non-humans' representation could involve anthropomorphism and should be mindful of not just presenting simplified, visual detail of 'popular' larger creatures, especially mammals. Totemism adds to these conditions as it involves giving a variety of non-human creatures a protected, special status.

How is the Aboriginal ethic manifest in 'Storywaters'? In 'Result' (p 84), a sparrow is present when the pregnant mother feels the baby move for the first time; the sparrow "Sings as, for the first time,/the baby kicks out ripples" (p 84). According to anthropologist and novelist Bruce Chatwin (1987), in some Aboriginal clans, the first movement of the child would indicate the child's spirit conception that would be interpreted for the child (p 67). A non-human present at this quickening time would be the totem of the child and, therefore, sacred. In addition to individual totems, clans also had totemic creatures that would not be hunted in the areas in which the clans lived, thus ensuring they

had a safe haven. The significance of totemism, therefore, is both spiritual and environmental. As anthropologist and social justice advocate Deborah Bird Rose (1996) states, “Totemism posits connectedness, mutual interdependence, and the non-negotiable significance of the lives of non-human species” (p 8). Such significance may be justification for non-humans not to be killed by humans and could be adding to Singer’s criteria of why some non-humans should have special status.³⁰ Totemic representations are environmental.³¹ There is a unique and protective relationship on behalf of humans towards non-humans. Although totemism is lost to our culture, it still has affinities with poetry generally that utilizes symbols to represent ideas. Totemism is also explored in ‘Platypus’ (p 17) when an encounter with the creature is a shared moment of experience; it is “a songline for our family” (p 18). Thereafter, it is a creature imbued with special qualities. The positive experience for the humans may result in them being caring and protective towards it in return. Totemism is not a panacea for the protection of non-humans. However, it does give focus to an outlook that I would argue already exists.

Anthropologists have explored totemism's significance, but not ecocriticism as its literary application is still to be evaluated. Ecocriticism needs to evolve as new types of environmental poetry emerge. My own work requires a new type of ecocriticism, one not solely based on Western traditions. Perhaps this new area of ecocriticism has not been theorized in mainstream Australian poetry as ecocriticism has not drawn greatly on Aboriginal culture. This may be because Aboriginal

³⁰ See page 154-5.

³¹ Bate (2000) talks of “the Aborigine’s sacral relationship with the land” (p 242).

culture is mainly an oral tradition and many Aboriginal poets are writing in English, a second language.

I am not proposing the Aboriginal ethic is an equivalent, parallel or alternative to Western perspectives regarding childbirth. However, the Aborigines' more holistic, environmentally-aware perspective informs some aspects of the sequence and contrasts with the scientific, more impersonal approach of contemporary science. This is a revalidation of native culture. The Aboriginal perspective avoids the unhelpful polarization of human/non-human. It places the child within the fabric of the environment by relating the child to its symbolic totem, a creature, a sacred place, the location where quickening occurred. The distinction between nature and culture or society does not exist in the same way it does in Western society. Why should science operate according to a different rationale from other areas of human experience?

However, there are a number of concerns and qualifications to be made regarding the totemic, Aboriginal perspective. As has been stated with 'Storywaters,' there is a danger that it superficially loots the cultural heritage of indigenous people, misrepresenting what may be a more complex issue as there are so many different Aboriginal clans. Secondly, the details as presented may reflect patriarchal structures in another form. With the moment of quickening, it is the male's spirit cells that justify the baby's movement by jumping into the womb: the female is dependent upon the male.³²

³² "What you had to visualise was an *already* pregnant woman strolling about her daily foraging round. Suddenly, she steps on a couplet, the 'spirit-child' jumps up...and works its way into her womb" (Chatwin 1987: 67, italics in original).

Totemism informs 'Storywaters' and is played out at the climax of the sequence. Although much of what I have claimed for my sequence in terms of content could equally be applied to prose fiction or any type of imaginative writing, the discourse of environmental poetry does have particular qualities. This is perhaps most notable in the last poem 'Warluwarru' where incidents and images from many of the earlier poems are reworked:

You, our storywaters:
 the black flower,
 patterns in water,
 your goanna, sparrow,
 your hand's hello,
 molecules of red dye,
 Warluwarru in the sky,
 our lucky number 401,
 it, foetus, he, our son (Pickford 2009: 96).

Images of significant moments reoccur, mainly chronologically. Although juxtaposed, they rhyme, the musical unity being redolent of Aboriginal songlines and celebratory. The question raised in the first poem regarding Warluwarru's position in the sky is answered in the final poem. The condensed, imagistic, rhyming conclusion that, among other things, celebrates totemism is untypical of other forms of writing.

Overall, some aspects of 'Storywaters' endorse some elements of ecofeminism, but disputes the premise of radical ecofeminism. Its ecomasculinist perspective is a

political and imaginative attempt to renegotiate gender roles. My practice, therefore, is presenting the world as it is in the hope that change may be possible. Part of the critique of patriarchy is based on the totemism of Aboriginal clans. Totemism is an area that has not been theorized by ecocriticism, but has been explored to some extent in my work. Although totemism needs a contemporary contextualization, its strength is that it connects childbirth with the environment in a way Western practices do not. Environmental poetry as a discourse is able to explore issues through the particular and personal. In addition to the small number of male poets writing about childbirth and renegotiating gender roles, I have also shown few anthologies or single collections deal with aspects of the medicalization of childbirth. 'Storywaters' attempts to redress this omission.

How has this helped to promote a more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of environmental poetry? In particular, environmental poetry can shake off established gender relationships and work for a more equal society. Poets need not be constrained by traditional subject matters, but seize the opportunity to explore all areas of experience that touches their lives. In this instance, it has entailed questioning patriarchal structures that can exploit women, men and the environment by endorsing the male/female binarism. A more environmentally-friendly, non-Western perspective may need to be considered to show how activities, perhaps all activities, can be related to their impact on the world.

Conclusion

Conventional academic discussions of ecocriticism and environmental poetry are usually couched in theoretical terms. In this thesis, the dialogue between the discourses has been investigated using a practice-led methodology. Being a poet, a practitioner within a research field, has enabled me to access new knowledge. My own environmental poetry has been used as an investigative device to explore the parameters of the discourse itself and analyse the validity of ecocriticism's position regarding environmental poetry. In clarifying the characteristics of environmental poetry, ecocriticism and their relationship, this thesis offers the possibility of change, of both discourses working more successfully for their aesthetic and environmental goals.

This thesis attempts to improve our understanding of our relationship with the bioregions we inhabit. This objective may be possible for a number of reasons. As a poet, I have argued that environmental poetry is more than a self-contained, artistic pattern of language. Environmental poetry is about the world we inhabit. Due to the care given to the way it is composed, environmental poetry may be a powerful and memorable way of communicating. The sub-genre of narrative poetry is particularly able to address characters' behaviour in relation to where they live, something that may be relevant to readers who have a relationship with their own bioregions.

Central to improving our relationship with the bioregions we inhabit is the questioning of binarisms, both in theory and practice, enabling us to understand that we are not separate from the plants and creatures with which we share the world.

Lastly, this thesis may help in some way to raise awareness of the pollution and

degradation that is so common in our news. A random survey of a newspaper for one week reveals environmental stories in the national, international and, interestingly, financial sections.³³ The stories include: indigenous Indians in Orissa protesting against Vedanta's proposed bauxite mine, endangered species in the southern hemisphere such as the leatherback turtle, rising sea levels around Bangladesh's low-lying islands, the makers of sporting shoes sourcing their leather from ranches in protected rainforests in Brazil, the decline in the number of bees due to disease and climate change, and the so-called Corby 16, a group of young people who won their claim for compensation against Corby Borough Council after toxic material spread across their town after the dismantling of a steel plant. The 'Corby 16' suffered deformities of their fingers and toes. Such stories are becoming more frequent it seems. Responding to such issues can take many forms such as campaigning, demonstrating and producing art. Environmental poetry is a way to support the cause.

In investigating the dialogue between ecocriticism and environmental poetry, I propose that, although some environmental poetry and some ecocriticism are similar, typically the two discourses have different characteristics. Generally speaking, environmental poetry is concerned with the personal and emotive realm as well as being concerned with ideas, even political ideas. Its language techniques lend themselves to showing rather than telling. Environmental poetry's ideas may be from a number of different discourses that negotiate their meanings within a single poem. Environmental poetry is a space where ecological discourse can enter into a critical relationship. One of environmental poetry's strengths is that it is able

³³ *The Guardian*, 30 July-5 August 2009

to capture the reader's experience of the world that may be inconsistent, holistic and non-sequential. On the whole, ecocriticism, a relatively new discourse, is also concerned with ideas, especially political and environmental ideas. It often arranges its content sequentially and thematically. Using ecocritical terminology and concepts is a useful way of furthering an understanding of environmental poetry. If ecocritics do not understand the characteristics of environmental poetry and vice versa, future conclusions may be compromised.

This thesis has produced new knowledge by considering the dialogue between the two discourses rather than regarding them as separate entities. Both have their own features yet there are points of intersection. Although the dialogue between the discourses reveals that sometimes there is disagreement, more frequently, one discourse tests, expands and qualifies the other, revealing biases and blind spots. Clarifying the nature of the dialogue will enable both discourses to work for change. For instance, there are opportunities for ecocriticism to address its blind spot regarding its appreciation of the role of style and form in shaping meaning. Concerning the representation of non-human animals, environmental poetry can learn from ecocriticism's conditions for representation. Encounters with large, so-called popular creatures that are treated in a serious fashion are challenged by some ecocritics. However, ecocriticism's qualified acceptance of anthropomorphism in the representation of non-humans is tentative compared with environmental poetry's embracing of the technique. Regarding the political and commercial representation of non-humans, environmental poetry has a further blind spot. The relationship between ecocriticism and environmental poetry is also revealed by the way bioregions are represented in environmental poetry. Some varieties of

ecofeminism question gendered instances of anthropomorphism to represent bioregions. However, skilfully handled, environmental poetry can teach ecocriticism and some types of ecofeminism that anthropomorphism is a legitimate and effective way to represent bioregions, even in gendered cases. On the other hand, environmental poetry can learn from ecocriticism regarding the representation of bioregions as rural and unpolluted. Environmental poetry has been slow to engage the agendas of environmental justice and racism. Ecocriticism has a particular Western perspective in outlook. In exploring how Western culture impacts on the environment, I have explored in 'Storywaters' how totemism may give focus to an existing, but undertheorized perspective. Thereafter, beyond this investigation, ecocriticism could consider more fully the significance of totemism. 'Storywaters' reveals how the environmental content of one discourse could be further explored by the other. Overall, both discourses have significant areas to explore and theorize; scope exists for new areas of study.

The dialogue, therefore, between ecocriticism and environmental poetry is complex: blind spots, biases and undertheorized areas have been discovered in a range of issues. Often one discourse qualifies and extends the other. These new insights offer opportunities for the two discourses to move forward. Although it is legitimate for the wide range of environmental writing such as ecocriticism, anthropology, gender studies and science to pursue its agenda within its own discourse, this thesis has demonstrated that dialogue between discourses can clarify, qualify and explore issues to the mutual benefit of the discourses involved. Indeed, the project of working for environmental improvement is and needs to be multidisciplinary.

Perhaps, generally, creative artists should be included in the discussion of abstract environmental concepts.

My own original work has also contributed to new knowledge. A sequence like 'Storywaters' has not been attempted before in the same way. Environmental poetry has a particular place in challenging existing ideas with a view to changing the future. It is an analytical tool that can test theoretical ideas. In this sense, it functions as a method of disseminating new knowledge. Furthermore, in terms of pragmatics, the audience for environmental poetry may be larger and more diverse than the audience for ecocriticism. Indeed, its message may be memorable as environmental poetry is concerned with how the message is expressed as much as what the message is.

The practice-led methodology of this investigation has strengths and restrictions. One of the benefits of exploring ecocriticism through environmental poetry is that environmental poetry is able to accommodate several discourses at once. As a result, the points of intersection can be examined; one discourse can shed light upon another. Furthermore, given environmental poetry's typically more personal locus, an ecocritical investigation in the form of a poem may produce a perspective that is in accord with the reader's view of the world. Readers of ecocritical theory do not lead their lives in thematic units arranged in a logical, sequential order. Another benefit of a practice-led methodology involving environmental poetry is that a sequence like 'Storywaters' has the space to explore societal issues, as well as offering a personal perspective. Such general issues are explored through the

particular perspective of environmental poetry. As a result, in this regard, environmental poetry can be effective in working for environmental change.

However, there are restrictions of working with a practice-led methodology. The characteristics of environmental poetry partly define the parameters of what this thesis has been able to explore. With poetry generally tending to be characteristically short, selective and symbolic, some detailed subjects that require an examination of large amounts of information may not be suited to the discourse. Environmental poetry is an aesthetic art. The necessity of ensuring language, symbolism, setting and, in the case of narrative poetry, character and plot combine effectively may result in a curtailed investigation of a particular ecocritical theme. Content is limited by aesthetic style, how the message is conveyed. A further methodological challenge is concerned with the number of factors considered. Environmental poetry is a multi-faceted discourse: it explains and describes as well as critiques its subjects. Employing a practice-led methodology increases the number of areas to be explored as it requires environmental poetry as well as ecocriticism and other multidisciplinary discourses to be considered in terms of their evolving relationship. These complex methodological factors are increased as it is necessary to take some of the conclusions of, say, cultural and biological discourses and apply them to ecocriticism and environmental poetry in an ecocritical way. Nevertheless, although the methodology of this thesis is complex due to the large number of variables considered, its conclusions will have a greater validity as a result. Lastly, in terms of the interplay between the discourses of environmental poetry and ecocriticism, it is sometimes difficult to quantify the extent to which one discourse affects the other. When explaining the genesis of any

particular poem, it is sometimes difficult to evaluate if the origins were exclusively in the sphere of environmental poetry, an area of criticism or a combination of the two and, if so, to what degrees. Creativity does not adhere to strict categories.

A number of parties will benefit from this investigation. Other poets, especially British environmental poets, will benefit from my project of proposing a more clearly defined, comprehensive and relevant type of environmental poetry. Such poets will be interested in the opportunity to explore the blind spots revealed by this investigation, for example: the lack of inclusiveness regarding which non-humans are represented, the limited representation of urban and suburban bioregions, and the lack of political representation of non-humans and their bioregions. Mainstream environmental poetry will need to question its historical antecedents: the Romantic, lyrical, rural, British tradition. Indeed, I anticipate writing more about the less iconic, common insects and creatures underrepresented by environmental poetry. This investigation has revealed new areas for my environmental poetry to explore.

Ecocritics and researchers will be interested in possible new theoretical fields arising from this thesis. In the same way that ecofeminism may be more relevant than feminism, Slovic's ecomasculinism may be more relevant still. Environmental poetry and ecomasculinism are both promoting a new perspective. Also, ecocriticism will need to reconsider the areas that have been identified as undertheorized: the function of poetic style in environmental poetry, the use of anthropomorphism that does not imply anthropocentrism, the renegotiation of gender roles without reinforcing the gender binarism and the non-Western, literary use of totemism. Finally, ecocritics and researchers will have to consider the

relationship between the two dialogues as usually the discourses are considered separately. Ecocritics sometimes seem idealistic regarding what they expect from environmental poetry. In some instances, ecocriticism proposes that environmental poetry should read like a guide to environmental salvation. However, environmental poetry is sometimes concerned with how the world presently is, its current state, rather than how it should be. It is only when the nature of the two discourses is acknowledged, the complex nature of the dialogue between the two is understood and the biases and blind spots recognized, that environmental poetry and ecocriticism can successfully collaborate for their shared aesthetic and environmental goals.

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