

The Sixth Creek

Exegesis: The home as habitat – writing and protecting the local

Volume 2

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Contents

Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Background.....	6
Ecocriticism	14
Ecopoetry	16
The poetry of place and bioregionalism.....	22
Chapter 1	27
Gilbert White and writing <i>The Sixth Creek</i>.....	27
<i>The Natural History of Selborne</i> as bioregional text	27
The world as local: Globalisation and cosmopolitanism	31
Gilbert White and the development of objectives for <i>The Sixth Creek</i>	34
Chapter 2	43
Ecocentrism in Edward Abbey’s <i>Desert Solitaire</i>	43
Edward Abbey	46
Ecocentrism and anthropomorphism in <i>Desert Solitaire</i>	50
Ecocentrism, anthropomorphism and environmental ethics in <i>The Sixth Creek</i>	55
Chapter 3	66
“To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work” – the poetry of Mary Oliver.....	66
Mary Oliver.....	68
“Attention and devotion” – bearing witness and ecocentrism	69
Affect and advocacy – writing <i>The Sixth Creek</i>	72

Chapter 4	81
Owning the activist: the poetry of Judith Wright and Louise Crisp	81
Ecocentrism and the home as habitat in the poetry of Judith Wright	82
“The only way I know to write is to walk”: Louise Crisp and field notes as poetic activism	93
Conclusion	103
Works cited.....	108
Bibliography of Additional Works	118

Abstract

The thesis comprises a collection of poetry, *The Sixth Creek*, and an exegesis *The home as habitat: writing and protecting the local*. The components of the thesis are intended to explore the concept of ecopoetry and how place-based poetry might function as environmental advocacy.

The poetry of *The Sixth Creek* is entirely located within the catchment area of the Sixth Creek in the Mount Lofty Ranges of South Australia. This catchment area constitutes a local bioregion and is used as a framing device; a model inspired by nature writers such as Gilbert White and Edward Abbey, whose work focussed on their local landscape yet achieved intercontinental reach in terms of impact on environmental ethics. The intention is for the poems to fall within contemporary boundaries of ecopoetry with regard to recognition of ecological interconnectivity, emphasis of an ecocentric perspective and underlying advocacy for the natural world.

My background as an environmental activist provided the context for the choice of the nature writers whose work shaped the philosophical perspective and advocacy objectives of *The Sixth Creek*. The exegesis analyses particular pieces by nature writers such as Edward Abbey, Mary Oliver, Judith Wright and Louise Crisp from an ecocritical perspective and illustrates how variously their writing practice, environmental preoccupations in their work, literary technique or advocacy objectives influenced the framework, compositional methodology and poetic style of *The Sixth Creek*.

Edward Abbey's exploration of the environmentally destructive consequences of anthropocentrism and his desire to erase anthropomorphism from his thinking in *Desert Solitaire* was instrumental to outlining the ecocentric perspective of *The Sixth*

Creek and refining my thinking on the potential for anthropomorphism as a tool for expanding ethical concern for the non-human world.

The poetry of Mary Oliver is examined in terms of its potential function as environmental advocacy. The effectiveness of Oliver's poetry as a device to draw attention to ecological interconnectivity and her employment of an ecocentric perspective as a means of expanding empathy and ethical concern beyond the human is discussed with particular reference to bearing witness as an effective means of environmental advocacy.

Australian poets Judith Wright and Louise Crisp are discussed in terms of activist poetics as both have written extensively about Australian landscapes and the environmental impact of human activity post-colonisation. Once again the common thread of ecocentrism is located and the effectiveness of didactic advocacy is explored with regard to the stated activist intentions in writing *The Sixth Creek*.

The Sixth Creek and exegesis illuminate and contextualise each other; the dual result of an ecocritical examination of how nature writers can affect environmental ethics far beyond the scope of their subject landscapes. The writers examined endeavour to affect readers' ethics through inspiring reconnection with the non-human world and reforging connections with local environments, with the desired result being the development of relationships that foster a sense of care and responsibility for home as habitat and habitat as home.