‘Rising in and for our life-source, Earth’,

ecopoetry as engaged, embodied, co-created expression of ecocentric consciousness

A PhD by publication

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Abstract

In writing this thesis, I am seeking to demonstrate the independent, significant, and original contribution to knowledge and scholarly research within the field of ecopoetry that the Collection makes; and in doing so, I broadly illustrate the core aims of my creative work, which are:

- To inspire social change through innovative socially and ecologically engaged ecopoetry
- To reveal how embodiment, imagination and perception contribute to paradigm shift
- To express the co-creative aspects of human and more-than-human relations

Beginning with personal reflection to trace my path towards 'ecopoetry', I move on to survey contemporary ecopoetry and its roots, demonstrating how the sustained ethical-political engagement evident within the Collection combined with my deployment of multiple perspectives, the trans-scalar imaginary, co-creation with the more-than-human world, and an innovative approach to form, have created a pioneering contribution to the field, particularly in the UK. Through an exploration of my ecocultural identity, I illustrate how my adoption of the epithet 'ecopoet' around twenty years ago served as a compass to orientate myself towards a more ecocentric worldview, despite the 'boundary patrol' to which I was subject. Drawing on ecopsychology to define consciousness, and a broad spectrum of ecocritical analysis, I discuss how the Collection reveals a decolonizing approach to 'Nature' and portrays a rewilding of the self, enabling an embodied approach that permits co-creation. With its unique breadth of perspective and subject-matter, the Collection has anticipated developments in ecocriticism and serves to revitalise perception of the interconnected crises in a globalised world, and to develop a deeper identification with the evolving planet. This retrospective analysis also reveals dimensions of eco-social justice and regenerative 'naturecultures' beyond apocalyptic tropes, and it shows how my use of organic ecopoetic structure and form reflect embodiment, taking ecopoetry in innovative directions.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed: Date: 12th June 2024

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Contents

1. Introduction

a) Introducing the Collection

This PhD by research is based on my Collection[1] of published ecopoetry and critical writings, and a list of the items included therein is provided in Appendix ii. In assembling this body of work, I'm drawing on my twenty-year reflective and creative practice as a freelance poet, writer, and socially engaged artist, which has been grounded in a sustained commitment to deconstructing and reshaping my sense of self and worldview to inspire social change. Beginning in 2004, the spectrum of what I would now define as my 'ecocultural arts practice' has yielded a range of outputs, from narrative non-fiction to award-winning ecopoetry films; audio recordings of longform landscape ecopoems with collaborative soundscapes; socially and ecologically engaged community arts projects; the installation of poetic texts in art galleries; a 'wild writing' programme, with in-person workshops / seminars and online mentorship of programme participants; plus in collaboration with the University of Gloucestershire, the curation of ECOPOETIKON, an online showcase of global ecopoetries.[2]

Focussing on my creative and critical writings published over the period 2007-2024 and on those intended for adult audiences, the Collection contains three critically acclaimed ecopoetry collections, *Hedge Fund, And Other Living Margins* (2012), *ECOZOA* (2015), and The *Mother Country* (2019); one co-authored bilingual volume of ecopoetry, *INTATTO. INTACT. Ecopoesia. Ecopoetry*, (2017); a book chapter on wild writing; eight essays exploring aspects of ecopoetics and ecocultural identity; and a selection of uncollected ecopoems published in a range of journals. The research methodologies employed in the Collection include personal reflection, critical

[1] I capitalize 'Collection' to distinguish it from my use of the word with a lower-case initial letter ('collection') to refer to an individual book of poetry

[2] www.ecopoetikon.org

analysis of language, phenomenological engagement with ecology, poetic enquiry, and arts-based research. I have drawn on personal reflection to reveal my ecocentric worldview and this has been complemented by critical analysis of language, which I deploy to uncover the anthropocentrism inherent in the language we use to refer to ecology. My practice of phenomenology[3] allows me to closely observe the more-than-human world with an open-minded, embodied, intuitive approach and to record my impressions. My observations are then supported by interdisciplinary research to extend my imaginative engagement with non-human species and ecosystems, and that two-fold approach has informed the development of my long landscape ecopoems. I have also evolved a unique research method, the 'biophilic dérive', which draws on psychogeography to create a radical re-reading of place.

My practice of embodying a communicative and co-creative relationship with the more-than-human world, which I have come to term 'wild writing', emerged from my meditation, yoga and dance practices, and has been complemented by participation in ecologically oriented practice groups and my work as a socially engaged artist, Forest School leader and environmental activist. Poetic enquiry and arts-based research have intersected with the professional and activist spheres of my life, my community engagement offering opportunities for participant observation. Cross arts-science fieldwork has provided another mode of research, and this has been enhanced by interviews with land-users, including farmers and people engaged in outdoor leisure pursuits. I also acknowledge reader and audience responses as an ongoing source of inspiration and feedback; and I am grateful to the mentees engaged in my 'Wild Ways to Writing' programme as co-researchers in the process of rewilding self.

[3] In using the term 'phenomenology', I am indebted to David Abram's discussion of its development by philosophers Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in Abram, David, *The Spell of the Sensuous, Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World,* (New York, Vintage Books, 1997), pp.31-76

b) The 'New' Ecocentric Paradigm

In recent decades, the notion of an emergent paradigm shift has been evident in the work of numerous writers, philosophers, environmental activists and ecocritics, and the Collection reflects their influence. If I were to single out one amongst their number, it would be the American cultural historian, Thomas Berry. In *The Great Work, Our Way into the Future,* Berry writes:

> […] the foundations of a new historical period, the Ecozoic Era, have been established in every realm of human affairs. The mythic vision has been set into place. The distorted dream of an industrial technological paradise is being replaced by the more viable dream of a mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing organic-based Earth community. The dream […] becomes the myth that both guides and drives the action.[4]

Berry's concept of 'the Ecozoic Era' directly shaped the thematic focus and title of *ECOZOA* (2015)[5], as did William Blake's *Four Zoas*[6] – as I will discuss. The vision of a 'new age' was present in Blake's creative work[7] and it has been articulated over the past two centuries by numerous artists and writers; however, as the term has been co-opted by alternative forms of capitalist consumerism, I avoid its usage. Together, these many voices creatively express the urgently felt need for social change – for the collective to discard the dualist, anthropocentric, 'Urizenic'[8] worldview that underpins the hyper-extractivist, white supremacist, patriarchal, colonising capitalist system, which is unsettling Earth's ecosystems, destroying biodiversity, perpetuating eco-social injustice, and threatening the future habitability of the planet for most life-forms. Embracing the emergent ecocentric paradigm requires the

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[4] Berry, Thomas, *The Great Work, Our Way into the Future,* (New York: Random House, 1999), p.201
[5] Moore, Helen, *ECOZOA,* (Hampshire: Permanent Publications, 2015) – see the Collection
[6] 'Vala, or The Four Zoas' in Blake, William, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake,* ed. by Erdman, David. V., (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1988)
[7] See Raine, Kathleen, *Blake and the New Age*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979)
[8] The term 'Urizenic' refers to Blake's conception of Urizen as the tyranny of reason – see Frye, Northrop, *Fearful Symmetry, A Study of William Blake*, (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1947, tenth printing 1990), p.35

dismantling of exploitative human-'Nature' relationships, and I concur with ecofeminist critic Laura White that examining the dominant rationalist conception of the human includes considering how it has participated in a network of related oppressions. From there, we can begin the ontological project of reformulating what it is to be human,[9] and in this I see the broad category of 'consciousness' as an essential point of focus, with my creative and critical work aiming to contribute towards this shifting worldview. As Jonathan Bate states in *The Song of the Earth,* 'the business of literature is to work on consciousness.'[10]

Through the ever-growing number of organisations committed to social and ecological justice worldwide,[11] the broadly documented 'ecological turn' within the humanities, and the increasing visibility of ecocultural arts, it seems evident that ecocentric consciousness is (re)awakening, if not in full view of corporate media channels. In adding the prefix 're' to 'awakening', I allude to the prior existence of an ecocentric way of perceiving and imagining the world amongst the early ancestors of these lands, whose lithic carvings and monuments dotted across this North Atlantic archipelago – long-barrows, stone circles, and henges – reflect subtle alignments with the solar cycle, and often a tribal identification with totemic species.[12] Of course, with no supply chains providing support if they destroyed their local environment, a more sustainable way of relating with local ecosystems was a feature of all pre-modern cultures; and ecocentrism continues to be reflected in extant First Nations cultures around the world. For these reasons, I use quotation marks around 'new' to indicate that the novelty of this paradigm is relative. Nevertheless, recent decades

[9] See White, Laura, 'Re-imagining the Human: Ecofeminism, Affect and Postcolonial Narration' in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, eds. Gaard, Greta, Estok, Simon C., Opperman, Serpil, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.138

[10] Bate, Jonathan, *The Song of the Earth*, (London: Picador, 2000), p.23

[11] See Hawken, Paul, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World, (*New York: Viking Press, 2007)

[12] See Hutton, Ronald, *Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and McHardy, Stuart, *Pagan Symbols of the Picts, The Symbology of Pre-Christian Belief* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2015)

have for the first time in human history offered us the means to observe, record and share our thoughts and deeds through published texts and media channels, which makes the shift both willed and self-conscious. Additionally, our globalised world and the insights of science bring us trans-scalar and trans-local perspectives that appear to be unique to the postmodern era. Within this context, I see ecopoetry as a cultural reflection of ancient/modern consciousness.

Collectively embracing an ecocentric worldview is simultaneously easy and incredibly difficult. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we humans are embedded in ecosystems, our bodies entangled with soil, water, air, energy, and all the micro- and macro-fauna whose lives interweave with our own; and yet, in having been raised in this anthropocentric culture, we're generally habituated to perceiving 'Nature' as a separate and often inferior 'other', with dominant discourses reflecting this distanced perspective. Additionally, there are strong socio-economic forces in place with interests vested in preserving the status quo. How then to avoid using language that reinforces anthropocentrism? Ecolinguistics helps us see how language limits and amplifies our perceptions of our embedded relationship in ecology, and my practice broadly reflects ecolinguistic approaches (i.e. looking critically at the stories that underpin the discourse of industrial civilisation and seeking to convey new stories to live by), although I only encountered this field in 2016.

I will return to this in greater depth, but by way of introduction, I want to outline some of the strategies deployed both within this thesis and in the Collection to avoid unquestioningly reproducing the values of dominant discourse. Where possible I use the term 'more-than-human' to refer to collectives of wild animals, birds, plants, fungi[13]. Where their common names are used, I endow them with an initial capital, a typographic attempt to raise their status from the margins to which our culture has

[13] See Abram, David, *Spell of the Sensuous*

relegated them. This is a practice I developed almost two decades ago – an idea arising in part from my knowledge of the German language, where nouns are capitalised. When I began, I knew of no other contemporary anglophone poets or writers adopting this approach, and it's one that I've regularly had to defend from rubbishing by critical editors and literary gatekeepers. It is explicitly stated in my debut collection, *Hedge Fund, And Other Living Margins,* in the first of a series of fragmentary poems called 'Marginals':

> Very quaint, very Emily Dickinson, all those shouting nouns –
> but how else to see sisters and brothers in margins and ghettos?[14]

More recently, ecologically engaged writers, including Robin Wall Kimmerer, have reconsidered their use of pronouns to refer to more-than-human Beings, [15] and similarly I avoid using 'it', preferring 'he', 'she' or 'they' when sex is unclear, and write 'who' instead of 'which'. In other poems in the Collection, corporate brand names are written in the lower case by way of contrast with capitalised non-human animals. I also capitalise 'Nature', and in this thesis use single quotation marks as part of my ongoing endeavour to decolonise and explore the human relationship with ecology. Additionally, I play with the term 'humanimal' as a reminder that we too are animals and intrinsically part of our ecosystems.

My commitment, in a mode of service to the planetary collective, has been informed by ground-breaking work across the sciences and humanities, and by my deepening, lived connection with 'Nature'. From the start, my ecopoetics has had an avowedly activist intention, reflecting a parallel engagement with environmental activism. In using the term 'ecopoetics', I'm following Danila Cannamela in her differentiation

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[14] 'Marginal, i' in Moore, Helen, *Hedge Fund, Another Other Living Margins*, (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2012) p.13 – see the Collection

[15] Kimmerer, Robin Wall, 'Nature Needs a New Pronoun: To Stop the Age of Extinction, Let's Start by Ditching "It", in *Yes Magazine,* (Spring 2015), ‹https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/together-earth/2015/03/30/alternative-grammar-a-new-language-of-kinship› [accessed 1st May, 2024]

between 'ecopoetics' and 'ecopoetry.'[16] Both, she tells us, derive from the Ancient Greek 'ποιεῖν (poieîn), to make or to create, designating an act of creativity, or ποίησις (poiesis).' And yet, this 'making' is not exclusively human. Quoting Aaron Moe's *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry,* Cannamela indicates that it occurs through "innumerable nuances of bodily movement, symbolic gesture, […] symbolic vocalization," and forms of "innovative imitation" across life-forms. Embracing a similarly non-anthropocentric perspective, I take ecopoetics to be, as Cannamela suggests:

> […] an umbrella term for all languages, media, and practices—whether human, nonhuman, or interspecies — that make the experience of dwelling on earth an act of creative interaction.[17]

The term "ecopoetry" thus refers to poetry 'as […] a creative language that can mediate people's construct of nature.'[18] Definitions of 'ecopoetry' remain contested – a terrain I will come on to survey. However, from an early stage in my own explorations of what was in the early 2000s a barely visible sub-genre of poetry in the UK, I began putting my evolving relationship with the more-than-human world at the core of my approach, and seeing my creative work as a reflection of the 'green movement', as I absorbed its philosophies and values. My resulting Collection articulates my 'ecosophy' (ecological philosophy),[19] which I summarize as 'engaged, embodied co-creation'. Embracing deep ecology's honouring of the intrinsic worth of more-than-human Beings and natural phenomena, i.e., beyond any instrumental value for humans, I espouse an activist-artistic stance, seeking to encourage others to explore a deeper sense of identity, with an understanding of ourselves as intra-

[16] Cannamela, Danila, 'Italian Ecopoetry, or the Art of Reading through Negativity', *MLN* 135 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020) p.303
[17] Ibid
[18] Ibid
[19] The term 'ecosophy' was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, and is discussed in detail in Stibbe, Arran, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By,* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp.25-28

penetrated parts of 'Gaia' – our belonging derived from our role as members of the wider multi-species communities of our planet-home. In this way, I believe we may more readily cultivate a relationship of reciprocity for the collective welfare. Bearing the influences of anarchist social ecology, ecofeminism, ecopsychology and earth-based spirituality, my ecopoetry is a restorative act, one of many signposts pointing towards emerging regenerative 'naturecultures',[20] where citizens understand themselves as part of 'Nature', and work with the more-than-human world to heal damaged ecosystems and promote eco-social justice, protecting the Earth, and particularly the land/bioregion we inhabit, as if it were community, kith, kin, our wider, shared body. Ultimately, I want to see ecopoetry become redundant – for it to herald a future where 'ecopoetry' is simply 'poetry' again.

As my work has developed, my aesthetics have shifted from what I initially termed 'art for earth's sake'[21] and have come to articulate as 'co-creation'.[22] This is particularly evident in the evolution of my 'wild writing practice', with my ecopoetics expressing a deepening awareness of the co-creative dance with the 'storied matter'[23] with which I'm entangled.

Ars ecopoetica[24]

'i' –
this
rewilding
female mammal
composed of water :
air : bacteria :
cells : viruses :
carbon :

[20] The term 'naturecultures' was coined by Donna Haraway and is discussed in Iovino, Serenella and Opperman, Serpil (eds.) *Material Ecocriticism,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), p.3
[21] See Moore, Helen, 'What is ecopoetry?', (International Times, 2012) – see the Collection
[22] See Moore, Helen, 'Wild Writing: Embracing Our Humanimal Nature', (Climate Cultures: creative conversations for the Anthropocene, 2021) – see the Collection
[23] 'The phrase 'storied matter' is borrowed from the introduction to *Material Ecocriticism:* 'the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be 'read' and interpreted as forming narratives, stories …' See Iovino, Serenella and Opperman, Serpil (eds.) *Material Ecocriticism*, p.1
[24] This poem is written as part of my thesis.

culture –

'i',
shedding
colonisation
of mind-body-
soul, coming back
to life, to breath,
to now;

'i',
to words
of kith & kin –
Wasp : Salmon : Oak :
Owl : Spider :
Snake : offered
through
my language
craft
///
***

2. Life journey, influences, and challenges

a) Origins

Born May 1971 in Chalfont St. Giles – one of three neighbouring villages known as 'The Chalfonts', meaning 'chalk springs', on the edge of England's Chiltern Hills – I was raised in nearby Seer Green, where the demographic was white and generally prosperous. The first fruit of the union of Ronald George Moore – my father was the eldest son of Norfolk tenant farmers, a 'self-made man' who had 'bettered' himself through accountancy and management consultancy; and my mother, Elizabeth Jane LeMare, a middle-class woman descended from Huguenot refugees, who lacked education, confidence, and opportunities (as I indicate in my poem 'The Scold's Bridle'[25]). My mother gave birth on her back, feet hoisted in stirrups – a

[25] 'The Scold's Bridle' in Moore, *The Mother Country,* p.58

disempowered position that originated during the reign of Louis XIV.[26] Suffering from post-natal depression, and isolated from community and relatives (the nuclear family is described by poet Adrienne Rich as 'the principal form of social fragmentation'[27]), my mother received little support other than that of 'Big Pharma', via the GP's prescription of Valium. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we never bonded in the way she did with my younger brother, and in my poem entitled 'Changeling', I experience myself as such.[28] Domestic violence had featured in both sides of my father's family, and the combination of his patriarchal conditioning and controlling personality created strong expectations around his children's conformity to gender norms and achievement of academic excellence. This intergenerational wounding also cascaded into my life, and, as one in four women in the UK,[29] I later suffered domestic violence, an experience that my poem 'The Carpet Beater' touches on.[30]

As a Seventies child, I'm grateful to have experienced outdoor adventures without parental supervision – a freedom that subsequent generations have lost, as Richard Louv documents in *Last Child in the Woods*[31]. I see those and other early childhood experiences as predisposing me towards a phenomenological engagement with the more-than-human world, and my poem 'On Sisterhood and Service'[32] reflects this, as I will illustrate in my discussion of my ecocultural identity. In the mid Eighties, Seer Green saw its first major wave of housebuilding, with Cherry orchards grubbed up

[26] Siring nearly two dozen children, the French king instructed his wives and mistresses to adopt this supine position, as his kink was watching them in labour. This contributed to changing the custom from the empowered postures women had adopted for millennia. See Dundes, Lauren, 'The evolution of maternal birthing position', *Public Health Then And Now*, AJPH May 1987, Vol. 77, No. 5, ‹https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1647027/pdf/amjph00256-0102.pdf› [Accessed 26th December, 2023]

[27] Rich, Adrienne, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1979), p.83

[28] 'The Changeling', in Moore, Helen, *The Mother Country*, (Stroud: Awen Publications, 2019) – see the Collection

[29] Statistics from the National Centre for Domestic Violence, ‹https://www.ncdv.org.uk/domestic-abuse-statistics-uk/› [Accessed 26th December 2023]

[30] Moore, Helen, 'Carpet Beater', in *Unbreakable, New Writing XIII, The 2024 Creative Writing Anthology from the University of Gloucestershire,* (Gloucester: Severn Print, 2024) – see the Collection.

[31] Louv, Richard, *Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder,* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010)

[32] 'On Sisterhood and Service' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.20

and bulldozed to make way for new housing estates and the rash of gated mansions that now characterise this 'stock-broker belt'. Disturbed by this violent upheaval and struggling within the toxic family culture, I found solace in making poems and paintings, and at eleven, won a national writing competition. Physical comfort and an experience of unconditional love was derived predominantly from a non-human animal, the family Welsh Terrier. Becoming a creative writer was not within the sphere of parental expectation, and despite choosing this at the tender age of twenty – a clear decision that came after participating in a voluntary aid project in Peru, where my eyes were opened to material poverty and social injustice – I was the first child on both sides of my family to go to university, and was more than once told by my father that in pursuing a path as a writer, I was 'wasting my education'.

b) Literary gatekeepers

Having moved to Edinburgh in 1994 to study for a Masters in Comparative and General Literature, I relinquished the opportunity to pursue a PhD, sensing the need to step outside academia to find my authentic voice as a writer. In this I was influenced by Gary Snyder's notion of the need to 'de-educate' oneself:

> Get away from books and the elite sense of being bearers of Western culture and all that crap. But also, ultimately, into your mind, into *original mind*, before any books were put into it, before language was even invented.[33]

In following his direction, I was also addressing my troubled psyche. Living alone near the university campus, holding down low-income, part-time jobs while I attended counselling and Buddhist sanghas, I worked on a novel. Influenced by 'A Room of One's Own',[34] I overlooked Woolf's less visible privilege – besides her class

[33] Snyder, Gary, in 'The Real Work', interview with Paul Geneson, 1977, in *The Real Work: Interviews and Talks, 1964-1979'*, (New York: New Directions, 1980), p.64
[34] Woolf, Virginia, 'A Room of One's Own', (London: Hogarth Press, 1929)

and race, she had a private income, a husband, plus servants to support her creative work[35] – and thus I continued to put my creative commitment ahead of economic security. When a literary agent, who admired my writing, declared my novel – an allegory of capitalism – to be 'too anti-consumerist to market to the major publishers', I became aware of the commercial pressures that being a successful writer would entail and rashly accepted a publishing deal with a new independent press, which promptly went bust.[36] It was around this time that the UK's 'Net Book Agreement' came to an end – a demise rued by the owner of Word*Power, the independent radical bookstore where I worked[37] – and this may have been a factor in the agent's decision. For decades, the NBA had fixed the retail price of books and was seen to benefit diversity within publishing, as it subsidized works of literary importance that might have a small readership with the profits from bestsellers. In *Arts Under Pressure*, Joost Smiers affirms how social institutions affect the production and dissemination of art, and he describes the shift of power that was occurring within large publishing houses in the Nineties away from editorial decision-making towards committees where 'financial and marketing staff play pivotal roles'.[38]

The heterogenous inclusivity of capitalism ends with 'those whose politics might undermine the very framework within which such inclusion occurs', as Terry Eagleton remarks in *Culture* (2016).[39] Being a woman proved an additional obstacle to successfully publishing creative work questioning the status quo. In *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, Joanna Russ surveys the history of women's writing in the UK and the US, and points to issues including a lack of role models, isolation, and

[35] In *Having and Being Had,* Biss, Eula (London: Faber & Faber, 2023), Biss documents Woolf's difficult relationship with the family's seven servants and her furious reaction to being asked to leave a servant's room, Woolf's self-justification being that ultimately it belonged to her as 'mistress' of the house.
[36] Moore, Helen, *The Doubling of the Elephant Woman*, (London: Bastard Books, 2001)
[37] Word*Power Books on West Nicholson Street Edinburgh is now Lighthouse Books
[38] Smiers, Joost, *Arts Under Pressure, promoting cultural diversity in the age of globalisation*, (London: Zed Books, 2003), p.23
[39] Eagleton, Terry, *Culture,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p.33

prohibitions.[40] Calling out 'the glass ceiling for women poets' (*Artemis Magazine*, 2010), the poet Fiona Sampson evokes the 'bizarrely antediluvian British poetry culture', and describes issues such as 'male gatekeepers' and the prohibition on women poets writing about ideas.[41] In examining the critical reception afforded women's poetry, Dr. Angela France undertook a detailed thematic analysis of poetry reviews of male and female poets, examining the discourse. Her study reveals that women's poems are judged more often on content, as opposed to poetic qualities.[42] Significantly, a review of *ECOZOA*, published in the British poetry journal *Tears in the Fence* based the entire judgement of my book on one poem.[43] The poet, editor and academic Naomi Foyle wrote to the white male editor, saying:

> It wouldn't be so necessary to take issue with a misreading of a poem in a review, if not for the fact that Persad's judgement of the book rests entirely on this one poem. In this respect, the review fell short of what I would consider a reasonable and respectful critical reading of a collection [...]

Foyle's letter, which she shared with me, was neither acknowledged nor published.

c) The cultural contexts of poetry

Living rurally, at a distance from metropolitan centres, I took the means of production into my own hands between 2004-2011, self-publishing poetry pamphlets and in 2006, a 'Nature' journal.[44] The latter developed my phenomenological engagement with the more-than-human world, as I honed observation skills, and

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[40] Russ, Joanna, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, (London: The Women's Press, 1984)
[41] Sampson, Fiona, 'Breaking the Glass Ceiling', *Artemis Magazine,* (London, Second Light Publications, 2010), p.24
[42] France, Angela, 'Gender Disparity in Poetry Publishing: it's about more than the numbers', (*Litro Magazine,* 10th March, 2014) ‹https://www.litromagazine.com/travelandlifestyle/gender-disparity-in-poetry-publishing-its-about-more-than-the-numbers/› [Accessed 8th March, 2024]
[43] Persad, Joseph, 'Ecopoetry', *Tears in the Fence*, no.71, (2020), pp.113-115
[44] Moore, Helen, *Changing Nature, Eco-notes of a Digital Woman*, (Somerset: Green Seer Books, 2006). My comparative phenological study of the impacts of climate change achieved some media attention, including a feature on BBC Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour', although I was disappointed that my most salient points about climate impacts on British flora and fauna were cut from the eight-minute piece that was broadcast.

wrote early 'Nature' poems. Taking up less labour-intensive forms than the novel, such as short stories, essays, and poetry, I felt freer to express radical ideas and could fit my creative practice around remunerated work. Buoyed by finding (largely unpaid) opportunities to publish my poems in print journals, I was aware that I was choosing to pursue 'an outcast art'. Tracing cultural resistance to poetry in the U.S. in 1949, Muriel Rukeyser, a politically engaged poet writes that the fear of poetry indicates that 'we are cut off from our own reality' – namely, the imagination.[45] In Edinburgh, I'd explored the burgeoning spoken word scene, influenced by American 'slam' culture. However, I found it uncomfortably male-dominated and focussed on entertainment – not a scene for sharing grief at the Sixth Mass Extinction, for example. And yet, the literary scene I later encountered in Bath felt staid and conservative, audiences rattled by issues that my ecopoems raised. In *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016),[46] Ben Lerner sees cultural resistance to poetry as a perennial challenge, dating back to Plato's attack on art and literature in *The Republic*. Charting the ongoing assaults on poetry over the centuries, Lerner references the responses made by poets, including Shelley's 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821). The latter found an echo in my essay 'Defending Ecopoetry, a Dance with Shelley', (2021) as part of a wider contemporary project of defending poetry.[47] I draw strength from Shelley's notion of poetry as 'secret alchemy', and experience my creative practice as a means to:

> […] grieve losses (personal and planetary), to channel rage at the insanity of an economic system pursuing infinite growth on a finite planet, and to restore my own balance, wellness, resilience.[48]

[45] Rukeyser, Muriel, *The Life of Poetry*, (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 1996), p.43
[46] Lerner, Ben, *The Hatred of Poetry, (*London: Fitcarraldo Editions, 2016)
[47] Moore, Helen, 'Defending ecopoetry, a dance with Shelley', 'New Defences of Poetry' (Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, 2021) – see the Collection
[48] Ibid

d) Influences and tutelary figures

Discovering in 2003 the writings of the American environmental activist, Buddhist scholar and systems theorist, Joanna Macy, and the practices collectively termed 'The Work that Reconnects',[49] was crucial in learning to honour my emotional responses to ecocide, and over the subsequent decade, I joined various groups that met to discuss and practise her work. Acknowledging the value of her work, Timothy Morton writes:

> Joanna Macy and others […] have suggested that instead of trying to get over grief, to shut off the terrible trauma of the current ecological crisis, we simply stay with it.[50]

I will return to the value of grief-tending and its expression in my work, but more broadly, Macy's vision of a movement towards a 'life-sustaining society', which she called 'The Great Turning'[51] has been hugely influential, and I have situated my environmental activism, 'Nature' education, and ecocultural arts practice within its three 'mutually reinforcing' dimensions, namely:

> 1."Holding actions" in defense of life on Earth; 2. Analysis of structural causes and creation of alternative institutions; 3. Shift in perceptions of reality, both cognitively and spiritually.[52]

Discovering *Resurgence & Ecologist Magazine* edited by Satish Kumar, I was soon reading widely in the developing fields of ecology, ecopsychology, ecofeminism, and ecophilosophy, and began contributing ecopoetry readings to *Resurgence* events, often sharing platforms with activists whose work I admired. The Gaia hypothesis,

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[49] For a general introduction to The Work that Reconnects, see: https://workthatreconnects.org/
[50] Morton, Timothy, *Ecology without Nature, Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p.186
[51] Macy, Joanna and Brown, Molly Young, *Coming Back to Life, Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World,* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 1998), p.17
[52] Ibid, pp.17-24

co-developed by scientists James Lovelock[53] and Lynn Margulis[54] as a way of understanding Earth as a 'self-regulating superorganism' soon awakened my interest. Although critiqued by scientists and ecocritics, I nevertheless found 'Gaian thinking' a powerful way to conceive of the interconnected planetary systems and it helped me extend my sense of self beyond an atomistic and anthropocentric perspective through my identification as one of the living organisms that comprise and reflect 'Gaia'. Several poems in the Collection, including 'glory be to Gaia' and 'Deep Time, Deep Tissue' articulate my integration of Gaian ideas in new and original ways.[55] The former, conceived of as a poem-hymn, was set to music and sung by a massed choir in Winchester Cathedral in 2014, and the latter, an embodied journey into Deep Time and the trans-scalar imaginary (as I will come on to discuss), was recorded for the 'Hacking the Anthropocene' symposium at the Sydney Environment Institute in 2016, and subsequently included in their publication.[56]

In examining the literary friendship between US poets Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, David Kalstone writes that 'Moore, who had no tutelary older poet in her own life, must have sensed Bishop's talent and independence from the start'.[57] For me, Rose Flint became such a figure when in 2003, having moved to a rural hamlet not far from Bath, I joined her 'MoonWrite' workshops for women poets, resonating with the pagan and subtly ecofeminist perspectives this older woman shared. It was at her encouragement that I entered the annual 'Bard of Bath' competition in late 2003, and having won the title, subsequently found the British Bardic tradition to be richly formative – an aspect of my ecocultural identity that I will develop. Of greater significance was my connection with the late Irish poet, actor, musician, psychogeographer, and activist Niall McDevitt, whom I met in 2008.

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[53] Lovelock, James, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth, (New York: Norton, 1995)*
[54] Margulis, Lynn, *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998)*
[55] 'glory be to Gaia' and 'Deep Time, Deep Tissue' in Moore, *ECOZOA*, p.68 and p.2
[56] See *Hamilton, Jennifer Mae*, Reid, Susan, van Gelder, Pia, eds., *Feminist, Queer, Anticolonial Propositions for Hacking the Anthropocene: Archive,* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2021) pp. 17-18
[57] Kalstone, David, *Becoming a Poet,* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989) p.4

Having gifted Niall one of my self-published poetry pamphlets, I received an email commenting: 'I see William Blake behind you, pointing to new ways.' I replied: 'I feel there are few places I can take my work in this hyper metropolitan and intellectual poetry scene.' A literary friendship blossomed between us, which became a four-year relationship. Being older and further established as a self-styled 'urban shaman' poet in London's countercultural arts scene, Niall was already anticipating the launch of his debut collection, *b/w*, (2009).[58] His generous encouragement and our rich exchange of ideas about poetry contributed to shaping my own debut.[59] It was at Niall's suggestion that I wrote my first essay on ecopoetry;[60] and with his collaboration, plus the wizardry of film-maker Howard Vause, I made my award-winning poetry film, 'Green Spin', in 2013.[61] Revisiting my email correspondence with Niall to research this thesis has proved significant for tracing my path into ecopoetry. In 2009, I wrote:

> […] I'd like to be seen as part of a wave of ecopoets heralding a new consciousness/ paradigm […] one which fully knows our deep interconnectedness with all beings, understands the miracle of Earth-life, and which feels the pain of our separation from this understanding.

e) Precarity and re-vision

Both my parents died from the cancer epidemic that has plagued Western societies in recent decades[62] – losses I've expressed within this Collection – see: 'On a Single Hand'[63], 'The Big C' and 'Mother Haiku'.[64] Symbolically too, the disease features in

[58] McDevitt, Niall, *b/w,* (Brighton: Waterloo Press, 2010)
[59] Moore, *Hedge Fund*
[60] Moore, 'What is ecopoetry?'
[61] Moore, Helen, 'Green Spin', (2013), ‹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-tZ_mEHomc› [Accessed 9th June 2024]
[62] Kanavos, P, 'The rising burden of cancer in the developing world', *Annals of Oncology* 17 (Supplement 8): viii15–viii23, 2006, doi:10.1093/annonc/mdl983
[63] 'On a Single Hand' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.61
[64] 'The Big C' and 'Mother Haiku, from *Winter Journal,* 2013-2014' in Moore, *The Mother Country,* p.35 and p.39

'The Cancer',[65] where capitalism possesses the power to 'recreate the self, over and over – metastasized past the confines of a single body'. With my mother disinheriting me in favour of my brother ('Legacy, Mother's Day 2016'[66]), and roles as wife and mother never moving beyond gestation, I've walked a precarious path as a child-free, freelance poet, writer, socially engaged artist, activist, and environmental educator, defining myself beyond my ability to reproduce – choosing 'to serve The Great Turning/[to] let revolutionary love suckle/at my breast' ('Sweet Pain'[67]). I acknowledge an ongoing search for love and connection, which has caused me to widen concepts of love beyond the human. In my essay 'Is love the answer? Personal and planetary wellbeing through the lens of poetry', awarded the annual ASLE essay prize in 2018, I developed notions of biophilic love to address the limited sense of love in an anthropocentric culture.[68] My search has also led me to explore new forms of human family across the UK and overseas. Despite the challenging upheaval, my relocations informed the development of trans-local perspectives, deepening my ability to relate with place, and inspiring my longform landscape ecopoems. My lived experience of the displacement resulting from globalisation included becoming a white migrant in Australia. Occasioned by my marriage to a white Australian, that short life chapter awoke my interest in historical and contemporary aspects of Aboriginal Australia in Sydney and New South Wales, strengthening my commitment to creatively addressing aspects of British colonial history in relation to 'Nature' and ecosocial justice issues. *The Mother Country* (2019) and my subsequent essay 'Beyond White Guilt: Imagining Sydney as Pre-colonial Site'[69] focus on these themes, situating my life experiences and ecological

[65] 'The Cancer' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.46
[66] 'Legacy, Mother's Day, 2016', Moore, *The Mother Country,* p.63
[67] 'Sweet Pain' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.64
[68] Moore, Helen, 'Is love the answer? Personal and planetary wellbeing through the lens of poetry', (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, 2018) – see the Collection
[69] Moore, Helen, 'Beyond White Guilt', Imagining Sydney as Pre-colonial site', *Panorama Journal*, 2022 – see the Collection

perspectives within the broader context of the collective, bringing a fresh, ecopoetic perspective to the contemporary conversation about colonial legacies.

Now permanently based back in the UK, my creative work has recently seen the completion of a (currently unpublished) prose memoir about my more-than-human teachers. Driven by a strong sense of purpose, I'm grateful to feel a growing sense of support for my ecocultural arts practice, and the opportunity to undertake a funded PhD by publication is revitalising my self-perception as a creative artist. As Adrienne Rich reminds:

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women […] an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge […] is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male dominated society.[70]

3. The landscape of ecopoetry, surveying the terrain

Before I shed light on my intersectional ecocultural identity, I intend to explore ecopoetry, and to set it in its wider context. What exactly is it? How does it differ from 'Nature' poetry? And why is it still so hard to define? Within this literature review, I also situate my ecopoetic practice and achievements within the field, showing some of the ways that the Collection has made a significant contribution.

a) Ecopoetry's roots

Ecopoetry has widely acknowledged roots in the Romantic tradition, beginning in the late eighteenth century as the effects of industrialisation (Blake's 'dark, satanic mills') began to bite deep. 'Romanticism,' as Jonathan Bate indicates in *Song of the*

[70] Rich, Adrienne, *On Lies,* p.35

Earth[71] 'challenges the moderns' separation of culture from nature.'[72] This separation was evident in the pastoral tradition, which emerged in Ancient Greek and Roman poetry about the countryside. With a predominant theme of transformation through an idealised retreat and return from the city into rural bliss and back again, the pastoral aesthetic has what Harriet Tarlo describes as a 'morally and socially inflected contrast between the cultural/urban and the natural.'[73] Adopted by Elizabethan court poets, the pastoral continued to influence English poetry over subsequent centuries, and I would argue, still influences the collective psyche. Nevertheless, breaking with this tradition, poems such as Keats's 'To Autumn' and Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' are, according to Bate, 'thinkings of fragile, beautiful, necessary ecological wholeness.'[74] Other Romantic poets, particularly Blake and Clare, highlighted the alienation and injustice that industrialisation and the enclosure of the land create, pointing towards the eco-social justice themes that emerge in ecopoetry.

Ecopoetry's taproots are nourished by the ancient wellspring of indigenous oral poetries, for which Jerome Rothenberg's anthology, *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania,*[75] is a brilliant primer. Additionally, I see ecopoetry's lateral roots in twentieth-century activist poetries of witness and resistance, and for this, Carolyn Forché's *Against Forgetting, Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*[76] is an essential resource. The latter reflects an important function of ecopoetry – the ability to face and communicate the horror and destruction of our times. My reading of Louis MacNeice's 'Prayer before birth'

[71] Bate, Jonathan, *The Song of the Earth*, (London: Picador, 2000), see preface
[72] Ibid, p.102
[73] Tarlo, Harriet (ed), *The Ground Aslant: an anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry,* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011), p.11
[74] Bate, *Song,* p.103
[75] Rothenberg, Jerome, *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania,* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2nd edition, 1985)
[76] Forché, Carolyn, *Against Forgetting, Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1993)

(1944)[77] as a teenager also left an indelible concern about the future generations. Written from the perspective of an unborn foetus, the poem's lyric voice prays not be harmed by the world:

> […] those who would freeze my
> humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton,
> would make me a cog in a machine […]

And instead invokes:

> […] water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk
> to me, sky to sing to me.

In *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013), a survey of 'American poetry about nature and the environment', editors Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street situate the development of ecopoetry with the rise of environmentalism in the 1960s, although they indicate that the term 'ecopoetry' entered the conversation in the 1990s. In their introduction, they cite the profound failure of the imagination in making the environmental crisis possible:

> What we humans disregard, what we fail to know and grasp, is easy to destroy: a mountaintop, a coral reef, a forest a human community. Yet poetry returns us in countless ways to our senses.[78]

Simultaneously with the publication of Rachel Carson's groundbreaking *Silent Spring* in 1962, the Beat poets were writing and performing poetry that documented a wide spectrum of ecological and social issues. Discovering these activist poets in my twenties, their poems were frequently soft bombs detonating in my mind. Ginsberg's 'Sunflower Sutra' (1955) is a deeply Blakean poem about an encounter

[77] MacNeice, Louis, *Collected Poems,* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966)
[78] Fisher-Wirth, Ann, Street, Laura-Gray (eds), *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2013)

with a Sunflower in an industrial wasteland, which I describe in 'Is Love the Answer?'[79] And Ginsberg's influence on my work was noted by the Australian ecopoet John Kinsella in his endorsement of *ECOZOA*:

> In Moore is a feminist-Ginsberg-channelling Blake – a voice we need, a voice that will not be silenced by vested interests.[80]

As the now revered elder statesman of American ecopoetry, Snyder's influence has been seminal. And in my critical writings, I have regularly cited his stance of advocacy for the more-than-human world: 'My political position is to be a spokesman for wild Nature. I take that as my primary constituency'– see my essays 'Is Love the Answer?' and 'In Defence of Ecopoetry' in the Collection. However, I have also come to see my developing sense of co-creation with the more-than-human world as moving beyond advocacy, as I will elaborate.

In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate discusses the work of the Barbadian poet Kamu Brathwaite in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*, (1967-1969), which follows the triangular route of the Atlantic slave trade between England, Africa, and the Caribbean.[81] Alongside Brathwaite's work, Bate places that of Aimé Césaire, a Francophone Martinican poet, author, and politician, who in 1968 reworked Shakespeare's *Tempest* as *Une tempête*. Both Césaire and Brathwaite take up the Shakespearean figure of Caliban, and for Bate their linking of Caliban with 'Nature' indicates that racial oppression and the exploitation of the more-than-human go hand in hand.[82] This intersectional insight, which I encountered in these and other engaged poets writing in North America and Australia from the mid to late twentieth century, (Anne Waldman, Amiri Baraka, Diane di Prima, Adrienne Rich,

[79] Moore, 'Is Love the Answer?'
[80] Kinsella, John in Moore, *ECOZOA* (see endorsements)
[81] Bate, *Song of the Earth,* pp.81-87
[82] Ibid, p.89

and John Kinsella) nevertheless seemed markedly absent from the British poetry scene when I began writing ecopoetry two decades later, although I acknowledge some counter-cultural exceptions, including Heathcote Williams's idiosyncratic documentary/ investigative poetry.[83]

b) Contemporary British ecopoetry, 2002-2024

In her seminal work of 2002, *The Re-enchantment of Art*, art critic, artist and author Suzi Gablik declared that restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with 'Nature' is 'the most pressing spiritual and political need of our time.'[84] That this was a call to action was evident in contemporaneous statements about the general absence of such work in both the US and the UK. In *Grist Magazine* (April 2005), the American environmental writer Bill McKibben pointed to the sparsity of creative responses to what was then generally termed 'global warming':

> Here's the paradox: if the scientists are right, we're living through the biggest thing that's happened since human civilization emerged…. But oddly, though we know about it, we don't know about it. It hasn't registered in our gut; it isn't part of our culture. Where are the books? The poems? The plays? The goddamn operas?[85]

A few months later, British writer Robert MacFarlane also bemoaned this deficit. Writing in *The Guardian,* he indicated that any literary response 'would need to find ways of imagining which remained honest to the scientific evidence.'[86] In envisioning such art, MacFarlane posited a need for 'forms which are chronic –

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[83] Heathcote Williams addressed three iconic species in his series of widely read volumes from the 1980s, *Falling for a Dolphin,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988) *Whale Nation,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), *Sacred Elephant,* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989)

[84] Gablik, Suzi, *The Re-enchantment of Art*, (New York, Thames and Hudson, 2002)

[85] McKibben, Bill, 'What the warming world needs now is art, sweet art', *Grist Magazine*, 2005, ‹https://grist.org/article/mckibben-imagine/› (Accessed 27th December, 2023)

[86] MacFarlane, Robert, 'The Burning Question', *The Guardian*, 24/11/2005, ‹https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/sep/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview29› (Accessed 27th December, 2023)

which unfold within time' to register the change occurring and weigh its consequences. His literary wish-list also includes 'more bumptious vernaculars … satire … polemic.[87]

By comparison, what was being defined as 'ecopoetry' in Britain in the first decade of the new millennium appeared limited. This was epitomised by Peter Abbs's *Earth Songs: A Resurgence anthology of contemporary eco-poetry* (2002).[88] With selected work 'directing our attention to the state of nature and its place in our lives,' it was paralleled three years later by Alice Oswald's anthology *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet.*[89] In surveying both anthologies, I would define their selections as predominantly new 'Nature' poetry, which perceives the more-than-human world as sacred; offers a felt sense of human interdependence with ecology; and goes some way towards witnessing ecocide. And it's important to note that such writing defied British literary fashion of the time, as Abbs attests in his introduction, quoting a metropolitan critic who had pronounced that there could be no more 'Nature' poetry.[90] (That this opinion was current is evident in my own experience in 2005 of a similar pronouncement from a literary gatekeeper regarding my own work.) Undeterred, Abbs and Oswald published broadly 'ecospiritual'[91] anthologies, which uphold the value of re-enchanting the human relationship with the more-than-human world. Along with Oswald's own luminous work, including *Dart* (2002),[92] these books are also an expression of the strand of ecopoetry that Jonathan Bate calls 'an experiencing of […] dwelling in the earth.'[93] However, what they

[87] Ibid
[88] Abbs, Peter, *Earth Songs: A Resurgence anthology of contemporary eco-poetry, (Devon: Green Books, 2002)*
[89] Oswald, Alice, *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006)
[90] Abbs, p.15
[91] Here I draw on Jay Ramsay's use of the word 'ecospiritual' in Ramsay, Jay, ed., *Soul of the Earth, The Awen Anthology of Ecospiritual Poetry,* (Stroud: Awen Publications, 2011), which explores a spiritual dimension to life on Earth, and suggests that the solution to the collective crises lies beyond materialism. This, and Jay's later anthology, *Diamond Cutters: Visionary Poets in America, Britain, and Oceania* (Tayen Lane Publishing, 2016) contain a selection of my more ecospiritual poems.
[92] Oswald, Alice, *Dart,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)
[93] Bate, p.42

largely omit is another strand, which Bate describes as 'ecopoetics […] pulled from the phenomenological to the political'.[94]

Abbs's introduction is problematic in that it speaks homogenously of humans as both 'highly creative' and 'perverse, dangerous and highly destructive'. And *Earth Songs* makes only oblique mention of the economic system responsible for the destruction to which just a few of the poems point – Peter Redgrove's 'Everything comes out of the cool dark mine' being one example. With this erasure, polemic and satire are almost entirely absent too, bar Snyder's 'Front Lines' and John Heath-Stubbs' 'Poem for the End of the World'. Nor does MacFarlane's vision of imaginative modes allied to scientific evidence feature amongst Abbs's selections. The anthropocentrism of the dominant culture and its language remain unexamined; and there is barely any acknowledgement of the social injustice that accompanies ecological injustice, except in Jem Poster's 'Plenty'. Expressions of complicity with destruction are more prevalent than activism to stop it; and any futurist vision is hard to find, beyond Wendell Berry's 'A Vision' and Snyder's 'For the Children'. By contrast, my Collection draws on science, examines dominant discourses, acknowledges social and ecological injustices, and contains regenerative themes, as I will illustrate.

In Spring 2006, the 'Green' issue of *Poetry Review* was published with Fiona Sampson's editorial, which stated:

> What does a poetry which responds to ecological challenge look like? Pastoral won't do […] It's simply *faux* nostalgia […] Polemic, meanwhile, is one good way to murder a poem […][95]

[94] Bate, p.76
[95] Sampson, Fiona (ed.), *The Poetry Review*, Volume 98, Spring 2008, pp.1-2

In response, I sent an email that was never acknowledged or published (ironically, given her stance on women poets' experience of the 'glass ceiling'). This was one of the points I made:

> […] in an age where advertising … corporate media distortions and the short-term ambitions of politicians contribute to the mainstream climate of apathy and fear, surely there is a place, even a need, for skilfully polemical poetry and art to cut through the bunkum, to perceive Harold Pinter's vision of 'the vast tapestry of lies' that surrounds us?[96]

Despite the literary establishment's aversion to any overtly political or polemical work, from 2007, my ecopoems were selected by some poetry editors.[97] These included: 'Awake to the Kittiwakes during London Fashion Week', a collage poem about super-skinny fashion models and juvenile Kittiwakes starving due to warming North Sea waters impacting their food sources; 'From *Greenwash*, a User's Manual' satirizing corporate greenwashing; 'Vermin Acts' drawing on parish records to reveal the systematic eradication of species considered 'vermin'; and 'Hedge Fund', which collaged observations of Somerset hedgerows with a description of how money markets function. First published in *The Wolf* (now defunct), this poem was later featured in the editors' 'Best of a Decade' selection in 2012.[98] My creative practice also included more ecospiritual poems, which were set alongside the political work, and in this early period these included: 'Timeout, Blackout', about meditating for 'Earth Hour', 'In Good Hands', describing the influence of a female figure with a deep 'Nature' connection, and 'Ice, an Elegy', a mythopoetic expression of the vanishing Arctic ice. An ongoing feature of the Collection, this fusion of

[96] See Pinter, Harold, *Art, Truth and Politics: The Nobel Lecture*, 2005, (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)

[97] Poetry journals which accepted my more politically inclined ecopoetry at the time included *Magma, Shearsman Magazine, The Wolf, Tears in the Fence, PAN (Philosophy, Activism, Nature),* Ecozon@ (Ecocritical Journal), *The European Journal of Ecopsychology, Artemis Poetry, International Times.* Poetry anthologies included *Buzz* (Templar Poetry), *In the Telling* (Cinnamon Press), *Soul of the Earth* (Awen Publishing), *The William Blake Birthday Book* (Bow of Burning Gold), *Emergency Verse* (The Recusant), and *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (Routledge).

[98] Editors of *The Wolf* were poets James Byrne and Sandeep Parmar

ecospirituality and politically engaged ecology is, I believe, an original contribution to the contemporary Eurowestern tradition of ecopoetry, although I acknowledge its presence in the work of Indigenous poets, including Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Scott Momaday, and Joy Harjo. By contrast, most other contemporary poets expressing ecopoetic concerns have tended to one polarity or the other.

Citing the influence of Scott Bryson's early survey of American ecopoetry, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002)[99], and of Abbs' and Oswald's anthologies, Neil Astley, editor at Bloodaxe Books, published his own anthology of ecopoems entitled *Earth Shattering* in 2007,[100] with a more inclusive scope. Featuring a diverse, international spectrum of poets, with some poetry in translation. Astley's anthology begins with a substantial introduction in which he acknowledges that the majority of 'contemporary poets addressing the environmental crisis with perception and passion' are American, and that ignorance of this work has deprived British poets of role models. Astley goes on to state that this has fostered 'the widely held view that ecopoetry is almost by definition political, and therefore propagandist,' and his aspiration for *Earth Shattering* was that it would counter these misconceptions – a project which my own Collection has also endeavoured to achieve.

Of the handful of contemporary British poets included in *Earth Shattering*, and whose overall practice has had a sustained ecopoetic focus, Mario Petrucci is an important exemplar. A British-Italian poet-scientist pioneer of ecopoetry, his extraordinary long-form poem, 'Heavy Water, a poem for Chernobyl' is featured in excerpts – one of which I recently republished on the ECOPOETIKON website.[101] Inevitably Astley's anthology made omissions, and after its publication, the voices of other

[99] Bryson, J. Scott, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2002)
[100] Astley, Neil, *Earth Shattering, (Hexham, Bloodaxe Books, 2007)*
[101] See Petrucci, Mario, from 'Heavy Water: a poem for Chernobyl', 'Every day I found a new man': https://ecopoetikon.org/public/poems/864ca2b3ef210c897b8cb467d176f7c9e8eb4f6e8a2c508148819d4332b0826b.pdf

contemporary British poets engaging with 'Nature' came to light. Jen Hadfield's *Nigh-no-Place* (awarded the T.S. Eliot prize in 2008), explores her relationship with the Shetland landscape. However, Hadfield's anthropocentrism has been criticised, and this is highlighted by Isabel Galleymore in *Teaching Environmental Writing, Ecocritical Pedagogy and Poetics* (2020).[102] For Galleymore, Hadfield's use of mixed metaphors and cultural references to describe a tide pool and a Hedgehog serve to encourage humorous self-reflexivity around the likenesses and differences between human and more-than-human beings. However, I am less convinced and believe that poems informed by ethical-political and ecospiritual dimensions are required to unsettle Western anthropocentrism. By contrast, the work of the less-celebrated Susan Richardson has been of greater inspiration, and her first and second collections, (*Creatures of the Intertidal Zone*, 2009 and *Where the Air is Rarefied*, 2010), show an innovative use of form and language in her exploration of climate impacts on Arctic ecology, with mythology, fairy tales, history, and science deployed to reveal more-than-human and indigenous Inuit perspectives. What is less apparent in Richardson's work is an intersectional awareness of the root causes of these impacts, and the trans-scalar imaginary that I will elaborate within my own practice.[103]

In 2012, the same year that I made my debut with *Hedge Fund* – reviewed by Alasdair Paterson in *Stride Magazine* as being '… in the great tradition of visionary politics in British poetry'[104] – I also published an essay entitled 'What is ecopoetry?'[105] in which I distinguished four broad themes within ecopoetry. These were: (re)connection with more-than-human Nature; witnessing ecocide and intersecting

[102] Galleymore, Isabel, *Teaching Environmental Writing, Ecocritical Pedagogy and Poetics,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p.159
[103] See Richardson, Susan, *Creatures of the Intertidal Zone* (Cinnamon Press, 2009), *Where the Air is Rarefied* (Cinnamon Press, 2010, *Skindancing* (Cinnamon Press, 2015), and *Words the Turtle Taught Me* (Cinnamon Press, 2018).
[104] Paterson, Alasdair, 'Big Notes, Small Changes', *Stride Magazine*, 2012, ‹https://www.stridebooks.co.uk/Stride%20mag%202012/july2012/bigNotesSmallChanges.htm› [Accessed 15th May, 2024]
[105] Moore, 'What is ecopoetry?'

social injustices; resistance, speaking truth to power; and visioning ecocentric ways of living and being. It was doubtless with this in mind that I came to review another ecopoetry anthology, *Entanglements* (2012), which contains an important introduction by Dr. David Borthwick. In it he writes that:

> […] ecopoetry seeks to question and renegotiate the human position in respect of the environment in which we are enmeshed. Its ethic is to oppose the violent assumption that the world around us exists merely as a set of resources which can be readily and unethically exploited and degraded for economic gain.[106]

The anthology contains many beautifully conceived and crafted poems informed by an intimate relationship with the more-than-human world. Nevertheless, my review expressed my frustration that the editors' avowed 'hunger for a meaningful connection with the earth' had been met by too many poems in which solitary humans walk (or drive) in landscapes. [107] Pointing to my own predilection for savouring the expression of ideas and actions inspired by the then multiple and extensive fields of ecological thought, and which might have come to shape the ecopoetic imagination, I was disappointed that the editors had deliberately chosen to exclude 'political poems', a position that seemed at variance with Borthwick's comment that: 'Ecopoetry can also be more directly political'. In reviewing *Entanglements* – and here I acknowledge that having had my own submission rejected, I cannot be fully objective[108] – my primary frustration was the lack of ecocritical engagement. Doubtless, the persistence of the pastoral aesthetic has been at play, as well as an inability to include what the Australian ecofeminist critic and

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[106] Blackie, Sharon, and Knowles, David, eds. *Entanglements, New Ecopoetry*, (Isle of Lewis: Two Ravens Press, 2012), p.xvi

[107] My review was commissioned by *Resurgence & Ecologist Magazine*, and published under the title 'Human-Nature Continuum, "What influences the ecopoet's imagination?', Moore, Helen, *Resurgence & Ecologist Magazine*, Issue 279, Jul/Aug 2013, 'The Ecozoic Era' ‹https://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article3976-human-nature-continuum.html› [Accessed 30th May, 2024]

[108] My submission was a selection of poems that were later published in *Hedge Fund* (2012), including the opening prose poem 'Nature Story', which explores the anthropocentrism inherent in the term 'natural history'.

writer Val Plumwood describes as 'shadow places', which often invisibly provide our material and ecological support within a globalised world.[109]

With prize culture being the predominant way in which quality literary poetry is identified and marketed, the inception in Britain of the Gingko Prize in 2015 and the Laurel Prize in 2019 has doubtless raised the status of ecopoetry. Notable winners include Pascale Petit, Sean Borodale, Karen McCarthy-Woolf, and Jemma Borg. Petit's *Mama Amazonica*[110] was the inaugural Laurel winner, with a laceratingly visceral evocation of her mother's experience of violence within the psychiatric system, with Petit using the destruction of the Amazon rainforest as an extended metaphor throughout the book. My own work was entered alongside Petit's, so again my judgement lacks neutrality; however, I believe that if *Mama Amazonica* is an example of ecopoetry, it must surely entail what Demos describes in *Decolonizing Nature* as 'the now-inadequate elements of earlier eco-artistic languages', (and here he quotes Morton) "the resort to the aesthetic dimension […] rather than ethical-political praxis."[111] I am perturbed by Petit's lack of distinction between the violence of a highway cutting through the rainforest and the hunting of non-human animals by what the reader supposes to be Indigenous communities. (Does the mention of a 'shaman' imply the presence of native Amazonians?) And although the poet acknowledges having visited the region for research, the poems do not reveal her embodied presence there, nor is there any reflection on the ethical dimensions arising from her visit or her shadowy entanglement with the rainforest as a Westerner living in the Global North.

[109] Plumwood, Val, 'Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling', *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 44, March 2008, ‹ https://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2008/03/01/shadow-places-and-the-politics-of-dwelling/› [Accessed 15th November, 2023]
[110] Petit, Pascale, *Mama Amazonica,* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2017)
[111] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, p.11

Finding literary prize culture generally problematic – competitions can be costly to enter, although entry fees do subsidize underfunded publishers and literary activities – I also noted the irony that in the year prior to the publication of *Hedge Fund,* Alice Oswald withdrew from judging the T.S. Eliot prize in protest at its sponsor being an investment company managing hedge funds.[112] Another issue is the influence of royal patronage via the Laureateship, with poets from privileged backgrounds who see themselves as potential contenders inevitably steering a more 'apolitical' course. For me at least, this has never been an aspiration; however, my political engagement brought an unexpected obstacle when I found myself unable to secure an acceptable publishing deal with Shearsman Books for *ECOZOA,* without succumbing to censorship. Having initially made his money in banking, the owner-editor insisted that I cut a quarter of the poems, because the book was too long and 'too political'. I was astonished to discover that one poem he wanted to censor was 'Earth Justice', which was based on research I'd undertaken through attending the mock ecocide trial at London's Supreme Court in 2011.[113] In 2013, the poem had been awarded third prize by Moniza Alvi in an international women's poetry competition;[114] clearly, however, this accolade endowed by a female judge and woman of colour was insufficient to persuade him of the poem's merits. Unwilling to be censored, I approached Permanent Publications, publishers of books on permaculture and other related subjects, and in 2015 they brought out *ECOZOA* with John Kinsella's powerful endorsement and the following from the American poet, Drew Dellinger:

> Helen Moore's poetry is an inch of topsoil built up over millennia; a living cell seen teeming under a microscope; a galaxy's lucid dream. These poems pulse

[112] See 'Alice Oswald withdraws from TS Eliot prize in protest at sponsor Aurum', *The Guardian,* 6.12.2011, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/06/alice-oswald-withdraws-ts-eliot-prize (Accessed 27th February 2024)

[113] For further details about the mock ecocide trial, see 'Test trial convicts fossil fuel bosses of "ecocide"', *The Guardian*, 5.10.2011, ‹https://www.theguardian.com/environment/damian-carrington-blog/2011/sep/29/ecocide-oil-criminal-court› [Accessed 20th May, 2024]

[114] The Second Light Open Poetry competition, 2013

> with ecstatic exuberance, linguistic intensity, and pleasing complexity coupled with profound insight. Embodying the evolutionary, Deep-Time vision of writers like Thomas Berry, Moore's stunning work stretches us between decaying political systems and the Earth's enchanted cosmopolis. When Walt Whitman wrote of "expecting the main things" from "poets to come," he must have been anticipating Helen Moore.[115]

I am honoured to have received some awards for my work, along with a range of endorsements and largely positive reviews.[116] However, in making the unorthodox choice to work with a 'green' publisher, I felt excommunicated from the poetry world, my publishers outside its networks. Nevertheless, my critical work had been developing alongside my creative practice, and in 2018 my essay 'Is love the answer?, won the ASLE/INSPIRE essay competition on literature and sustainability. 'Intimacies of air, love and consciousness in the time of plague', was also a winner of the 'Sacred Essays' competition held by the US Center for Interfaith Relations in 2020. Moreover, it was heartening to find that there was a growing Italian audience for my work. Massimo D'Arcangelo invited me to co-author a bilingual volume of ecopoetry with both him and the Australian ecopoet Anne Elvey, and *INTATTO. INTACT. Ecopoesia. Ecopoetry* was published by La Vita Felice in 2017 with an introduction by Serenella Iovino. In 2021 I gave a keynote lecture on ecopoetry at PoesiaEuropa, a European poetry festival, and my lecture was subsequently published as a 'Poetry and landscape: ecopoetry as restorative act' in *ZEST, Litteratura Sostenible*.[117]

My third collection, *The Mother Country*, edited and published by Anthony Nanson's small Stroud-based literary press Awen Publications in 2019, was well received by Kay Syrad, who wrote in *Envoi* Magazine:

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[115] Dellinger, Drew in Moore, *ECOZOA* (see endorsements)
[116] For reviews of my books, see my website: ‹https://www.helenmoorepoet.com/reviews›
[117] Moore, Helen, 'Poetry and landscape: ecopoetry as restorative act' in *ZEST, Litteratura Sostenible* (2022) – see the Collection

> As with her earlier ground-breaking collection, *ECOZOA* (2015), Helen Moore's poetry is characterised by formal versatility, intellectual energy, and political daring – an inspiration for what poetry can offer in the face of our urgent global challenges.[118]

However, the onset of the Covid pandemic, and my struggles with housing precarity meant that in many ways the book disappeared, and I found myself in the doldrums with poetry in general. Nevertheless, it was through this period that I began developing my wild writing practice.

Now, twenty years on from my first forays into ecopoetry, there is a new generation of British poets expressing ecopoetic concerns. Isabel Galleymore's *Significant Other* (2019)[119] takes up a phrase usually connoted with a human lover and offers a series of striking poems that make more-than-human beings significant and worthy of our love and respect in their radical difference. Caleb Parkin's *This Fruiting Body* (2021)[120] also explores love, developing a powerfully queer ecopoetics that sees the impacts of normative anthropocentric culture on ecology. Surprisingly, however, neither poet is included in *Footprints: an anthology of new ecopoetry,* (2022). This is Charlie Baylis's introduction:

> Ecopoetry is older than Rome. What sets *new* ecopoetry apart is that it is written on the edge of a precipice. Our generation is faced with a unique set of dangers, led by a bunch of inept and callous politicians […] mostly in the pocket of big business. New ecopoetry engages with the current reality of our planet, in many ways these poems are a record of where we are, a document that will hopefully reveal something to future generations about our experience of the world.[121]

[118] Syrad, Kay, 'Helen Moore - In the Mother Country,' *Envoi,* issue 183, October 2019, p.41
[119] Galleymore, Isabel, *Significant Other*, (Manchester, Carcanet, 2019)
[120] Parkin, Caleb, *This Fruiting Body,* (Rugby: Nine Arches Press, 2021)
[121] Baylis, Charlie and Kent, Aaron, *Footprints: an anthology of new ecopoetry,* (Talgarreg, Wales: Broken Sleep Books, 2022), p.9

And indeed, this poetry of witness is expressed in a variety of innovative forms. But I am perplexed at the absence of any regenerative vision for the future, or of ecopoetries that fully register 'new' paradigm consciousness. In merely positioning itself as a 'record of where we are', rather than deploying the ethical-political and ecospiritual dimensions that could contribute to transforming the narratives and perspectives that are required to facilitate social change, I see by contrast the value of my own contribution to ecopoetry. This has recently been affirmed by Chris McCabe, poet and head librarian of the Poetry Library at London's Southbank, who described me as: 'a poet of the luminous present and a precursor of ecopoetics.'[122]

c) Contested definitions of ecopoetry

> Ecopoetry is an interesting field. Why not just 'poetry'? There's something compelling about that 'eco' there. It's as if this is poetry that can actually step up and speak about public issues. It's as if this is poetry that can affect some kind of change in the world. What is this poetry able to do that other poetry can't? Does ecopoetry have access to a morality inaccessible to other poetries?[123]

These are Persad's deliberations in 2020, before he proceeds to make his reductive review of *ECOZOA*. Aside from the probability of gendered bias, I find the lack of effort to explore the field regrettable. However, his comments are helpful in that they reveal ongoing misunderstanding around ecopoetry, and the work that remains to be done to communicate its central ideas. A recent feature in *MsLexia* also indicates that the distinctions between 'Nature' poetry and ecopoetry still need explanation. Kate Simpson writes:

> Nature poetry tends to be about standing back and admiring the world, as if the poet were on a cliff, marvelling as the waves swell against the rocks below [...] Ecopoetry is, in some ways, the antithesis of this. Successful ecopoems

[122] For the full text of Chris MacCabe's testimonial, see appendix i
[123] Persad, 'Ecopoetry', p.113

> […] demonstrate – and demand that we consider – the ripple effects of what we have done, and continue to do, as a part of much larger ecosystem. Unlike nature poems, issues of justice are often integral to ecopoetry – and idealism is called upon only in images of a future we might aim towards.[124]

Looking back to ecopoetry's foundational texts, I see approaches that both help and hinder its definition. In his 2002 survey, Bryson acknowledges that as an emergent genre, definitions would need to remain fluid; nevertheless, he states that ecopoetry has three overarching characteristics, namely:

> […] ecocentrism, a humble appreciation of wildness, and a scepticism toward hyperrationality and its resultant overreliance on technology. [125]

With Bryson's focus on North American writers, the volume discusses the historical and cross-cultural roots of ecopoetry, and includes themes such as genocide and extinction, the lesbian body, and post colonialism. In 2009, Jonathan Skinner published 'Small Fish Big Pond', a series of sometimes paradoxical and provocative statements sketching out what the field does and does not include, such as: 'Ecopoetics includes all poetics and poems and can be an aspect of any poetic work.[126] Despite my own acknowledgement (following Cannamela) that ecopoetics includes more-than-human voices, I wonder how useful it is to assert such inclusivity, without making the distinction between ecopoetics and ecopoetry. Drawing on ecocritical analysis**,** I agree with Cheryll Glotfelty that:

> […] literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter and ideas interact.[127]

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[124] Simpson, Kate, 'Ecopoetry versus nature poetry, What's the difference between ecopoetry and nature poetry?' MsLexia 2022, ‹https://mslexia.co.uk/magazine/blog/ecopoetry-versus-nature-poetry/› [Accessed 24th December 2023]

[125] Bryson, *Ecopoetry*,

[126] Skinner, Jonathan (2009) 'Small Fish Big Pond', *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 14:2, 111-113, DOI: 10.1080/09697250903282002

[127] Cheryl Glotfelty in Iovino and Opperman, *Material Ecocriticism,* p.6

Picking up these ideas in his 2016 essay 'Why ecopoetry? There's no Planet B', Jon Shoptaw quotes Morton's statement that all poems are environmental, because they include the spaces in which they are written and read, and asks:

> OK, but why environmental and not, say, spatio-temporal? If all poems are environmental poems, environmental poetry means nothing and matters not at all.[128]

Shoptaw's use of the word 'environmental' is problematic, in that it perpetuates the notion that humans and 'Nature' are separate. However, his cavil is one with which I broadly concur. The British poet Em Strang also raises this issue of an overly broad term's meaninglessness; for her, however, 'ecopoetry' is either plagued by amorphousness or by diminishment through an overt political agenda. For this reason, Strang prefers the term 'ecological poetry', which she sees as including a range of relationships – 'political, phenomenological, mythical, etymological, material, spiritual, and imaginary.'[129] Clearly, this breadth of focus is vital for rich ecopoetic expression. Where Strang and I differ is largely a matter of emphasis. I advocate for the creative inclusion of social justice and ethical-political dimensions, including the poet's own enmeshment with them; however, Strang's preoccupation with the mythopoetic, her reluctance to use the 'poetic I', and insistence on poetry's affect obscures or erases its ability to shape consciousness. In the context of ecopoetry, I find Strang's rejection of the personal to be particularly problematic – as Forché reminds, there is a delicate balance to be struck between the expression of the intersecting realms of the personal and the political:

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[128] Shoptaw, Jon, 'Why ecopoetry?', *Poetry Magazine*, January 2016, from the Poetry Foundation website, ‹https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/70299/why-ecopoetry› [Accessed 26th December, 2023]

[129] Strang, Em, 'Habitude: Ecological Poetry as (Im)Possible (Inter)Connection', (doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2013), p.24

> If we give up the dimension of the personal, we risk relinquishing one of the most powerful sites of resistance. The celebration of the personal, however, can indicate a myopia, an inability to see how larger structures of the economy and the state circumscribe, if not determine, the fragile realm of individuality.[130]

The 2009 anthology, *Black Nature, Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry,*[131] edited by Camille Dungy is an important case in point, as it raises the need for a broader inclusiveness in ecopoetics – moving beyond the pastoral tradition within Anglo-American literature – and revealing the complex relationship that African Americans have with the natural world, which, as Dungy reminds, is 'steeped in a legacy of violence, forced labor, torture, death.'[132] In poems written from the perspectives of field workers, farmhands, slaves, and their modern urbanised descendants, there are poignant testimonies of both the individual and collective pain of having been 'classified as […] a subspecies or as a possession'[133]. Pointing to this as being why African Americans have not embraced nature writing in the same manner as the dominant culture (which in turn has led to their exclusion from many anthologies of nature writing and poetry), Dungy quotes Elizabeth Dodd, who writes:

> […] the literary attempt to deflect attention away from human beings […] might not be appealing for writers who already feel politically, economically, and socially marginalized.[134]

Two years after the publication of *Black Nature, The Ecopoetry Anthology*[135] (another North American publication) took up the project of further teasing out definitions of ecopoetry; and despite acknowledging that it 'has no precise definitions and rather fluid boundaries,' the (white, female) editors, Fisher-Wirth and Street, discerned within their survey three distinct categories. These are, firstly, 'nature poetry', which

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[130] Forché, *Against Forgetting,* p.31.
[131] Dungy, Camille, *Black Nature, Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2009)
[132] Ibid, p.xxi
[133] Ibid, p.xxi
[134] Ibid, p.xxv
[135] Fisher-Wirth and Street, *Ecopoetry*

considers 'nature as subject matter and inspiration'.[136] However, in arguing that 'not all nature poetry evinces the accurate and unsentimental awareness of the natural world that is the sine qua non of ecopoetry,'[137] are they not confusing the distinction? Their second category is 'environmental poetry' – 'poetry propelled by and directly engaged with active and politicized environmentalism.'[138] Rejecting agitprop expression, which sacrifices art and complexity, the editors assert that the anthology includes powerful activist poems. Their third category is 'ecological poetry', which they define as often being experimental and tending 'to think in self-reflexive ways about how poems can be ecological'.[139] This grouping engages questions of poetic form and 'the singular coherent self', which Fisher-Wirth and Street argue has been historically taken for granted.

I see a need for ecopoetry to embrace all three categories – poems focussing on 'Nature' can serve to reconnect and re-enchant, but these need to be allied with activism and ecocritical insight. Overall, I can identify each of the three within my creative work, and I will come on to discuss my use of the 'singular self' and ecopoetic form in this thesis. For now, I want to conclude my survey of ecopoetry by pointing to a definition I make within the Collection. In the preface to *ECOZOA*, I describe ecopoetry as 'engaged poetry for a new age of awareness', which imagines an alternative to the 'Anthropocene':

> Imagine if we were to create a more constructive and hopeful alternative to the human-centred 'Anthropocene', one already named by the great theologian Thomas Berry as the 'Ecozoic Era'. In this approaching time, we will live in harmony "with the Earth as our community", in stark contrast to the current period of planetary ecosystems ravaged by industrial civilisation, where apocalypse is widely projected as our collective future, the popular

[136] Ibid, p.14
[137] Ibid
[138] Ibid, p.16
[139] Ibid, p.9

> imagination fuelled with sci-fi scenarios of humans abandoning a devastated Earth to colonise outer space.[140]

Here, I do not claim to be definitive about ecopoetry – I am one voice adding to the conversation, although I acknowledge the depth and breadth of my explorations. Ultimately, I believe that the slipperiness of the term is due to the collective shift towards an ecocentric consciousness, with all the uncertainty and fumbling in darkness that this process inevitably entails.

4. Ecocultural identity

The concept of 'ecocultural identity' was first introduced by Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor in *The Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* in 2020 to reflect the understanding that 'We are made of, part of, emerging from, and constantly contributing to both ecology and culture.'[141] Seeing the need for an overarching framework for understanding all identities, and that 'sociocultural dimensions of selfhood are always inseparable from ecological dimensions',[142] Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor recognised the value of using this lens to remember that we are 'earth citizens', and have asserted that:

> […] renewed understandings of an extended self, at once ecological and cultural, unshackle predominant notions of human subjectivity, senses of selfhood, and worldly experience, and have liberatory potential.[143]

We humanimals are just like myriad other species who are shaped by their own cultures and who have bodies that are fundamentally enmeshed in an ongoing exchange with their ecosystems. However, as modern Westerners, we have been

[140] Moore, Helen, *ECOZOA*, p.ix
[141] Milstein Tema and Castro-Sotomayor, José, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020) p.xix
[142] Ibid
[143] Ibid

conditioned to think that 'Nature' has little to do with culture, and that we're exceptional, endowed with the right to do as we please. In recent decades, many of us have been waking up to the harm that this worldview is causing. But how can we change, shed our conditioning, and embrace the intersection of ecology and culture in how we self-define? This is particularly challenging when our interdependence remains unacknowledged by the normative Western anthropocentric identity, which is informed by cultural narratives that privilege humans over more-than-human species, and hierarchical ideologies that intersect, as Melissa Michelle Parks reminds us, 'with colonial perspectives that are foundational to/entangled with racism, sexism, and other oppressive forces'?[144]

Arran Stibbe develops notions of ecocultural identity by associating identity directly with narrative and performance. In *Econarrative, Ethics, Ecology, and the Search for New Narratives,* he describes how a person's identity is not found in behaviour, but in their ability to sustain a particular narrative. Thus, a person's biography has to continually integrate experiences and life events, incorporating them into an ongoing personal narrative.[145] Studying 'queer theory' in 1995 had already primed me to question essentialist views of sex and gender, and to see identity as performative; but more powerful influences on my emergent ecocentric identity were my experiences of finding myself as a pagan in Edinburgh's fire festival community. Over eight years I performed roles in the annual Beltane Fire Festival, an internationally renowned event which blends ritual, outdoor physical theatre, and spectacular fire performances to celebrate the start of Summer. In this I simultaneously found myself embracing a non-normative identity – a process I describe in 'Stations of the Sun, an Ecocultural Journey'.[146]

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[144] Parks, Melissa Michelle, 'Critical Ecocultural Intersectionality', in Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity*, p.110

[145] Stibbe, Arran, *Econarrative, Ethics, Ecology, and the Search for New Narratives,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024) p.53

[146] Moore, Helen, 'Stations of the Sun, an Ecocultural Journey', (*Panorama Journal*, 2024) – see the Collection

Moving in what *The Sunday Times* problematically dubbed a 'youth tribe of modern primitivism',[147] I was aware not only of being on the margins of society, but increasingly too of the rhythms of the seasons in a mode that felt more meaningful than the nominally Christian calendar of public festivals characterised by secular over-consumption and passive spectacle. My early poem 'Nativity'[148] expresses a more ecocentric approach to 'welcome in Midwinter's dark' than the mass felling of trees to celebrate Christmas. And 'The Sky on Guy Fawkes Night'[149] points to what ecocritic Greta Gaard refers to as 'the masculinist attitudes towards power and violence' inherent in firework displays,[150] which also have a material impact on human and ecological health. Other poems, such as 'Modern Magus'[151], 'daughter of dodmen'[152], and 'Frome-Selwood, an Odyssey'[153] draw on a sense of connection with ancestral cultures – in 'Modern Magus' this occurs through becoming a 'pilgrim' experiencing the energy inside a freshly made crop circle at Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, where the artificial chalk mound is understood to be part of the prehistoric ritual landscape complex that includes Avebury's stone circle. All these poems add to the ecospiritual dimension of the Collection.

When did I first start to self-identify as an 'ecopoet' and explicitly write 'ecopoetry'? Although it's impossible to pinpoint the date, the seeds of it lay in my initiation as '8th Bard of Bath' in early 2004, when as previously mentioned I won the annual competition held by the city's neopagan community. In Celtic societies, bards were

[147] In an article headlined 'Pagans rule on the hill' (1996), *The Sunday Times* also described the Beltane community as espousing 'the developing liturgy of the New Age: vegetarianism, ecological awareness, body piercing and communal living'.
[148] 'Nativity', in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.72
[149] 'The Sky on Guy Fawkes Night' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.60
[150] See Gaard, Greta, 'in(ter)dependence Day: A Feminist Ecocritical Perspective on Fireworks' in Gaard, Greta, Estok, Simon C., Opperman, Serpil, *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.260
[151] 'Modern Magus' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.79
[152] 'daughter of dodmen' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.42
[153] 'Frome-Selwood, an Odyssey' in Moore, *The Mother Country,* p.67

employed by monarchs and chieftains to combine a range of communicative modes, including storytelling, poetry, and music, and to record histories and genealogies, lament, spur warriors into battle, and satirize enemies.[154] Inspired to explore the bardic tradition within a modern context, I found that it gave validity to my desire to express my politics and earth-based spirituality in an uncomfortably secular and privileged literary world. During my Bardic initiation ceremony, I made an explicit vow to serve 'Gaia'. In this, I was consciously adopting an ecocentric identity as a poet, and my early poem 'On Sisterhood and Service', which recounts a childhood experience of accidentally severing a Wasp mid-air with a knife, transforms the ongoing guilt and horror I felt towards this and my mother's persecution of Wasps as 'pests', into a statement of kinship and service:

> […] to atone for that petty murder – my ear,
> my eye, my vocal cords would be of lifelong service.[155]

Here the poem features the 'poetic I', however in *Hedge Fund*, where the poem appears, the first person singular and plural are deployed in poems interspersed by others using the third person singular and plural, an approach that upholds a sense of the web of interdependence, and thus undermines notions of the singular self.

In further cultivating the 'ecological identity' that Parks describes as 'a kind of private alchemy between an individual and nature',[156] I began developing wildcraft skills, including foraging for wild foods – and 'Green Drift' expresses my barefoot, biophilic delight in harvesting Ramsons from the woods.[157] I also learned to identify a range of more-than-human species, and in 2003 left Edinburgh to live with deeper

[154] See 'What is a bard?', The Druid Way, ‹https://druidry.org/druid-way/what-druidry/what-is-a-bard› [Accessed 20th March 2024]
[155] 'On Sisterhood and Service' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.20
[156] Parks, Melissa Michelle, 'Critical Ecocultural Intersectionality', in Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity,* p.106
[157] 'Green Drift', in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.41

'Nature' connection in a rural location in NE Somerset. There I trained and worked as a Forest School leader, seeking to address children's low levels of ecoliteracy, and founded Shared Earth Learning Forest School Co-op.[158] My poems 'Media Story'[159] and 'A Natural Curriculum'[160] draw on participant observation of children and young adults in that educational context. Additionally, I was embracing an 'environmental identity', which Parks distinguishes as 'engagement with the environment and other people committed to protecting the environment',[161] and I increasingly found myself participating in climate marches, socially and ecologically engaged arts projects, and later the anti-fracking movement, where I took on the identity of 'Earth Protector'. This was collectively established in contrast to the broad characterization of anti-frackers as 'domestic extremists', which government and tabloid media were using to denigrate our community. Two poems in the Collection – *'This is not a dirty protest!'*[162] and 'Portrait of a Domestic Extremist' – express these experiences. In the latter poem, my identification with the collective becomes transformed to that of being:

> […] cells in Earth's immune system,
> rising as & when we can
> to take this crazy show off the road. [163]

Inevitably, alongside this political engagement came my 'green identity' (connecting 'material relations to activist lifestyles'[164]) and I increasingly explored choices I could make as a 'consumer' to minimise my ecological footprint, including my adoption of a vegan diet, upcycling second-hand clothes, supporting local independent shops, and, despite having a driving licence, being a committed pedestrian, cyclist, and

[158] See Shared Earth Learning: ‹https://www.sharedearthlearning.org/› [Accessed 12th February 2024]
[159] 'Media Story' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.54
[160] 'A Natural Curriculum' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.75
[161] Parks, Melissa Michelle, in Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity,* p.106
[162] *'This is not a dirty protest!'* in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.9
[163] Moore, Helen, 'Portrait of a Domestic Extremist' in *Climate Psychology Journal Explorations*, Issue3, 2022
[164] Parks, Melissa Michelle, in Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity,* p.106

public transport-user. Additionally, I embraced what Buddhists call 'right livelihood', striving to earn my living through ethical means, and in parallel with that, the Gandhian ethos of living simply that others may simply live.

In taking on these ecocentric identities, I was susceptible to 'boundary patrol', i.e. the implicit or overt behavioural controls that serve to patrol the boundaries of normative anthropocentric behaviour. According to Milstein, these controls can be presented externally (as ridicule and dismissive labelling), or internally (as self-disciplining and self-censorship) and ultimately serve to corral 'boundary-transgression back into what is considered acceptable territory within dominant Western/ized ecoculture.'[165] Referencing not only the hegemony of contemporary society but also generational and cellular memories of coercive violence that were used to enforce ecocultural identity norms in earlier centuries, such as during the European witch hunts, Milstein acknowledges the power that boundary patrol can have. Her survey of anthropocentric boundary-patrolling also includes accusations of anthropomorphism, which:

> […] give the accuser authority over the individual, dismissing their senses of more-than-human emotion, intention, and experience.[166]

In my experience, this boundary patrol intersected with gender oppression through the assertion of an older white male literary gatekeeper, in whose poetry workshop group I was enrolled in 2005, that 'There's nothing new to write about nature.' Arising in response to the ecopoems I was bringing for workshop, the statement and its impact are described in my aforementioned essay, 'Defending Ecopoetry'. That poet was not alone in attempting to corral my creative identity into a more normative one. In resisting this and continuing to define myself as an ecopoet, I see

[165] Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity,* p.30
[166] Ibid

that my choice has significantly informed my creative practice over two decades and has guided my exploration of an ecocentric 'new' paradigm consciousness. And yet, it was also clear to me that my conditioning ran deep, as anthropocentric attitudes, modes of perception and behaviours were liable to surface. My poem 'Wallpaper'[167], which I placed after the explicitly ecocentric 'Green Drift' poem, points to the perception of 'Nature' as attractive background wallpaper. 'The Accomplice' evokes my complicity in the use of anti-freeze, which I describe as 'this drive-by poisoning / of the Greater Being'. [168] And 'The Vigil'[169] expresses my guilt at going through with the castration of the male Welsh Terrier whom I had taken on as a pup – enacting what Laura Bridgeman describes as 'Western dominator ecocultural identity' in human-animal relations.[170]

In summary, my creative and critical practice corresponds with the notion of an ongoing 'story of the self'. Informed by a mode of poetic enquiry – exploring my consciousness to root out anthropocentric attitudes, alongside processes of rewilding and aspiring to embody an ethical ecocentric consciousness – have led to what I perceive as being a unique approach to ecopoetry in the UK, as I have yet to identify a similar depth of ecocultural exploration in the creative practice of other poets.

5. Towards an engaged, embodied, co-creative ecocentric consciousness

a) Disconnected, dominant Western mind

[167] 'Wallpaper', in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.43
[168] 'The Accomplice' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.31
[169] 'The Vigil', in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.74
[170] Bridgeman, Laura, 'Western Dominator Ecocultural Identity and the Denial of Animal Autonomy', in Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity,* p.87

> Things called subjectivity, mind and self are devalued or even eliminated by dominant forms of materialism […] Whatever consciousness is, it is irreducibly part of reality, not separate from it.[171]

Here Timothy Morton indicates the limited conceptualisation of consciousness within modern Western culture. A subject of debate amongst scientists, theologians and philosophers over the millennia, consciousness became of central interest for Western philosophy of mind and the developing field of psychology through the twentieth century. The influence of neuroscience on current debates within the philosophy of mind is evident in assertions that human consciousness is a purely physical phenomenon depending on our brain states, with feelings such as love reduced to neural activity, the release of serotonin and oxytocin.[172] This exemplifies the mind-body split that underpins much of modern Western science and culture, a position I satirise in 'Her Feet Speak of the Woman in Heels', where any notion of a singular coherent self is also questioned through the body's communications:

> You'd think a walking head
> which we ferry here & there –
> this upright, overactive biped
> in & out of boardrooms, shops,
>
> evening dos in blahniks/choos,
> heel-bones dying on those plastic stalks
> that flourish arse & calves & boobs
> like ornamental plants,
>
> but make of us disfigured cranks
> with hammer-toes & devil's claws […][173]

[171] See Morton, Timothy, 'Treating Objects like Women: Feminist Ontology and the Question of Essence' in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*, eds. Gaard, Greta, Estok, Simon C., Opperman, Serpil, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.65

[172] Mørch, Hedda Hassel, *Non-physicalist Theories of Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.1

[173] 'Her Feet Speak of the Woman in Heels', in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.26

Consciousness and the ability to direct it have also been a perennial focus within a variety of wisdom traditions, including Buddhism and Sufism. Both have influenced writings contained within the Collection, including my essay 'Intimacies of Air: Love & Consciousness in the Time of Plague',[174] where I make the connection between the practice of meditation and how mindful breathing can govern our consciousness. Breathwork points to the embodied nature of consciousness, and to it being a continuum of body-mind-self. In the field of psychology, consciousness is not entirely relegated to the disembodied brain – as Jungian analyst James Hillman writes in his foreword to *Ecopsychology, Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, psychology generally understands that 'aspects of the psyche merge with the biological body […] and the physical stuff of the world […]'.[175] However, the dualisms entrenched in our worldview reinforce a problematic separation between the self and the world, which ecopsychology addresses. Examining the history of psychology prior to the emergence of ecopsychology, Hillman points to one core concern, namely: 'Where is the "me"?' Typically, the boundaries of the ego – what Hillman calls 'the cut between "me" and "not-me"[176] – have been located at a person's interface with the external world, i.e. their skin. Bearing the influence of Newtonian physics, the normally functioning ego was thus seen at the turn of the twentieth century as (in Theodore Roszak's words):

> […] an isolated atom of self-regarding consciousness that had no relational continuity with the physical world around it.[177]

There is an arbitrariness in this 'cut' between self and other, and this has increasingly been made apparent by ecology, ecocriticism, and quantum physics, amongst other fields. The ongoing cultural emphasis on the self-contained individual tends to

[174] Moore, Helen, 'Intimacies of air, love and consciousness in the time of plague', (Center for Interfaith Relations, 2020) – see the Collection
[175] Roszak, Theodore, *Ecopsychology, Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, p.xviii
[176] Ibid, p.xix
[177] Ibid, p.10

pathologize personal pain rather than link it to the larger context, and this missing context follows the Western human-'Nature' split, which is one of an interconnected list of what Val Plumwood calls 'hyper-separated dualisms'.[178] Built on notions of human exceptionalism and the separation between humans and animals, the human-'Nature' split was reinforced by the insanely sadistic experiments of French Enlightenment philosophers,[179] who accorded animals no consciousness whatsoever.[180] This position subsequently softened to endow them with physical sensation but no ability to reason, whereas now, as Hillman writes, the cut itself is being interrogated.[181]

Nevertheless, as Plumwood argues, the Western concept of 'reason' has continued to underpin and define the contrast for the concept of 'Nature':

> Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him.[182]

In Blake's writings, reason is characterised as the tyrannical 'Urizen',[183] whose dominance creates an imbalance within the 'four zoas' which comprise Albion.[184] In

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[178] Drawing on Plumwood, Val, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* (London: Routledge, 1993), Nick Totton lists these matched binary oppositions as **male**/female**, light**/dark, **sky**/earth, **culture**/nature, **mind**/body, **conscious**/unconscious, **thought**/feeling, **civilised**/wild – see Totton, Nick, *Wild Therapy, Rewilding Our Inner and Outer Worlds,* (Monmouth: PCCS Books, 2nd edition, 2021), p.14

[179] Hillman names Descartes, Malebranche and La Mettrie in Roszak, Theodore, *Ecopsychology,* p.xviii

[180] The Philosophy Forum describes the experiments that Descartes and his followers performed, which involved nailing animals by their paws onto boards and cutting them open to reveal their beating hearts. They burned, scalded, and mutilated them, and when the animals reacted as though they were suffering pain, Descartes dismissed these reactions as being no different from the sound of a machine that was functioning improperly. See The Philosophy Forum: ‹https://thephilosophyforum.com/discussion/13942/descartes-and-animal-cruelty› (Accessed 15th March 2024)

[181] Roszak, *Ecopsychology*, p.xviii

[182] Plumwood, *Feminism,* p.4

[183] Blake, William, *An Introduction,* ed. Anne Malcolmson, (London: Constable Young Books Ltd., 1967), p.110

[184] Albion is both a mythologisation of the primeval human ('the Eternal Man') and a metaphor for the collective, with the name derived from the mythical name for Britain. Ibid, p.110

ECOZOA, I take up Blake's concept, and in structuring my book around the four zoas, restore balance by creating four equal sections of ten poems, each loosely themed around one of the zoas. The book opens with 'Tharmas', the realm of physical sensation, and a poem based on an experience of receiving a deep tissue massage, 'Deep Time, Deep Tissue'. This releases 'the stress and toxins, which life/in the Anthropocene engenders in our being', permitting an emotional release that leads to an expanded sense of the body within evolutionary time. Other poems focus on the bodies of female Greenpeace activists engaged in climbing London's Shard ('#Iceclimblive'), and the extraction of raw materials from 'our wider, life-sustaining body' ('apples are not the only gadgets'). In 'Climate Adaptation, # 1', the need to physically adapt is evoked through changes to the landscape and the body ('I'll grow skeins of Watercress/& webbed feet').

The next section is 'Urizen', which attempts to widen notions of consciousness and includes my homage to Theodore Roszak ('The Ecopsychologist'). This is followed by 'Urthona', the realm of imagination and intuition, with poems of speculative futures – 'Climate Adaptation # 2', imagining regenerative adaptation in a future London; 'Tetanus Boy, Now! Now!, which draws on social ecology and visions of horse-powered regenerative agriculture; and 'Spaced Out', voicing unborn future generations, which was inspired by The Work that Reconnects practice groups.[185] The final section is 'Luvah', heart consciousness, which touches into the role of grief in addressing the ecological and social crises ('Ark Rains, from Aberdeen to Zennor', 'Soul Midwife Sings', 'Sweet Pain'); and contains poems of celebration – such as the restoration of a Welsh water mill now serving its local community with flour and bread ('Our Daily Bread').

[185] See Macy, Joanna and Brown, Molly Young, *Coming Back to Life,* chapter 9, 'Deep Time: Reconnecting with Past and Future Generations'

In directly addressing the disconnected, disembodied mind, which reinforces the underlying anthropocentric paradigm, and through the remedy it proposes via the rebalancing of consciousness, *ECOZOA* is an original contribution to ecopoetry – to my knowledge, no other British ecopoet has explored this terrain. In terms of the evolution of my creative practice, it also marked a deepening in my own movement towards embodiment, and the development of what I call 'wild writing', a practice that I will come on to elaborate. However, my exploration of consciousness will now examine the narratives that shape language and behaviour.

b) On being between stories

In exploring the emergent shift towards an ecocentric consciousness, it is essential to explore the role of language, which reflects and reinforces our thoughts, ideologies, and worldviews. In *Ecolinguistics, Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*, Arran Stibbe explains that ecolinguistics can explore the patterns of language that influence how people think about and treat the world, investigating 'the stories we live by – i.e., mental models which influence behaviour and lie at the heart of the ecological challenges we are facing.' [186] For Stibbe:

> Stories are cognitive structures in the minds of individuals which influence how they think, talk and act. Stories we live by are stories in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture […] Importantly, the stories we live by influence how we act in the world – if nature is seen as a resource then we may be more likely to exploit it […][187]

In developing his ideas of the narratives that underpin our culture, Stibbe references Berry, who, in *The Dream of the Earth*, noted that we are currently between stories:

[186] Stibbe, Arran, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By,* (London: Routledge, 2021) p.14
[187] Ibid, p.19

> We are in trouble just now because we don't have a good story. We are between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.[188]

My debut foray into ecopoetry reflects this liminal, inter-narrative space. The book opens with 'Nature Story', a prose poem exploring the term 'natural history'. Seeing its framing of 'Nature' as dead museum objects, I point to its inability to reflect or imagine 'the latency of woodland, a fallen trunk rife with spores, the rhythms of Lichen' – images which restore agency and intentionality to the more-than-human world. The subsequent poem is the title poem, 'Hedge Fund', which visibly reveals a sense of both the anthropocentric story – the world of money markets – and the ecocentric story of the true 'hedge fund', with the italicised collage of the capitalist narrative inserted with a left alignment of text between the centred 'hedge fund' stanzas. As the poems progress, there is a movement back and forth between anthropocentrism, and its concomitant patriarchal capitalist system and ecocentric perspectives – what Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman call 'the stories of matter':

> […] the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be 'read' and interpreted as formatting narratives, stories.[189]

Often the language of capitalism is deployed and satirised to expose its negative associations and harmful effects. In 'Capitalism, a sonnet', I juxtapose brand names of cosmetics with images of non-human animals being tested in laboratories:

> max factor eyes burning Cat l'oreal
> Rabbit (the devil wears perfume)

[188] Berry, Thomas, *Dream of the Earth,* p.123
[189] Iovino, Serenella and Opperman, Serpil (eds.) *Material Ecocriticism*, p.1

As previously mentioned, there is a non-normative usage of upper/lower case initials here, which I intend to destabilise the narrative of human dominance. In 'Awake to the Kittiwakes during London Fashion Week', I draw on the language of fast fashion – 'Sprats are out this season', 'a fabulous cliff-edge location', 'a muted palette', 'those Cleopatra eyes', 'lots of retro ruffles', 'heroin chic', and 'double zero' – to show the impact on Kittiwakes, which is caused 'now the North Sea's turned Mediterranean'. And in 'Greenwash, a User's Manual', capitalism is given full voice in the advocacy of corporate greenwashing, and yet is undermined through the domestic literalness of doing the laundry:

> When it's that really tough
> competitive edge you're after,
> just front-load your business
> into our new green
> washing machine […]

In 'The Unsung Pilchard', a long-form landscape ecopoem about the disappearance of the once vast schools of Pilchards off the south coast of Britain, I draw on the language of industrial fishing in the poem's final section to point up the torturous anthropocentric logic of capitalism and the politicians deciding the 'Total Allowable Catches' – 'Better an empty sea than a lost election!' Other poems and/or poem sections juxtapose the voices and agency of more-than-human beings, thus pointing to the shifting narrative. For example, in the first section of 'The Unsung Pilchard', the lost schools of Pilchards communicate as a plural 'we' through fish-shaped stanzas, simultaneously expressing individuality and their modus operandi as a collective – 'We move as one,/many schools of thought, but one pelagic/principle'. In this they reveal awareness of their role in the ecosystem, as they acknowledge their predators and see themselves as: 'a forage crop' who 'sacrifice our scales/to the greater whole, our comrades in the brine.' My use of the word 'comrades' evokes socialist/anarchist politics and the entire section has musical references throughout –

'scales', 'songs of our species', 'sounding them we choir along' – which point to a harmonious relationship with the marine ecosystem. Having explored Cornwall's Lizard Peninsula and the remnants of the traditional Pilchard fishing industry, this poem emerged through researching the ecology of Pilchards, local history, and the development of industrial fishing. This allowed me to imaginatively engage with the world of Pilchard, inhabiting their voices and contrasting them in the poem's later sections with the perspectives of traditional Cornish fishermen and the modern fish-factory.

As I have previously indicated, such anthropomorphism is subject to boundary patrol, and it is important to note the distinction that Galleymore makes between anthropomorphism that reinforces anthropocentrism via the attribution of human characteristics (she references Aesop's animal fables and contemporary children's literature), and anthropomorphism that explores and illuminates difference.[190] It is in the latter category that my creative work is positioned, and in imagining more-than-human experiences, I am also motivated by a Snyderian position of advocacy. Yet other poems in *Hedge Fund* highlight the experiences of more-than-human beings without recourse to use of the first person. An example is 'The Underneath Farmers', where Earthworms who have no 'tongues to speak' are seen to communicate about the impact of pesticides through their bodies:

> […] their heads and tails are curling,
> asking for mercy, begging us to stop.

Here the language has a spiritual quality, alluding to speaking in tongues and the concept of 'mercy'. Yet other poems give voice to or the perspective of people from the Global South to show the impact of capitalism's polycrisis on their lives. 'Lament for Baiji, Yangtze River Dolphin' imagines the voice of a traditional Chinese

[190] Galleymore, Isabel, *Teaching Environmental Writing*, p.92

fisherman impacted by pollution, overfishing, climate chaos, and hunger as he contemplates the annual Dragon Boat Festival and the extinction of the River Dolphin:

> Our People's Republic opened like a giant
> red flower – head looking West –
> and ever since our world's been turning sour.[191]

'Monsoon June' also takes up the voice of a South-Asian woman, whom I'd seen depicted in a Christian-Aid advert up to her neck in floodwater, with the caption: 'Do us a favour will you? Write to your MP about the climate change bill!' Finding the speculative voice incongruous, I decided to imagine her experience of a flooded world, 'where sacred Cows/are floating in the streets'. Navigating the difficult territory of being a white woman from the Global North ventriloquising someone from the Global South, I decided that my motivation was ethical, given that I was seeking to offer narratives of Plumwood's 'shadow places', where the Global North is largely responsible for unleashing the polycrisis. Here the woman is praying for protection:

> The stench I can accept, the bloated corpses, flooding
> sewage – but keep those scaly Muggers snoozing in their lairs
> now their hunting grounds are everywhere.
> And yes, I do seek protection, dear Durga,
> though I've made no offerings – the usual ball of rice
> and flowers – but we have nothing now,
> and the plants are drowned.[192]

In 'Climbing Out of a Dog Eat Dog World' – a poem that points to the shift from an individualistic, competitive, anthropocentric worldview to a loving, ecocentric one – I depict the Kayapo people of the Amazon, who march 'in the midst of the rushing

[191] 'Lament for Baiji, Yangtze River Dolphin', in Moore, Helen, *Hedge Fund*, p.51
[192] 'Monsoon June', in Moore, Helen, *Hedge Fund,* p.66

wasted city' for 'living rivers, trees –/these natural riches they steward for their children.' Here I subvert the normal association of 'riches' with status objects and other forms of non-organic material wealth to fit the overall theme of *Hedge Fund* – i.e., the natural wealth found in healthy, biodiverse ecosystems. In my later poem 'Fluvial', [193] the final section of 'Dorset Waterbodies, a Common / Weal'(2021), a long-form landscape ecopoem, which was developed as part of a commission to explore pollution within the Poole Bay watershed, and drew on cross arts-science fieldwork and research conducted through interviews with land-users, I redeploy the shifting narrative around what constitutes wealth through my use of the word 'common weal'. This plays on the archaic meaning of 'commonwealth' as general welfare, and in the word 'weal' evokes the injuries sustained by river, and through our interdependence, ourselves too.

c) Decolonizing 'Nature'/Rewilding the Self

This awareness of language and the narratives it upholds is part of a larger project that we might call 'decolonizing 'Nature'. In his book of the same title, Demos points to critiques of the Western concept of Nature by Bruno Latour and Timothy Morton, and how 'Nature' has long been positioned as 'an ahistoric monolith in a separate realm from the human', and points out the 'ideological manipulations' that have been produced by invoking it as a force for naturalization, fixation and domination.[194] For Morton, 'we are losing touch with a fantasy Nature that never really existed,' and in 'queering' ecology, his project is to deconstruct heteronormative readings of 'Nature'; to uphold the intertwining of biodiversity and gender diversity; and to include the 'unbeautiful', including dirt and pollution.[195]

[193] Moore, Helen, 'Fluvial', *River Research and Applications*, Volume 38, Issue 3, Special Issue: Voicing Rivers, 2022 – see the Collection.
[194] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, p.20
[195] Morton, Timothy, 'Queer Ecology', in PMLA (Publications of the Modern Language Association of America), March 2010, Vol 125, Issue 2, p.20

Ultimately, Morton asserts the necessity of imagining 'ecology without nature',[196] whereas Demos argues that although we need to undo 'nature's objectification and ontological isolation', 'Nature' is nevertheless 'a rallying cry' within the resurging Indigenous and activist movements.[197] For Demos, the project of decolonizing 'Nature' ultimately requires the integration of the human and:

> […] a method of intersectionality which insists on thinking, being and becoming at the cross section of multiple fields of social, political, economic and material determinations.[198]

Asking what decolonising 'Nature' would mean, Demos begins by defining colonialism at its most basic, stating that it implies 'a subject-object relation mediated by power and defined by mastery and appropriation'.[199] He goes on to quote Achille Mbembe, the Cameroonian postcolonial theorist, who speaks of the multiple forms of violence that constitute colonialism, which include making its unquestionable control permanent.[200] Thus for Demos, decolonizing 'Nature' broadly entails:

> […] dissolving the subject-object relation in the social and natural environment; ending the conditions of mastery and appropriation that determine the connection between the two; and stopping the multiple levels of violence that enforce these relations.[201]

Ecopoetry can powerfully illustrate these objectives and in the Collection, I regularly overturn anthropocentric subject-object relations. In 'Succession, Hampton Court Palace',[202] an unwilled rewilding takes place as humans fall into a Sleeping-Beauty-style sleep, and the more-than-human world enjoys a process of succession:

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[196] Morton, *Ecology without Nature,* pp.1-2
[197] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, p.25
[198] Ibid, p.25
[199] Ibid, p.202
[200] Ibid, p.202
[201] Ibid, p.203
[202] 'Succession, Hampton Court Palace' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.54

Damp grows happy and glorious
[…]
As centuries of grace and favour glide away,
a colony of Bats has come home to roost […]

In 'A History of the British Empire in a Single Object',[203] I examine the history of an antique mahogany rocking chair, tracing its timber to the rainforests of so-called 'British Honduras'. Here colonial attitudes are satirised and contrasted with the traditional ecological knowledge of the indigenous Maya and their rich inter-relations with the trees, plants, and non-human animals of the rainforest. Similarly, in 'Earth Justice',[204] the more-than-human experience of violent harm through tar sands oil extraction in Canada's boreal forest is foregrounded within the setting of a courtroom, where the crime of ecocide is being tried, thus endowing the various birds with the status of subjects who are worthy of defence:

To their left Mansfield QC represents the absent victims –
Canvasback; Goldeneye; Canada Goose; Lesser Scaup; Mallard
killed by toxic sludge:

a mix of bitumen, polycyclic hydrocarbons, acids, sand, clay
which coats feet, legs, feathers, makes tarred anchors
of these sitting Fowl – drags them down with lazy bubbles

to bite the dregs of our addiction.[205]

In ''P' is for Play'[206] the brutal appropriation of raw materials from Earth is represented as if occurring to a human body, while its normalisation through children's toys is pointed up. In other poems, I empower more-than-human beings to become subjects directly voicing their experiences, in a mode that Susan Richardson and Les Murray have powerfully done. Like Murray's 'Pigs' in

[203] 'A History of the British Empire in a Single Object' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.20
[204] 'Earth Justice' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.30
[205] Ibid
[206] Moore, Helen, ''P' is for Play' in *Resurgence & Ecologist,* March/April issue 343, 2024, p.51

Translations from the Natural World,[207] the subjects of some of my poems also critique industrialised human activity. In 'What the Owls Say', the Tawny Owls inhabiting a woodland, which has been invaded by a sound-and-light show, directly address humans to voice their discomfort:

> Does our ghost-voice haunt your dreams?
> We, shadow-dwellers who occupy dark margins
> that you diurnal creatures usually resist.
> You, whose day-time woodland visits
> we put up with – though frequently your chatter &
> the barks of canine pals disrupt our sleep.
> Yet now it seems, ill-content with spending night
> locked inside your heated boxes, you invade our space
> with blinding beams & deafening noise, confuse
> our territorial calls, scare away our prey.
> With blasting energy-machines you paint the trees
> unnatural colours, while throngs troop & tramp
> the paths, & *Ooo* & *Ah* your ruse, your hoot at our expense –
> this unwelcome spectacle of human disconnection.[208]

In writing the poem (of which the above is an excerpt), my awareness of Tawny Owl ecology was supported by further research, so that the collective Owl voice is based in scientific study and embroidered with imaginative metaphor. As I lived close to their woodland habitat in North-east Scotland, I pinned copies of the poem to trees over a period of a fortnight after the event in question. Mostly they were torn down, but I was not alone in my protest and was later pleased to learn that the extravaganza had been cancelled due to insufficient revenue.

The impacts of capitalism are also voiced in 'Fluvial', where the reader is invited to reconsider river's normatively singular identity, and with the direct address serving to create a subject addressing another:

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[207] Murray, Les, *Translations from the Natural World* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1993)
[208] 'What the Owls Say', Moore, Helen, *Zoomorphic*, 2017 – see the Collection

Don't call us 'river'
as if we were singular –
a blue, serpentine line on a map,
an 's' from source to estuary;
an abstraction
to be navigated, straightened.
fished, dredged.

A **g a p i n g** mouth for waste disposal.

If you must make us 'river', sense our communities
of muds, molluscs, marshes, mires […]

River goes on to express the violence that their waterbodies have endured, including chemical spills, agricultural run-off, sedimentation, raw sewage:

Your industrialised life is our death
by a thousand **c u t s** . . .

'Fluvial' concludes with the reminder that there is no separation between river and humans; whatever affects river impacts humans too. And there is a positive revisioning of the violent subject-object relationship, as river appeals to a spirit of co-operation:

[…] let's be communities of diverse voices
with a common future.

A communion of subjects & one
Commonweal

In 'Fluvial' I owe a certain debt to *Dart*. However, Oswald's poem is, as she states, primarily 'made from the language of people who live and work on the Dart',[209] and thus whilst the poem offers a wonderful tapestry of the human within the more-

[209] Oswald, *Dart*

than-human, which in some ways addresses the human-'Nature' split, there is nevertheless an anthropocentrism inherent in reading these voices (as she indicates her readers should) 'as the river's mutterings'.[210] By contrast, my poem incorporates the human (benign and destructive), but the perspective belongs fundamentally to river, with form and typography reinforcing the project of decolonising subject-object relations (a topic I will expand on separately).

Of course, it is impossible to decolonise 'Nature' if we exclude ourselves from the process, as this would simply be to reinforce the binary of separation. Having been conditioned by anthropocentrism and neoliberal capitalism, we have come to endure and even to enact processes of extractivism within and against ourselves, and this is further reinforced by the colonization of our imaginations, particularly by apocalyptic tropes. In reflecting on my journey, I see a rewilding process as having taken place in my own life and body – a process which I've often framed as simultaneously healing self and Earth. The theme of interconnected personal and planetary healing is woven throughout the Collection, and is particularly evident in 'Climbing out of a Dog Eat Dog World'[211] and in 'Healing Song',[212] where I explore the impacts of patriarchal capitalism:

> this system making self-hating/-hurting woman
> wailing sybil a broken addicted woman
> woman divided trying-to-be-whole

The poem concludes with the line: 'in healing ourselves we begin to heal the whole'.

[210] Ibid
[211] 'Climbing out of a Dog Eat Dog World' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.84
[212] 'Healing Song' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.46

My Forest School and outdoor wellbeing work enabled me to make participant observations and understand the benefits of ecotherapy for personal wellbeing, and in various poems I have made connections between personal and planetary healing. In 'Intimations at Cae Mabon',[213] a young man heals from intersectional and intergenerational class-based trauma associated with a Welsh slate quarry. In 'River Finds its Tongue',[214] a rewilded waterway is seen to encourage community cohesion in a town previously depressed by the closure of coal mines. And in 'The Pansy Project',[215] the work of artist Paul Harfleet, who plants Pansies at sites of homophobic violence, is seen to transform prejudice, and to heal strangers.

In her discussion of ecocultural identity, Milstein speaks of the importance of 'undisciplining and rewilding ecocultural identity', which can lead us to embrace:

> […] identities rooted in interdependency, reciprocity, response-ability, regeneration, and also *regenerosity*, which I define as the circular mutual gifting and nourishing integral to our ecosystems if not our currents modes of identification.[216]

In 'A Wild Wedding',[217] the bride and groom hold their ceremony in a Scottish sea cave and in making their vows to 'serve Earth's regeneration', invite their guests to scatter tree seeds on a cliff-top scarred by wildfire. I was living in Australia during the catastrophic bushfires of 2019-20, and in 'Wanting it to rain so much',[218] I describe the creation of a mandala with found materials on a beach to grieve 'the millions killed by flames'. Later in the same poem, the lyrical 'I' picks up on a local Gumbaynggirr prayer for rain and invokes its restorative effect through an

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[213] 'Intimations at Cae Mabon' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.10
[214] 'River finds its tongue' in Moore, Helen, *The Ecological Citizen,* Vol 1 No 1 2017, p.p. 113-114
[215] 'The Pansy Project', Moore, Helen, *Unbreakable, New Writing XIII, The 2024 Creative Writing Anthology from the University of Gloucestershire,* (Gloucester: Severn Print, 2024) – see the Collection
[216] Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity,* p., p.45
[217] 'A Wild Wedding', Moore, Helen, *About Place Journal,* 2020 – see the Collection
[218] 'Wanting it to rain so much', Moore, Helen, *Unpsychology Magazine*, issue 7, 'Climate Complexity Change', 2021 – see the Collection

embodied rain dance. This echoes my sense of the restorative potential of ecopoetry, which I express in my essay 'Poetry / landscape: ecopoetry as restorative act'. In it I unpack anthropocentric notions of landscape and uphold a vision of us Western humans learning to derive our sense of belonging from our role as members of the wider multi-species communities of our planet-home, cultivating a relationship of reciprocity, restoring ecosystems, and more broadly developing regenerative 'naturecultures', where citizens protect the land/bioregion we inhabit, as if it were community, kith and kin. In this context, decolonization of 'Nature' and ourselves requires us to understand the erasure that our notions of landscape have created, both of more-than-human beings and of Indigenous presences. This is particularly apparent in the Western conception of 'wilderness', which, as I discuss in the essay, perpetuates notions of 'terra nullius'.

In my subsequent essay, 'Beyond 'White Guilt'',[219] I elaborate the unique phenomenological research method I developed whilst living in Sydney to decolonize my perception of the land and river system around which the sprawling Australian city stands, and to imagine it as a precolonial site. Drawing on E.O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis and on Guy Debord's *Theory of the Dérive* (1956) – a 'dérive' being an unplanned journey through an urban landscape with the intention of creating a radical re-reading of place – I evolved my 'biophilic dérive', which led to me gravitating on foot towards natural spaces within the city, local flora and fauna, extant natural topography, and any signs/storyboards acknowledging Traditional Owners. An embodied and intuitive approach, my research method allowed chance associations and creative impulses to occur, and this substantially informed the writing of *The Mother Country*, as the essay explains.

[219] Moore, 'Beyond White Guilt'

The book opens with 'Biophony, Prior to Invasion', a reconstruction of the dawn chorus at the pre-colonial site known to indigenous Australians as 'Waran', the wide and deep bay in the Paramatta River, where the British first landed on 26th January 1788, and which is now generally named 'Sydney Cove'. The biophony, or wild music of what would have previously been a richly biodiverse ecosystem, would no doubt have included humans as well as a range of native Australian birds and animals whose homes have also been destroyed by the development of the modern city. A term developed by a white North American male ecologist, 'biophony' ('the collective sound produced by all living organisms that reside in a particular biome'[220]) is not normally seen as including human voices, and thus my poem places Indigenous people and more-than-human beings together, acknowledging their role in co-creating the ecosystem's soundscape over millennia. Has any other UK poet researched and imagined the pre-colonial context of a cityscape? In the absence of identifying any other similar works, I would like to propose this as another significant contribution that the Collection has made to British ecopoetry.

d) 'Wild mind', interspecies communication and co-creation

Deeply influenced by his practice of Zen Buddhism, Gary Snyder defined the 'architecture of consciousness' as including '[…] contentless ground through the unconscious and the conscious.'[221] For Snyder, the unconscious is 'our wilderness areas', which contrast with 'the conscious agenda-planning ego [that] occupies a very tiny territory, a little cubicle somewhere near the gate.'[222] His notion of the unconscious as wilderness touches at the heart of ecopsychology, which, according to Roszak, proceeds from the assumption that:

[220] The term 'biophony' was coined by Bernie Krause, and contrasts with 'geophony' and 'anthropophony', see: Krause, Bernie, 'Biophony, Soundscape ecology plunges us into a wilder world beyond the mundane and merely visual', ‹https://www.anthropocenemagazine.org/2017/08/biophony/› [Accessed 31st May, 2024]
[221] Snyder, *The Real Work*, p.5
[222] Snyder, Gary, *The Practice of the Wild*, (Berkley: Counterpoint, 1990), p.17

> […] at its deepest level the psyche remains sympathetically bonded to the Earth that mothered us into existence.[223]

This bond is located in what Roszak called 'the ecological unconscious', and his understanding draws on E.O. Wilson's 'biophilia hypothesis', which suggests that humans have an innate emotional affiliation with other living organisms.[224] In 'The Ecopsychologist,'[225] I name this bond as 'the primal umbilicus – / that psychic cord that links me to my alma mater, Earth'. This realisation enables a healing process and changes my self-perception, as 'I taste an intelligence held across millennia – / how to be human in nature.' At this point in my creative practice (the poem was first published in *The European Journal of Ecopsychology* in 2011), I had yet to adopt the use of a capital and quotation marks around 'Nature', so there is perhaps a missing dimension of self-reflexivity here – however, the poem serves to show how my creative practice has evolved. In a subsequent piece, 'Frome-Selwood, an Odyssey', a long-form landscape ecopoem emerging from my 2015-16 residency with a socially engaged art project, which involved researching and communicating the heritage of the ancient forest of Selwood and Frome's origins within it, I point to our ancestral hunter-gatherer cultures still being 'imprinted in our DNA', and to 'the wild being we barely know / we are.' [226]

This sense of our embodied wildness is echoed by ecopsychologist Nick Totton in *Wild Therapy, Rewilding our Inner and Outer Worlds.*[227] Here he takes up notions of the ecological unconscious, which he calls 'wild mind', and regards as being 'directly embodied', with embodiment an ongoing process. This he describes lyrically as:

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[223] See Roszak, Theodore, 'Where Psyche meets Gaia' in Roszak, *Ecopsychology,* p.5
[224] Roszak, *Ecopsychology*, p.4
[225] 'The Ecopsychologist', in Moore, *ECOZOA*, p.37
[226] 'Frome-Selwood, an Odyssey' in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.67
[227] Totton, *Wild Therapy, Rewilding Our Inner and Outer Worlds, (Monmouth: PCCS Books, 2nd edition, 2021)*

> […] an always provisional experience of coming to be, in which the witnessing aspect of mind rhythmically leaps dolphin-like above the surface of the body's sea, then dives down into it again, stitching together air and water, self-awareness and embodied immediacy.[228]

Seeing the unconscious as an aspect of my embodied wild self, I have drawn on its communications in the form of dreams for inspiration in my writings. Dreams have frequently inspired the work of poets and artists, but the originality I bring is the ecopsychological interpretation. 'Dog's Message'[229] describes a powerful communication from a dream, where 'a large Dog with hyper-vigilant ears' invites a collaborative approach to 'resisting the forces that would break us.' 'Pain Threshold'[230] is also a dream landscape pointing to an experience of healing through facing demons, grieving, the dismantling of 'derelict frameworks' and the use of herbs ('poultices of comfrey and myrrh'). By contrast, 'How We Sleep at Night'[231] points to the need for sleeping pills and other substances that block the horrors of this world from our minds, an image of factory farmed Pigs evoked to indicate the impact on the soul.

'Wild mind' features in my work in other ways too. 'On the Butterfly Path'[232] shifts into the realm of biosemiotics, an ecocritical approach that perceives ecology as being 'perfused with signs, meanings, and purposes, which are material and which evolve.'[233] In drawing on these signs, I am recognising a position beyond advocacy. In this poem, the observation of Tortoiseshells aligned to the East along a cycle path – all facing the distant beacon of a chalk figure carved into the hillside – offers meaning beyond the rationalising mind; and it is only sometime after the experience

[228] Ibid, p.84
[229] 'Dogs Message' in D'Arcangelo, Elvey & Moore, *INTATTO. INTACT,* p.81
[230] 'Pain Threshold' in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.41
[231] 'How We Sleep at Night' in ibid, p.52
[232] 'On the Butterfly Path' in *INTATTO. INTACT,* p.84
[233] Iovino and Opperman, *Material Ecocriticism,* p.4

that the significance of the alignment surfaces, so that the more-than-human world gains a sense of agency as co-creator of this meaning.

For Iovino and Opperman, biosemiotics serves to counter 'the vision fixed on human supremacy', and instead proposes 'a confederation of agencies', where:

> […] the world's phenomena are segments of a conversation between human and manifold nonhuman beings […][234]

Their subsequent reminder that the term 'conversation' is not a metaphor resonates with the broad notion of ecopoetics as an act of creative interaction, which includes human and more-than-human beings. By widening the concept of 'Nature' to incorporate the human – relocating us within 'the larger material-semiotic collective' – the 'new' paradigm is premised on 'integral ways of thinking language and reality, meaning and matter together.'[235] Drawing on Karen Barad's theory of agential realism, where phenomena arise from the 'intra-actions' of co-emerging material and discursive practices, and Wendy Wheeler's vision of 'a web teeming with meaning', Iovino and Opperman affirm Donna Haraway's notion of 'naturecultures', where nature and culture are a congealing hybrid compound.[236]

For the early ancestors of the British Isles, and within the precolonial worldview of Indigenous peoples, naturecultures undoubtedly existed, and in surviving colonisation, this is a position that First Nations people struggle to uphold. However, in anthropocentric cultures there is a general taboo around conversing with 'Nature'. Indicating that 'listening for the voices of the Earth as if the nonhuman world felt, heard, spoke' is usually regarded as 'the essence of

[234] Iovino and Opperman, *Material Ecocriticism,* p.4
[235] Ibid
[236] Ibid, p.3

madness',[237] Roszak questions the role of traditional psychotherapy in reinforcing the split:

> Is it possible that by asserting that very conception of madness, psychotherapy may be defending the deepest of all our repressions, the form of psychic mutilation that is most crucial to the advance of industrial civilisation, namely the assumption that the land is a dead and servile thing that has no feeling, no memory, no intention of its own.[238]

For David Abram, the development of human languages arose not simply within interhuman exchanges, but 'in a kind of call and response with a speaking, many-voiced world,' [239] which echoes the inclusive biophony I evoke in *The Mother Country*. Abram also sees his creativity arising from his body's 'intimate exchange with other bodies and beings,'[240] whereas in Western culture creativity is predominantly bound up with human individualism – 'the quasi-godlike creative genius of the human mind', as Hubert Zapf writes.[241] And yet in reuniting culture and 'Nature', Zapf sees the potential for 'the transforming power of art' as 'an ecological force within culture.'[242]

In my book chapter 'Wild Writing: co-creative practices & inspirations',[243] I begin by discussing the word 'inspire', which connects us with the breath and the air we share with all beings, and I elaborate my understanding of co-creation, which is at the heart of all experience. I encourage the aspiring wild writer to prepare for an outdoor writing session, to get in touch with the 'creaturely' body and to 'drop into

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[237] Roszak, *Ecopsychology*, p.7
[238] Ibid
[239] Abram, David, 'Interbreathing in the Humilocene' in Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor, *Ecocultural Identity*, p.11
[240] Ibid
[241] Zapf, Hubert, 'Creative Matter and Creative Mind, Cultural Ecology and Literary Creativity', in Iovino and Opperman, *Material Ecocriticism*, p.51
[242] Ibid, p.65
[243] Moore, Helen, 'Wild Writing: co-creative practices & inspirations', *Inspire: Exciting Ways to Teach Creative Writing*, eds. Brankin, Emma; Gilbert, Francis, and Sharples, Carinya (London: Gold Publishing, 2020) – see the Collection

an extra-ordinary mode, where our being is freed to be wilder than usual'. In engaging with the more-than-human world, I suggest crossing some symbolic threshold, and recommend an epistemological approach that decentres the dominant rational mind, and instead employs five different modes of knowing: sensing, feeling, imagining, intuiting and thinking. Quoting Ezra Pound's description of artists as 'the antennae of the race', I encourage the wild writer to develop an embodied, co-creative phenomenological approach, 'picking up on signals, signs, wild language', and recording them without judgement. I also indicate the importance of staying open to thoughts, feelings, sensations, associations, memories, and dreams that may subsequently arise.

In my poem 'Tracks and Signs',[244] tracks left in the snow by Red Squirrels and Blackbirds are seen as the woods' 'wild Braille, its cuneiform'. These must be deciphered, and in the poem the implied communications of the more-than-human world become linked with reading the signs of the climate emergency – a handwritten sign on a supermarket door, empty shelves, and newspaper headlines proclaiming: '*"ARCTIC WARMER THAN LONDON, PARIS, ROME."*' In 'Sky News',[245] the woods awakening in Springtime are seen to have agency and to communicate in a way that overturns the connotation of the title as a reference to the corporate media channel. More recent critical work (my 'Poetry & Landscape' essay) describes the genesis of the poem 'Nightmare Slurry Spill', which developed out of a disturbing dream that occurred whilst I was camping on a rewilded Trout farm during my field research for the 'Dorset Waterbodies' poem cycle and as part of a 'social dreaming matrix',[246] which had been planned with other artists for the following morning. The dream comprised the very real sense of some malevolent energy entering my tent – the door unzipping – then squatting on my chest and

[244] Moore, Helen, 'Tracks & Signs', *The Wild Word*, 2021 – see the Collection
[245] Moore, Helen, 'Sky News', Amethyst Review, 2018 – see the Collection
[246] For more about the social dreaming matrix, see https://socialdreaminginternational.net/ (Accessed 29th April, 2024)

trying to suffocate me, not once but three times; and it culminated with my sacrifice of a Blackbird to dispel the entity. Having got over the shock that the nightmare provoked, I ultimately felt that it was an interspecies communication – namely, that I had been given a visceral sense of the suffocation that Fish experience when rivers are polluted by agricultural effluent or raw sewage.[247] This event also occurred around the time of George Floyd's murder through suffocation by a white policeman, and I was reminded of the intertwining social and ecological crises, which find their origins in capitalism's oppressions. The resulting poem was thus a co-creation fusing human and more-than-human dimensions:

> *We cannot breathe!* In toxic oblivion, hearts & gills float –
> fins pinioned to our sides, voices unable to whisper.
> (Who speaks for the voiceless?)

Non-ordinary states of consciousness, achieved through dreams, breathwork and the ingestion of entheogens, have been used in Indigenous cultures for millennia to develop co-creative relationships with the more-than-human world. And in 'Mycelium, and the Mental Dance of Fruiting Bodies',[248] I draw on first-hand phenomenological research and the field of evolutionary psychology, where Terence McKenna's radical insights suggest the role of psychedelic mushrooms in catalysing human and animal consciousness.[249] If they are indeed 'interspecies chemical messengers', as McKenna claims, their messages seem to reach us through altered states of consciousness, post ingestion. A parallel also seems to exist between the

[247] Dissolved oxygen in water is essential for maintaining aquatic life, however rotting organic matter, such as raw sewage or slurry, causes bacteria to proliferate and to use up all the dissolved oxygen. Scientists call this consumption of oxygen in the water 'Biological Oxygen Demand' – see: ‹https://www.wwdmag.com/utility-management/article/10938701/what-is-biological-oxygen-demand-bod› [Accessed 10th June 2024]
[248] Moore, Helen, 'Mycelium, and the Mental Dance of Fruiting Bodies', *Long Poem Magazine*, issue 19, 2018 – see the Collection
[249] McKenna, Terence, *Food of the Gods, a radical history of plants, drugs and human evolution,* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p.41

underground nature of fungi and the unconscious ('wild') mind, as the poem indicates:

> Beige moons
> luminous russet parasols
> plain buns with frilly gills –
>
> in such wondrous forms they seek our attention
>
> I cut the stalks,
> press each fleshy cap to paper under glass
> to catch spores
>
> Mushrooms print round, fanning patterns
> with a hole at the centre –
>
> like the mind encircled
> by filaments of dark,
> I try to keep it clear for emergent
>
> *S e e d s o f p o e s i s*

This comes in sharp contrast to the poem's epigraph, which evokes Cartesian notions of a de-souled, mechanistic world that have dominated contemporary Western thought:

> *"I have described this earth, and indeed this whole visible world, as a machine."* –
> René Descartes

In bearing this juxtaposition, the poem serves to reveal the clash of the old anthropocentric paradigm with the 'new', where animate intelligence co-exists and co-creates with and through all life-forms. This ancient worldview remains embedded in First Nations' fight for survival across our damaged planet, and it is re-emerging in Western cultures through those of us actively seeking to create change. This change begins with transforming the self through the various decolonising and

rewilding processes I have already outlined, and develops, I believe, through what Joanna Macy calls 'honouring our pain for the world.'[250]

e) Grief-tending

Even as I shift towards embodying and upholding a more ecocentric worldview, I am still immersed in an anthropocentric culture where ecocide and genocide are widely reported and even tangible. This requires the ability to feel and process this painful level of reality. As the American poet Jorie Graham reminds us, ecologically engaged poetry is about emotionally registering crisis in a culture where we no longer remember how to feel our way in the world, nor know what it is 'to be human in a world where birdsong is disappearing.'[251]

Grief-tending – creating space for the expression and processing of grief – is particularly reflected in *The Mother Country,* and is seen in personal and collective contexts. The latter is evident in two juxtaposed Indigenous narratives within a single poem ('Narawarn & the Sea'), where the Aboriginal creation story about how the sea became salty is introduced by a Sydney-based elder, Uncle Charles Madden, speaking in a mix of English and Dharug, about the role of mourning and truth-telling for Cadigal people:

> *Our hearts feel bugrabanya (broken to pieces) as we remember the stories of the marri bayi (big kill), galgala (small pox) and mubi (mourning). But we who ngalawa (remain) must honour our peoples & countries through baya yurring (speaking true*).[252]

[250] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life,* p.26
[251] Graham, Jorie, 'An Interview with Jorie Graham', in *Earthlines*: 'The Culture of Nature', Issue 2, August 2012, p.40
[252] 'Narawarn and the Sea' in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.62

For the psychologist Francis Weller, processing personal and collective grief is a journey through what he calls 'the gates of grief' towards the 'new culture […] that honours soul and the soul of the world.'[253] Addressing what Weller terms the 'two primary sins of Western civilisation: amnesia and anesthesia' – states of forgetting and numbing which allow us to 'slip into a mode of being that neglects the wider bonds of our belonging'[254] – grief-tending is a practice to which I have returned over many years, particularly within the context of The Work that Reconnects groups. My personal reflection and research finds its expression throughout the Collection in poems that move beyond the numbness brought on by our addictions ('How We Sleep at Night'[255]) and 'panem et circenses, 44BCE – 2012CE'[256]), to poems that invite in and honour personal and planetary grief. These include: 'Soul Midwife Sings',[257] 'Prayer for Grief', 'Pain Threshold' and 'Tears I Shed Yesterday Have Become Rain'[258]. In *ECOZOA*'s 'Ark Rains', Noah's daughter sees widespread flooding ('mass markets / swelling rivers') as *'all the tears that people never shed'*. For the writer and educator Martin Prechtel, grief and praise are allied, and the absence of praise has a deadening effect on us.[259] But what if our culture barely notices the disappearance of more-than-human beings from land, rivers, and seas? Perceiving an aspect of the role of ecopoet as a memory-keeper for lost beings, this dimension of grief and praise is combined in my poem 'The Fallen', where I individually celebrate some of the wild plants that have gone extinct in the British Isles in recent decades.[260]

The practice of 'owning and honouring our pain for the world', as Macy terms it, emerged from her understanding that 'pain has a purpose: it is a warning signal,

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[253] Weller, Francis, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015), p.23
[254] Ibid, p.xx
[255] 'How We Sleep at Night' in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.52
[256] 'panem et circenses, 44BCE – 2012CE' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.25
[257] 'Soul Midwife Sings' in Moore, *ECOZOA*, p.63
[258] 'Prayer for Grief', 'Pain Threshold' and 'Tears I Shed Yesterday Have Become Rain' in Moore, *The Mother Country,* p.42, p.41, p.76
[259] Prechtel, Martin, The Smell of Rain on Dust, (Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, 2015), p.37
[260] 'The Fallen' in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.18

designed to trigger remedial action'.[261] For Macy, 'the epochal shift from a self-destructive industrial growth society to a life-sustaining society' (The Great Turning), requires that we recognise the repression of our pain, which occurs for psychological and social/economic reasons.[262] 'Coming back to life' involves addressing this repression through group-work exercises – 'Practices to Reconnect our Lives, Our World'[263] – with group members supporting each other in a spiral journey that begins with expressing gratitude, then moves to honouring our pain, seeing with new eyes, and going forth into action. Macy's insight is that in giving space for our sorrow, we realise that our feelings arise from our interconnectedness:

> The very distress that, when we hid it, seemed to separate us from other people, now uncovers the connective tissue bonding us […][264]

The shift in perception (metanoia) which follows grief-work, is termed by Macy as 'seeing with new eyes', and group-work often involves imagining across temporal and spatial scales in support of paradigm shift. And in my view, the deployment of what I have come to term the 'trans-scalar imaginary' alongside my grief-tending substantially adds to the significance of the Collection, in that other poets tend to stay with the witnessing and implied grief, without journeying beyond it.

6. The Trans-scalar Imaginary

> Very often creative writers and artists anticipate theory, or their work embodies theory. Their art and the way they talk about it may not employ the language of theory per se, as theoretical language is necessarily abstract,

[261] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, p. 27
[262] These psychological reasons include the fear of facing our own pain, despair, guilt, powerlessness; distrusting our intelligence; not wanting to cause others distress; and the belief in a separate self. And because of economic and social forces – mass media, job and time pressures, social violence etc. See: Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, pp.27-38
[263] Also known as 'The Work that Reconnects'
[264] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, p. 37

> whereas many artists express their ideas and intuitions concretely or narratively.[265]

These are the words of Cheryl Glotfelty and the 'trans-scalar imaginary' is one such theoretical approach, which I now identify as a feature of my creative work. Establishing the limitations of our physical senses to perceive the threats to our collective survival in the modern world, Scott Slovic, founding president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, indicates the need for thought processes that move from micro to macro, the individual to the collective, from past to present to future. He writes:

> Because of our limited ability to perceive with physical sensory organs, we must use our brains to imagine the real connections that underlie our existence.[266]

These 'real connections' are not simply our material entanglement with local ecosystems, but also involve those brought about by our globalised world, where our choices and actions have implications for others who may be invisible to us. Slovic sees this ability to imagine across different scales as a way of addressing what Rob Nixon terms 'slow violence', which is:

> [...] a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.[267]

As Caleb Parkin affirms, poetry has the ability to make scalar shifts and 'to hold multiple perspectives and ambiguities', and as such, he sees poetry as uniquely placed within the public imagination 'to support the representation of massively

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[265] Gloftelty, Cheryl in Iovino and Opperman, *Material Ecocriticism*, p.223
[266] Slovic, Scott, 'Liquid Scale: Trans-scalar Thinking the Perception of Water' in Costlow, Jane, Haila, Yrjö, Rosenholm, Arja (eds.), Water in Social Imagination, from Technological Optimism to Contemporary Environmentalism, (Leiden: Brill Rodophi, 2017), p.24
[267] Ibid, p.13

distributed temporospatial (time/space) violences to the entire biosphere'.[268] Nevertheless, in much contemporary literature and poetry, shifts in time and place are generally bound up with the individual life experience of the central human character or lyrical 'I', and as such do not reflect the reality of inter- and intra-connection in a globalised world. A recurrent feature of my creative work, the trans-scalar imaginary is particularly evident in *ECOZOA,* where there is a frequent shift between spatial and temporal scales that include Deep Time, the historic past, and the future. Such shifts also occur within individual poems. As previously mentioned, 'Deep Time, Deep Tissue' describes the experience of a massage expanding awareness of the body within evolutionary time. The poem takes the reader on a journey from the micro detail of the body, where releasing its armour of tension leads to an experience of the self as 'foetus/ deep sea mammal/first bubble of life/in some primordial lagoon', and subsequently moves to the macro as any notion of self-hood collapses into 'dark matter', becoming absorbed with 'our symbiotic home', and a vision of Earth from outer space. This is followed by an evocation of ecocide, 'dead zones in oceans', the erasure of 'cultures of birds, animals, people', eroded soils, melting glaciers and ice-sheets. In its final section, the poem returns to breath and body, the latter addressed with a heightened sense of gratitude – 'You/ ancient, four-zoaed temple' – and ultimately provides ground for the self to acknowledge an active role within the collective:

> […] In whatever mortal span
> that remains, help me to navigate
>
> this crisis in our evolution, to stay
> with what others have begun
>
> millions of cells rising
> rising in and for our life-source, Earth

[268] Parkin, Caleb, statement written for ECOPOETIKON, ‹https://ecopoetikon.org/poets/portfolio/caleb-parkin›, [Accessed 31st May, 2024]

willing Ecozoa's birth.

Here 'Ecozoa' refers to Berry's notion of the Ecozoic Era, which stands as an alternative to the Anthropocene, and represents the 'conscious evolution' that Slovic understands as being necessary for 'us to adapt to the changing world.'[269]

Echoing Plumwood's notion of 'shadow places', 'translocality' is a specific way of talking about the realities of a globalised world, and it stands in contrast to 'locality', defined by physical or geographical borders, which obscure the connections and flows that expand a place beyond its traditional boundaries.[270] An aspect of the trans-scalar imaginary, trans-locality is evident in 'Apple Company, West Country',[271] which contrasts local organic orchards and traditional customs with foreign apple production and the chemicals involved. Other poems that contribute trans-locality to the Collection are those that give voice to people from the Global South. As previously mentioned, they have a decolonising function, but also point to how the Global North benefits from the outsourcing of manufacturing to places where wages are low, employment protection is negligible, and the climate crisis unfairly impacts people. Some additional poems that incorporate these perspectives are: 'capitalism, a sonnet'[272] and 'apples are not the only gadgets',[273] where each tercet takes a brand with a name appropriated from an animal, plant, or First Nations tribe, and reveals its superseded meaning:

> apple is not a pomaceous fruit typical of orchards
> but a multinational company that designs and markets electronics,
> computers, software. (Child labour worsens in its Chinese factories)

[269] Slovic, 'Liquid Scale', p.19
[270] Peth, Simon A., 'What is translocality? A refined understanding of place and space in a globalized world', DOI: https://doi.org/10.34834/2019.0007
[271] 'Apple Company, West Country' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.73
[272] 'capitalism, a sonnet' in Moore, *Hedge Fund*, p.59
[273] 'Apples are not the only gadgets' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.6

Other poems in the Collection point to the invisible flows of pollution, rubbish, and disease that arise from industrialised capitalism. 'Away'[274] imagines the comedic communications of a kitchen wastebin and then transports the reader's attention to a landfill site, its 'oozing, tumorous obsolence', and ends by upholding the 'ancient vocation' of detritivores. In 'Whitefella Fishing',[275] there is not only a sense of the erased cultures of local Indigenous peoples who once fished in Sydney's Paramatta River, but also traces of dioxins in the Flathead caught by a white Australian fisherman. This he relishes barbecuing, despite anglers' talk of government health warnings about dioxins in the ecosystem, which stem from New Year firework celebrations on Sydney Harbour Bridge. The implication of ingesting dioxins is later picked up in *The Mother Country*, when in the final section of 'The Big C',[276] 'Outing the Mafia' reveals the 'characters' at work behind the scenes to cause the cancerous tumours that oncologists have previously removed from a patient's body. These 'Mafiosi' include:

> […] slick godfather, Mr Postmodern Living,
>
> on his arm an ironic supermarket basket
> of products that stir up *Bloody Toxic* (body
>
> as cocktail shaker), ingredients: nail polish, air fresheners,
> tinned food, sunscreen, fizzy drinks, dry-cleaned suits,
>
> processed meat, underarm deodorants – this inside-job
> quietly conspiring to damage DNA, disrupt hormones, inflame
>
> tissues, switch genes on or off.

Awareness of the flows of substances between ecosystems, humanimal and more-than-human bodies reflects Stacey Alaimo's concept of 'transcorporeality', which,

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[274] 'Away' in D'Arcangelo, Elvey & Moore, *INTATTO. INTACT,* p.36
[275] 'Whitefella Fishing' in Moore, *The Mother Country,* p.15
[276] 'The Big C' in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.35

Alaimo says, has been the work of activists and practitioners of health, justice, and climate change movements to reveal, even as global capitalism and its medical-industrial complex promote an 'ideology of solidly bonded individual consumers and benign, discrete products.'[277] Macy develops this by saying that Industrial Growth Society's perception of separate entities relating to each other through hierarchical and competitive modes can be shifted through grief-tending, which enables The Great Turning's reclaimed awareness of the interdependence of all phenomena, and where power is understood as:

> […] mutual and synergistic, arising from interaction and generating new possibilities and capacities.[278]

This theme of shared power is one that I explore further in the following section, which moves the collective imagination beyond apocalyptic tropes.

7. Beyond Apocalypse

At a Creative Arts conference I recently attended at the University of Gloucestershire, an undergraduate student made a presentation about 'Doomerism', and the pervasive attitudes amongst younger generations that reflect pessimism and fatalism regarding the polycrisis, including the widespread acceptance of human extinction. This, I believe, reflects the paucity of what Stibbe calls 'ethical leadership' amongst older generations,[279] and a lack of awareness of our shared power. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to pretend either that the crises we face are not of immense severity, or that the vested interests shoring up the current system are not deeply entrenched, or even that Western so-called 'civilisation' and lifestyles are at

[277] Alaimo, Stacey, 'Oceanic Origins, Plastic Activism and New Materialism at Sea', Iovino and Opperman, *Material Ecocriticism*, p.187
[278] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life,* p.117
[279] Stibbe, Arran, *Econarratives,* see chapter 6, 'Leading: Ethics in Leadership Communication', pp.123-146

all sustainable. As *The Mother Country* points up, there are widespread legacies of dispossession resulting from both historic and ongoing colonialism, and this includes the disinheritance of the future generations, which I express satirically in 'The Never-never Land':

> Planet in the red, we've pawned our Great Mother. And for tomorrow's reserves – forests, fish, topsoil, minerals – we're indebted to our children. They themselves will live on Mars, reading *Peter Pan*. [280]

With the proliferation of nuclear technology and its inadequately addressed legacies of waste, we also live with the ever-present reality of major catastrophes unfolding, whether through nuclear warfare or through repetitions of the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters. In her essay 'Rages of Fukushima and Grief in a No-Future Present', [281] the Japanese writer Mari Matsumoto talks of the inadequacy of the senses to fully comprehend what occurred, and she quotes the German philosopher Günther Anders who uses the term 'Apocalypse-Blindheit' to describe our blindness to potential apocalypse, and the need for us to get in touch with our emotions and 'to be enraged together'.

In *The Anthropocene Unconscious, Climate Catastrophe Culture*,[282] Mark Bould surveys the plethora of films and books that swamp our culture with imagery of often far-fetched disaster, such as the 'Sharknado' films, and he challenges Amitav Ghosh's assertion in *The Great Derangement* (2016) that most forms of contemporary art and literature have been drawn into 'modes of concealment' which prevent people from recognizing our collective plight. For Bould, art and literature is 'pregnant with catastrophe', even if obliquely stated, and thus it represents what he calls 'the

[280] 'The Never-never Land', in Moore, *Hedge Fund,* p.77
[281] Matsumoto, Mari, ''Rages of Fukushima and Grief in a No-Future Present', in Milstein, Cindy (ed), *Rebellious Mourning, The Collective Work of Grief,* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2017)
[282] Bould, Mark, *The Anthropocene Unconscious, Climate Catastrophe Culture,* (London: Verso, 2021)

unconscious of the Anthropocene'.[283] Bould simultaneously acknowledges the problems with the Anthropocene concept, which upholds narratives of humanity as an undifferentiated whole, thus failing to distinguish the roles of class, capital, imperialism, and culture in creating the climate crisis. But what his book then omits is the relationship between this oblique cultural expression of the Anthropocene unconscious and the enforced narratives of disaster capitalism – not to mention the million-dollar revenue streams these apocalyptic scenarios generate for the corporate media and entertainment industry.

For Morton, these apocalyptic narratives also serve indirectly to reinforce the Cartesian split running through the culture:

> In ecological apocalyptic fantasies of the last man, everyone dies—except for the viewer or the reader. They reproduce a fundamental Cartesian and semantic split between the "I" who is narrating, and the "I" who is the subject of the story.[284]

Apocalypse culture no doubt has a role in contributing to the amnesia and anaethesia that Weller identifies in our culture, and this extends to contemporary poetry, where irony, solipsism, consumerism, and intertextual references to pop culture (such as in Toby Fitch's *Where Only the Sky had Hung Before,* 2019[285]) serve to reinforce the general malaise of a culture lacking vision. Morton advocates for the role that grief-tending (Macy's) has in countering the cultural tendency towards apocalypticism, which 'tries to see beyond death, to remain sighted after there is nothing left to see.'[286] My own position is to creatively refuse the colonisation of the collective imagination that apocalyptism creates. In 'Deep Time, Deep Tissue',[287] I reference the Anthropocene as 'obscene era', and move towards the co-creative

[283] Ibid, pp.2-3
[284] Morton, *Ecology without Nature,* p.186
[285] Fitch, Toby, *Where Only the Sky had Hung Before* (Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2019)
[286] Morton, *Ecology without Nature,* p.186
[287] 'Deep Time, Deep Tissue', in Moore, *ECOZOA*, pp.2-4

position of 'cells rising/in and for our life source, Earth', which heralds the alternative Ecozoic Era introduced in *ECOZOA*'s aforementioned preface, where we will live in harmony with the Earth as our community.[288]

Similarly, Demos asserts the need to switch from 'apocalyptic imagery to utopian prophecy', and (quoting Nicholas Powers): "[…] to create a cultural 'wilding' that opens horizontal spaces into which people can enter."[289] This alludes to Macy's notion of shared power, which is derived from recognizing the non-hierarchical interdependence of all phenomena, and is echoed in the themes of restoration and intertwining personal and planetary healing that I have already highlighted within the Collection. I am also inspired by the less culturally visible meaning of 'apocalypse' – the Greek word for 'apocalypse', 'ἀποκαλύπτω', means 'revealing', 'unveiling', or 'vision', and in the 'Urthona' section of *ECOZOA*, there is a visionary strand of expression that supplants the capitalist colonisation of public space through outdoor advertising ('Vision, with Product Placement'). Overnight, a series of transformative slogans appear, which have a visible impact on people, promoting greater social cohesion, and the poem concludes with the insight, 'Our thoughts are forming the world' In this, I find an echo of Blake's perception that 'All that we see is Vision', and see a correlation with the ecocritical awareness of the powerful role that narratives and language uphold.

8. Embodiment and Ecopoetic Form

Throughout my thesis, I have highlighted the importance of embodiment for the development of ecocentric consciousness and as I draw my discussion to a close, I want to briefly touch on how that is reflected in my innovative use of form in poetry. A defining characteristic of poetry in a literate culture, form only surfaced as

[288] Moore, *ECOZOA*, p.ix
[289] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature,* p.19

Western poetics emerged from its earlier oral roots, where there was no need to consider how words might be arranged on a page, although metrics and mnemonic structures, such as rhyme and repeated refrains, were important features for Bardic memorisation. After the advent of writing, poetry developed through highly controlled traditional verse forms until its release into free verse, which reflects the broad twentieth-century interest in consciousness. With writers' experimenting across genres, including the novel and the Joycean project of stream-of-consciousness, Modernist poets, including e. e. cummings, also drew on free forms of contemporary music, such as jazz, to inspire their poetics. My own approach to form inevitably stems from this rich heritage, but it also reflects Fisher-Wirth and Street's third category of ecopoetry – 'ecological poetry', which engages questions of poetic form in its exploration of how poems can be 'ecological'.[290]

This engagement was initially visible in the UK amongst more experimental poets, who drew on American L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E. poetry, and Harriet Tarlo's 2011 *Ground Aslant* anthology[291] reflects work that is at times formally innovative whilst being more obliquely ecological, and yet does not position itself as ecopoetry. A willingness to explore form has subsequently become more apparent amongst new generations of British ecopoets, as is evident in the *Footprints* anthology. However, at the time I began writing ecopoetry, what was being presented as such (by Abbs and Oswald, for example), was much less formally inventive, perhaps due to the absence of any conceptual underpinning that ecocritical theory can provide. Again, my role models were international, and I acknowledge the inspiration of Forrest Gander and John Kinsella in *Redstart: An Ecological Poetics* (2012), where they ask how syntax, line break or the shape of the poem on the page can express an ecological ethics. Reminding us that writing is a constructed system, they gesture towards the myriad opportunities of form to represent 'Nature':

[290] Fisher-Wirth and Street, *Ecopoetry,* p.9
[291] Tarlo, Harriet, *The Ground Aslant*

> A poem expressing a concern for ecology might be structured as compost, it might be developed rhizomatically, it might be described as a nest, a collectivity.[292]

In the Collection, a school of Pilchards is thus expressed in fish-shaped stanzas, while sections about industrial fishing are expressed in prose poetry that represents the nets they are caught in.[293] In 'Mimesis/Nemesis', the 'ever-decreasing circles' of a tractor closing in on the flowering Bee Orchids in a meadow is evoked through the narrowing sprawl of text and the movement from right to left alignment on the page.[294] In articulating the narratives that exist concurrently as we shift towards the 'new' paradigm, both are liable to appear side-by-side on the page, with the ecocentric taking centre stage and the anthropocentric off to the side ('Hedge Fund', 'Apple Company',[295] 'Bio tapestry'[296]). I am also interested in the white spaces between the words that can represent erasure – in *The Mother Country* this is particularly evident in the title poem, and in 'First Contact', 'Daughter of the Dissolution' ('Mother Tongue'), 'The Scold's Bridle' and 'Frome-Selwood, an Odyssey'. In 'Away'[297] there is a sense of words pushed to the edge of the page, just as we push awareness of where landfill waste is destined to the edges of our consciousness. Sometimes it serves my ecopoetics to express embodied experience through traditional verse forms. In 'Mother Haiku'[298] I use the haiku form to show brief exchanges, grief at my mother's cancer, and our absent bond, while in 'Pantoum on Planting Seeds',[299] the repeating lines reveal the gradual dawning of awareness about the potent energy contained in seeds.

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[292] Gander, Forrest and Kinsella, John, *Redstart: An Ecological Poetics,* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2012), p.13
[293] 'The Unsung Pilchard', in Moore, *Hedge Fund*, p.24
[294] 'Mimesis, Nemesis' in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.50
[295] 'Apple Company West Country' in Moore, *ECOZOA*, p.73
[296] 'Bio Tapestry' in Moore, *ECOZOA,* p.77
[297] 'Away' in D'Arcangelo, Elvey & Moore, *INTATTO. INTACT,* p.36
[298] 'Mother Haiku, from *Winter Journal*, 2013-2014', in Moore, *The Mother Country*, p.39
[299] 'Pantoum on Planting Seeds' in Moore, Hedge Fund, p.35

I have already discussed how my decolonising approach makes use of capitals for more-than-human beings and wild phenomena and lower case for brand names, and in 'Fluvial' (and the long-form poem, 'Dorset Waterbodies', within which it sits), typography is additionally deployed to add texture to a poem-cycle through my use of bolded type and bigger font sizes. Written with the awareness that these texts would be displayed in art galleries, both on the walls and as part of installations that I created, I began working with a sense of scale beyond the page of a book. In attempting to bring ecopoetry to different audiences, by mixing words with objects, for example – text from 'Nightmare Slurry Spill' was handwritten onto what resembled a pool of split milk placed next to a large metal milk churn on the gallery floor – I was gratified to provoke responses that would never be visible through the dissemination of the poem in book form. These included a note attached to the installation that read 'This is anti-farmer rhetoric'. The same exhibition also drew positive comments, which I will share amongst my testimonials.[300]

9. Concluding thoughts

In exploring ecopoetry as the engaged, embodied, co-created expression of ecocentric 'new' paradigm consciousness, I hope to have shown the originality of the Collection in its multi-faceted engagement with ecology. A unique fusion of political, ecospiritual, and ecocritical dimensions, the Collection innovatively expresses the intersectional domination and appropriation of ecosystems, more-than-human and human cultures; the role that the embodied 'humanimal' self, the decolonised imagination, and revitalised modes of perception play in the development of an ecocentric worldview; and the communicative co-creation with the more-than-human/phenomenal world, which can energise the transition towards personal and

[300] See appendix i

planetary regeneration. Viewed within the wider context of British ecopoetry, my work has been a pioneering contribution to the field, in that to my knowledge, there are no other examples of an ecopoetic oeuvre so deeply grounded in an ecocultural investigation of self, awareness of the limited perception and imagination that underpins the collective issues we face, and the activism inherent in seeking to remedy this through the positioning and production of ecopoetry as 'restorative act'.

In my introduction, I referred to Adrienne Rich's notion of 're-vision' as the drive to self-knowledge for women, and a refusal of patriarchal oppression. In the light of my own oppression as a woman and as a female ecopoet, the empowering process of examining my creative and critical work has also enabled fresh insight, and in delineating aspects of my practice, and its development over the past twenty years, it has come into clearer focus and has become easier to articulate. Overall, I see the creative and critical work contained in the Collection as a rewilding of poetics, a systemic and conceptual approach blended with the project of re-enchantment. As a result of this process, and the enormous encouragement I have received throughout, I feel re-energized to step up more as a voice for ecopoetry, ecocultural arts and humanities in the UK and internationally. To see myself once again as one of many beings 'rising in and for our life-source, Earth/willing Ecozoa's birth'.

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Appendix i, Testimonials, endorsements, and review excerpts

Chris McCabe, Head Librarian, Poetry Library, Southbank, testimonial, April 2024
'Helen Moore is a poet of the luminous present and a precursor of ecopoetics. Helen was writing whole collections of ecopoetry long before there were prizes dedicated to it. From *Hedge Fund* (2012) through to *ECOZOA* (2015), *The Mother Country* (2019) and the recent work included in *Messages from the Embers: Australian Bushfire Poetry Anthology*, we're delighted to have a run of this important poet's work in our collection. When asked by the public for contemporary poets writing about the natural world, Helen Moore is the first on our list of recommendations.'

Lindsay Clarke's endorsement of *Hedge Fund, And Other Living Margins*, 2012
'Like the vision it preserves and celebrates, the language of this collection draws its strength from a deep rootedness in the natural world. At once eulogist for all that sustains our life and elegist for all that we despoil, Helen Moore emerges in *Hedge Fund* as an urgent, compelling and compassionate voice for these critical times.'

John Kinsella's endorsement of *ECOZOA*, 2015
'In her Blake-vision for the planet, Helen Moore intones, invokes, implores and damns. *Ecozoa* is a summoning-up of all animals, plants, rocks and soil, to have their say as humans dissolve the planet, as the State rides roughshod over the rights of humans and environment. Moore's is an assertive plea for the earth to reclaim its intactness, its wholeness in the face of human destruction, human abuse. But it's also calling across time to our human ancestors, a gathering of the human condition, a roll-call of all those who have suffered and need to be given voice - accounting for the costs of human using human for personal and collective gain. This is nothing less than a declaration of nature's independence, a manifesto for human engagement that is inclusive, respectful and aware of the impact all of us make in our day-to-day lives on the earth's living body. It is passionate and compassionate, angry but also speaking from within the condition, the crisis. There's also a vital ecofeminism here that takes responsibility, and realigns the Goddess as a force for addressing the monopolising of all religions by the tools of military-industrial violence. And all of this cased in prophetic utterances underpinned by gritty realism - blending invocation and reportage. In Moore is a feminist-Ginsberg-channelling-Blake - a voice we need, a voice that will not be silenced by vested interests. This is science as justice, poetry as action. Though deeply crafted, these poems are no mere ornaments for our consumption. And there's a terrible beauty in all of this that needs to be understood as an affirmation of all existence. If the poems hold to account, the book offers us a means of healing - it is a milestone in the journey of ecopoetics.'

Sara Iles reviewing *ECOZOA* in *Feminist Theology*, 25-1, 2016

'Moore draws on the rich ecofeminist traditions of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Thomas Berry, Joanna Macy and Ivone Gebara. Traditional patriarchal theology has seen nature as subservient to 'man' and inanimate (Christ, 2002: 89), but Moore's work sees the soul, depth and power of all that lives. […] Moore's poems speak to me on a personal, spiritual, geopolitical, global and cosmic level. I feel less complacent and more deeply connected since reading her work. I feel empowered, comforted and provoked to live well and live differently.'

Kay Syrad reviewing *ECOZOA* in *Artemis Magazine*, Nov 2015
'Helen Moore's Ecozoa is oratorical. This is eco-poetics, activism on the page... I admired the poet's stamina: poem after poem calling time on destructive ways of thinking about our relationship to the earth, her courage in speaking or even shouting out what needs to be heard, through a variety of forms and characters: as daughter of dodmen; or in a Court transcript in the brilliant and Second Light prize-winning long poem, Earth Justice; or Noah's daughter - 'Ah, sighs Noah's daughter, these rains/are all the tears that people never shed', from Ark Rains, from Aberdeen to Zennor). I felt I was being informed (about campaigns, the language of eco-politics, the significance of women and feminism in the survival of the planet; what is happening to the earth, the atmosphere, how we might have to live after climate change, in Climate Adaptation, #1 and #2).'

Dr Kevan Manwaring reviewing *ECOZOA* in 'New Landscape Radicals,' A Beautiful Resistance (blog), 2016 ‹https://abeautifulresistance.org/2016/06/15/new-landscape-radicals/›
'Unlike much modern poetry [*ECOZOA*] takes the risky gambit of actually daring to *say something* – with intelligence, with authenticity, and with wit. Helen's poems are no mere word-games, cryptic crossword clues that we must aspire to decode in homage to the poet's cleverness. Not that there isn't sophistication and subtlety here. These poems, dense with topical and classical allusion, that warrant re-reading – yet their heartfelt message comes across loud and clear. The prevailing rhetoric is one of a defiant Gaia-consciousness squaring up to rapacious planet-destroying Capitalism – resulting in an excoriating critique of *business-as-usual* consensus reality, which markets the latest disposable must-have gadget using the iconography of nature (Apple; Blackberry; Orange, etc). Such an approach could easily become overly didactic and tediously tub-thumping, but time and time again Moore leavens this with her verbal dexterity, her playfulness with language, and her 360 degree awareness of the bigger picture. The microcosmic illustrates the macro – as in her poem 'The Pocket's Circumference': 'If Earth were a first balled up and thrust in a pocket, the atmosphere would be as think as that cotton fabric.' She doesn't avoid pulling punches, as in her powerful 'Kali Exorcism': 'Come, dark goddess, tear off veils of rhetoric that conceal/war-mongering deeds in cloaks of respectability; help us/hear deeper than *the pre-emptive strikes, the collateral damage.'* She celebrates the humdrum, the little wonders of nature, even the urban – and, always, man's impact

on the natural, as in her poem, 'Egford Brook, with Scum'. Moore plays with forms – using concrete poetry, proem, refrain, Beat-rap, mantra, liturgy, eulogy… constantly pushing the envelope. This is not cosy tea-time poetry for Radio 4 listeners. Yet there is beauty and life-affirming delight here in a paean for human-nature biodiversity and abundance. The collection is structured on William Blake's four Zoas, and ultimately offers a rebalancing of the Earth's humours in a holistic template for sustainable life. It is a celebration of the locally distinctive ('Our Daily Bread'; 'Apple Company, West Country') and the long view ('glory be to Gaia'; 'Bio tapestry restored by citizens around the world'). Her unfailing attention to the quotidian miracles of creation is a call-to-adventure – to plunge into life and defend it to our dying breath.'

Wendy Hollway, Emeritus Professor of Psychology and Cape Farewell Trustee, testimonial, June 2023
'Helen combines creativity, energy, ecological sensibility, commitment, and efficiency, as well as deep experience in her work, and this is what I found her bringing to the project (RiverRun commission, Cape Farewell, 2020-21). I wouldn't usually think of 'poet' and 'professional' in the same phrase, but I realized that describes her approach to her vocation – thoroughly professional. I was inspired enough to seek out Helen's published collections and learn about her poetic achievements that way. I found my own ecological concerns movingly honed by her complex, delicate crafting of ideas and words, always fresh and innovative.' –

Dr. Tom Bailey, testimonial, April 2024
'Thank you for your ability to take the science of water pollution and mix it with the feelings we have for our 'rivers of life' […] Thank you for being the voice of this nature that we all need to cherish but sadly so often don't. Nature needs voices because politicians seem to only value the voices they hear and the votes they count.'

For further reviews and testimonials, see my website: www.helenmoorepoet.com

Appendix ii, Publications included in the Collection

- **Ecopoetry collections**
  - Moore, Helen, *ECOZOA*, (Hampshire: Permanent Publications, 2015)
  - _____, *Hedge Fund, & Other Living Margins*, (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2012)
  - _____, *The Mother Country,* (Stroud: Awen Publications, 2019)

- **Co-authored, bilingual ecopoetry book (Italian/English)**

- D'Arcangelo, Massimo (Italy), Elvey, Anne (Australia), Moore, Helen (UK), *INTATTO. INTACT, Ecopoesia. Ecopoetry*, (Milano: La Vita Felice, 2017)

Book chapters

- Moore, Helen, 'Wild writing: co-creative practices and inspirations', in Brankin, Emma, Gilbert, Francis, and Sharples, Carinya (eds.) *Inspire: Exciting Ways to Teach Creative Writing*, (London: Gold Publishing, 2020)

Essays/articles

- Moore, Helen, 'Beyond "White Guilt": imagining Sydney as pre-colonial site', Panorama Journal, 2022, https://panoramajournal.org/issues/issue-7-dawn/dawn-beyond-white-guilt-imagining-sydney-as-pre-colonial-site/
- _____, 'Defending ecopoetry, a dance with Shelley', 'New Defences of Poetry', Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, 2021, http://nclacommunity.org/newdefences/2021/07/16/defending-ecopoetry-a-dance-with-shelley/
- _____, 'Intimacies of air, love and consciousness in the time of plague', Center for Interfaith Relations, 2020: https://www.centerforinterfaithrelations.org/sacred-essays/winners/intimacies-of-air-love-consciousness-in-the-time-of-plague/
- _____, 'Is love the answer? Personal and planetary wellbeing through the lens of poetry', (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, 2018)
- _____, 'Poetry and landscape: ecopoetry as restorative act', published in English and Italian (translation by Alessandro Macilenti) in ZEST, Litteratura Sostenible, 2022, https://www.zestletteraturasostenibile.com/poesia-paesaggio-lecopoesia-come-atto-rigenerativo-poetry-landscape-ecopoetry-as-restorative-act/
- _____, 'Stations of the Sun, an Ecocultural Journey', Panorama Journal, 2024: https://panoramajournal.org/issues/issue-11-ecology/ecology-stations-of-the-sun-an-ecocultural-journey/
- _____, 'What is ecopoetry?', International Times, 2012, https://internationaltimes.it/what-is-ecopoetry/
- _____, 'Wild Writing: Embracing Our Humanimal Nature', Climate Cultures: creative conversations for the Anthropocene, 2021, https://climatecultures.net/tag/trees/

Selected ecopoems (currently uncollected)

- Moore, Helen, 'A Wild Wedding', *About Place Journal*, 2020, https://aboutplacejournal.org/issues/practices-of-hope/entanglements/helen-moore/

- _____, ‘Carpet Beater’, in *Unbreakable, New Writing XIII, The 2024 Creative Writing Anthology from the University of Gloucestershire,* (Gloucester: Severn Print, 2024)
- _____, ‘Fluvial’ (excerpt from ‘Dorset Waterbodies, a Common / Weal’), *River Research and Applications*, Volume 38, Issue3, Special Issue: ‘Voicing Rivers’, 2022, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/rra.3939
- _____, ‘Mycelium, and the Mental Dance of Fruiting Bodies’, *Long Poem Magazine*, issue 19, 2018
- _____, 'Portrait of a Domestic Extremist', *Climate Psychology Journal Explorations*, Issue3, 2022 https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/index.php/component/content/article/explorations-e-journal?catid=15&Itemid=101
- _____, ‘River Finds its Tongue’, *The Ecological Citizen,* Vol 1 No 1 2017, 113-114
- _____, 'Sky News', *Amethyst Review*, 2018, https://amethystmagazine.org/2018/04/18/sky-news-a-poem-by-helen-moore/
- _____, ‘The Pansy Project’, in *Unbreakable, New Writing XIII, The 2024 Creative Writing Anthology from the University of Gloucestershire,* (Gloucester: Severn Print, 2024)
- _____, 'Tracks & Signs', *The Wild Word*, 2021, https://thewildword.com/poetry-helen-moore/
- _____, ‘Wanting it to rain so much’, *Unpsychology Magazine*, issue 7, ‘Climate Complexity Change’, 2021
- _____, 'What the Owls Say', *Zoomorphic*, 2017, http://zoomorphic.net/2017/10/what-the-owls-say/