

The Sixth Creek

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

Volume 2

Rachael Mead

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English and Creative Writing

School of Humanities

Faculty of Arts

University of Adelaide

May 2016

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.

Introduction

Background

The poet W.H. Auden once famously proclaimed “poetry makes nothing happen” (Auden “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” *Another Time* 108). Although he wrote this in 1939, the quote is still commonly cited as evidence of the political uselessness of poetry or used to support arguments about the ineffectiveness of poetry as an agent of change. What these arguments fail to consider is the context in which Auden initially wrote the line in question. The line occurs *in a poem*.

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth. (Auden “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” *Another Time* 108).

Auden explored this concept in greater length in a prose eulogy for W.B. Yeats, a poet who was also a politician and an activist and whose work, both creative and political, clearly had agency in the world (Auden *The Partisan Review* 50). Regardless of the ongoing arguments over whether or not Auden had lost faith in the radical potential of poetry and the potential of the poet as crusader, he remained an advocate for the art itself, believing that the role of the poet was to *make poems happen* (Share np).

Once the poem is out in the world, the possible ways in which it may work on its readers cannot be underestimated or glibly dismissed. My professional

background as an environmental campaigner and later as a writer was deeply influenced by literature in general and poetry in particular. From the initial inspiration to study ecology and environmental history to the development of the philosophy that underlay my decisions as a professional activist and most recently to the writing of my creative piece *The Sixth Creek*, poets and nature writers have been both formative and instrumental to the process.

While always conscious of being an environmentally aware citizen, I was first inspired to take my interest further after attending a protest against the nuclear industry in Adelaide where a lecturer from the Environmental Studies Department at the University of Adelaide introduced his speech by reading the poem “Australia 1970” by Judith Wright. That poem had a visceral effect; it moved me to tears and infused me with a desire to work as a defender of the non-human environment.

As a consequence of this catalysing moment, I undertook a Masters degree in Environmental Studies and subsequently became interested in environmental history. Environmental history is a broad term that can encompass both the ecological history of landscapes and the history of the environmental movement. Interestingly, avid delving into both these subject areas would come to inform much of my personal environmental philosophy and correspondingly the direction and methods of my activism. It was in studying the history of the global environmental movement that I began to read widely in the genres of natural history and nature writing, becoming familiar with the watershed works that shaped the history, philosophy and politics of the movement, such as the works of Gilbert White, Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, and Judith Wright.

While studying, I had become involved in several South Australian environmental, animal rights and Aboriginal rights groups such as the campaign

against the Hindmarsh Island Bridge and the anti-nuclear movement, the latter in the form of a local group which, in alliance with Indigenous elders from the Maralinga region, was fighting the establishment of a nuclear waste dump in the north of South Australia. After graduating with a Masters degree in Environmental Studies, I sought work in the movement and over the next 15 years worked as a professional campaigner for organisations such as Animal Liberation SA, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth SA, The Greens SA and finally as a policy analyst for the Conservation Council of SA.

My employment history required a working knowledge of social and behavioural change theory in addition to being conversant in the field of environmental ethics. Coordinating campaigns for environmental non-government organisations (ENGOS) necessitated working within the law, advocating for change at a legislative level and using the media as a tool for public awareness. These campaigns included anti-animal cruelty, industrial farming and the banning of live exports in the animal rights movement, anti-nuclear campaigns in South Australia and the Northern Territory and lobbying for the recognition of environmental refugees rendered homeless as a result of climate change. While all were vastly different campaigns addressing a broad variety of issues and concerns, at heart my role in each campaign was quite similar: to engage with the public and work towards extending their area of ethical concern to include the non-human world.

This makes the work sound simple but the reality was that, over time, this kind of campaigning, when practised unsustainably, can and did take an emotional toll, eventually becoming detrimental to my mental and physical health. These campaigns were long term and the activists involved could go for years without any sense of achievement or recognition that their work was making a difference. Meanwhile, as

activists chipped away at local campaigns that were more often lost than won, the environmental damage inflicted on ecosystems was unrelenting and continued unabated on a global scale. After more than a decade in the movement, I succumbed to the mental and emotional pressure.

It was during this time that I began to read more broadly on the history of direct action as a campaign tool. The writings of the proponents of deep ecology and eco-feminism such as Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva and Warwick Fox had inspired me philosophically for many years. Deep ecologists are proponents of ecocentrism and as such recognise the inherent value of all life irrespective of any instrumental worth to humanity. To generalise, deep ecology asserts that the complex interdependence of life at species and ecosystem scales means that human actions that interfere with or destroy the natural world pose a threat to all life on Earth. Scholar, deep ecologist and activist Joanna Macy describes ecological interconnectivity and the threat posed by human impact on ecosystems as follows:

I consider that this shift [to an emphasis on our “capacity to identify with the larger collective of all beings”] is essential to our survival at this point in history precisely because it can serve in lieu of morality and because moralizing is ineffective. Sermons seldom hinder us from pursuing our self-interest, so we need to be a little more enlightened about what our self-interest is. It would not occur to me, for example, to exhort you to refrain from cutting off your leg. That wouldn’t occur to me or to you, because your leg is part of you. Well, so are the trees in the Amazon Basin; they are our external lungs. We are just beginning to wake up to that. We are gradually discovering that we are our world. (Macy in Fox 229)

Ecofeminism is a similarly ecocentric philosophy which argues that the domination of women by men is fundamentally linked to the domination of nature and that anthropocentrism, like androcentrism, is yet another inequitable consequence of humanity's inherently flawed hierarchical value structure.

As a result of becoming increasingly despondent about the incremental rate of change I could see in public attitudes to the environment I began to delve into the work of deep ecologist writers and those inspired by their philosophies such as Dave Foreman and Derek Jensen, who believed that practical and direct action in defence of the non-human had to be taken regardless of the legal ramifications. Initially inspired by Edward Abbey, activists such as Foreman and Jensen used Abbey's writings as a starting point and eventually these proponents of eco-sabotage or "monkey-wrenching"¹ coalesced and evolved into organisations such as *Earth First!* and the activist cells of the Animal Liberation and Earth Liberation Fronts. Inspired by these activist writers' passionate calls to arms, I too took part in illegal actions, swimming in front of live sheep transporter vessels and breaking into and locking myself onto structures in coal mines and industrial piggeries.

Despite forays into the illegal realms of activism I was still attempting to inspire and galvanise change through the role of campaigner within the non-governmental environment sector. However, my disillusionment with humanity was growing and I had lost all hope that as a species we would ever come to live within our ecological means. My work in the movement felt meaningless and all attempts at inspiring change as an activist seemed ineffective. Campaigning seemed to be an

¹ A monkey-wrench is an adjustable spanner, similar to a Stilson wrench, and the term "monkey-wrenching" is a North American colloquialism dating from the early nineteenth century, its British equivalent being to "throw a spanner into the works". After the publication of Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in 1975 the term has come to refer to acts of eco-sabotage. *Oxford English Dictionary* 3rd edition.

endless argument with an opponent who kept changing the rules. Gradually, my conviction grew that humanity was not only destined for self destruction but that it would drive a significant proportion of life on the planet to extinction with it. I resigned from my role as a political analyst and disassociated from the activist groups with which I had been involved.

It was after completely withdrawing from the environmental community that I first encountered the poetry of Mary Oliver and her work left a deep impression. Her method of bearing witness through lyric and non-didactic encouragement to engage with the natural world illustrated that there were other ways of inspiring behavioural change and the broadening of environmental ethics. As a method of recovery I began to look back to the writing that had initially catalysed my desire to protect the non-human world and I noticed that all had something in common beyond a shared respect for the natural world. These writers walked their local landscapes then returned to their desks to write about the connections they forged with nature and through this local writing they all achieved some broader impact in the world. While their texts may not have directly inspired physical acts of environmental activism, these writers were all consciously attempting to make something happen, even if that change resided in the nebulous realm of human thought rather than action.

I began to walk every day, trying to conjure a mindset akin to Mary Oliver's "attention and devotion" (Mary Oliver *Facebook post* 17.10.2014). Then I would return home and attempt to write lyric eco-poems that would bear witness (in the activist sense) to my bioregion, informed by my understanding of local landscape ecology, the history of human impact and the experience of being mindfully connected to the natural world.

In terms of defining terminology, when using the word “nature”, I will not be referring to the Romantic conceptualisation of nature that excludes or overwhelms the human, but rather an inclusive concept that embraces humanity, viewing urban and wild environments as equally legitimate forms of nature.

Lyric poetry also needs to be defined in terms of this discussion, as it is a form that has, through time, evolved significantly away from its Ancient Greek definition as publically performed verse accompanied by a musical instrument into contemporary conceptions as a more private form, often employing metre, that expresses personal feelings and emotions, generally in the first person. The form of lyric poetry that I chose to adopt in *The Sixth Creek* harks back to Romantic era notions of the lyric in that the verse expresses first person accounts of my perceptions, observations and state of mind, particularly focussing on the natural world, but I do not entirely conform to the traditional Romantic lyric in that I do not consciously impose any particular metre on the poem. Further, my conception of the lyric differs from ancient notions of the form in that it is intended to invoke a feeling of private consideration of the subjects handled in the poems rather than give the impression of intention for public expression or performance, despite my acknowledgment that publication of the text is a form of public expression. While Romantic conceptions of the lyric are predicated emotion and subjectivity, the “I” of *The Sixth Creek* is unreliable, unstable and constructed of multiple perspectives. While I try to write about my local landscape with a sense of interconnectedness, I acknowledge that my poetry is not a direct reflection of that landscape as it changes me and I, in turn, embellish it with imagination, making it up anew each day. So the “I” as it appears in *The Sixth Creek* can be confessional and autobiographical. It may contain ethical, political and emotional dimensions. Yet fundamentally the “I” as subject is

imaginative, performative and relative, seeing the lyric space as encompassing a multitude of relationships to the world. As Australian poet Jill Jones says, “It’s no news to poets that the self is unstable, unreliable, multiple... We can’t avoid our selves. Whatever selves we think we are as we move in the world ” (157).

The term “bearing witness” is also used throughout the exegesis and I employ it with reference to the meaning the concept has developed within the history of environmental activism. In addition to the traditional meaning of “bearing witness” as an observer being in the position to give first-hand evidence of an act or event, the term has developed a new layer of meaning within the environmental movement as a form of direct action. In the early 1970s, Greenpeace adopted a direct action strategy derived from the Quaker tradition of bearing witness as a form of non-violent protest. In the Quaker sense, bearing witness involved registering disapproval of an activity and exerting moral pressure on the perpetrators through being present at the site or event. Greenpeace activists adapted this strategy into a form of direct action by capturing footage or images of events and then using the media to widely disseminate this evidence in order to impact public consciousness on the issue. When referring to bearing witness in the exegesis I am invoking the environmental advocacy resonance of the term in that there is desire and intention for my presence and words to have some broader environmental influence.

The Sixth Creek is the cumulative result of the impact that literature and poetry have had on my life, my activism and my relationship with the natural world. Auden may say that poetry makes nothing happen but it is my experience that poetry and nature writing can have a deep and lasting impact on the way people think and consequently the choices they make. In my case, poetry guided me to activism, saved my sanity then led me back out into the world to write and through poetry explore a

different approach to defending the natural world. As Matsuo Bashō describes the relationship between being in the world and writing in his seminal work *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*:

With a bit of madness in me,
Which is poetry,
I plod along like Chikusai
Among the walls of the wind. (Bashō in Yuasa 31)

Ecocriticism

Environmentally oriented literary and cultural studies began to emerge as a legitimate critical field during the 1990s. The first wave of ecocriticism focussed on the historical significance of nature writers to the American and British canon, primarily engaging with writers of prose in fiction and non-fiction such as Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard and Edward Abbey (Bryson *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space & Eco-poetry* 1).

Glotfelty, in her introduction to the foundational ecocritical text *The Ecocriticism Reader*, was one of the first to examine the relationship between literature and the natural world as a legitimate critical field and bring an ecological consciousness to examinations of literature (xvii). Coupe, in his *Green Studies Reader*, states that ecocriticism does not challenge the idea that humans make sense of the world through language but rather takes issue with the critical notion that nature is in essence a linguistic construct (3). As Soper states "in short it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer; and the real thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier"(124).

An ecocritical approach to the analysis of texts examined in this exegesis has been adopted primarily due to the fact that as an analytical methodology it recognises and acknowledges the existence of a real world beyond the text. Scheese, in his ecocritical analysis of the evolution of the pastoral in various post-colonial American nature writers, identifies that a central tenet of contemporary literary criticism, such as post-structuralism, posits that everything in existence is a psychological, verbal or social construct (*Nature Writing : The Pastoral Impulse in America* 9). Ecocriticism does not refute this position; in fact it re-iterates this point in the claim that landscape is a constructed way of seeing the world or an act of imagination (9). Yet ecocriticism sets itself apart as a distinct theoretical perspective by its assertion that it is the physical world itself that forms the bedrock of the construct. Ecocriticism rejects the claims of post-structuralism that there is no such thing as nature² and instead contends that the physical world is a dominant character both within and without the text (8) and that the authors themselves acknowledge this and it is the relationship and interaction between the author and the non-human world which makes possible a philosophical shift from anthropocentrism to a more ecocentric perspective (9). My ecocritical analysis of the work of Abbey, Oliver, Wright, Crisp and my work in *The Sixth Creek* will acknowledge the existence of the real world beyond the text and the unavoidable subjectivity of analysis and interpretation. In addition, the inevitable influence of history and contemporary context on both my own interpretations and also other the writers is acknowledged since all of us see through the lenses of our own historical eras and we write and interpret according to these individual

² While post-structuralism characterises “nature” as a product of writing, some theorists have a more nuanced approach. Derrida’s thinking, for example, is that what has never existed outside the text is not “nature” but “Nature” with “Nature” being the metaphysical construct evolving from a particular inter-textual history and projected onto the physical world in a variety of contexts with a range of interpretations (Rigby, K. “Writing After Nature” np).

distortions and refractions. The works discussed in this exegesis will therefore be recognised as texts resulting from key moments in time and analysed from the ecocritical perspective that language is the tool by which these writers both articulate their individual experience of the natural world and attempt to reconfigure perceptions of human relationships with the non-human world.

Ecopoetry

During the first flush of ecocritical work only two book-length studies of contemporary nature poetry were written: John Elder's *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (1985) and Terry Gifford's *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (1995). It was not until the late 1990s that work began to emerge that focussed specifically on contemporary nature poetry and the development of theoretical tools that would allow critical engagement with environmentally aware nature poetry or ecopoetry as it has been labelled.

For much of literary history, nature poetry has featured significantly in the literature produced in the English-speaking world. Bryson, in his overview of the expression of human relationships with nature in poetry, observes that it is only since the latter part of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of industrial society and the contemporaneous rethinking of how humans conceived of their place in the world, that pastoral considerations of nature and use of the pathetic fallacy began to decline in credibility (*Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* 2). The pastoral, in which idealised, bucolic country life was contrasted with the morally corrupt city and the predominant use of the pathetic fallacy, in which the natural world was sentimentally anthropomorphised, both fell out of favour in a world that was being revolutionised

by scientific thinking. Nineteenth century cultural critic Ruskin coined the term “pathetic fallacy” to criticise what he believed to be an overly sentimental fashion among Romantic poets to ascribe human traits and emotions to inanimate aspects of nature (Ruskin 158). It was not until the early twentieth century that nature poetry began to re-emerge, this time defined by its opposition to the pathetic fallacy and pastoral sentimentality and by the latter half of the twentieth century, as the Western world grew progressively more aware of environmental issues, these concerns began to permeate nature writing across all genres. In tandem with the increased freedom of subject matter that revolutionised twentieth century poetry, poets increasingly took up environmental themes, leading to the eventual identification in the 1990s of the field of poetry that has come to be termed ecopoetry.

Despite the growing critical interest in the field of ecopoetry, scholars have yet to agree on a commonly accepted definition of the term. Gifford prefers the term “green poetry” as a descriptor of any poetry that engages directly with environmental issues (3). In *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Eco-poets*, Scigaj defines ecopoetry as “poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems” (37). In this way, he differentiates ecopoetry from environmental poetry that he deems to still revere nature and confront environmental issues while failing to conceive of nature as an interrelated series of feedback systems (37). In Lawrence Buell’s seminal ecocritical text of 1995, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, he delineates a set of characteristics which he deems common to work that demonstrates an environmental consciousness which includes the presence of the non-human world as more than background, the expansion of human consideration beyond the human, a sense of human responsibility to the non-

human and awareness of the ecological world as a process rather than a constant or static given (7-8). Gilcrest refines these general characteristics by distinguishing what he terms ecological poetry from the commonly held definitions of contemporary nature poetry and traditional Romantic poetry. He defines ecological poetry as containing inherent critiques of dominant paradigms such as mechanistic or atomistic world views, identification of environmental crises as a result of these world views, calls to revolutionary transformations based on ecological science and calling for an “ecocentric ethic of interconnectedness, reciprocity and ... radical egalitarianism”(Gilcrest 24).

Bryson, in his analysis of contemporary definitions of ecopoetry, maintains that while certain conventions of Romanticism still hold, such as deep appreciation for the natural world and the rejection of classical forms in preference for more colloquial language and expression of the poet’s subjective perspective, the primary distinction lies in ecopoetry’s concern with contemporary environmental issues (*Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* 5). Bryson goes on to identify three characteristics common to ecopoetry. Firstly, ecopoetry promulgates an ecological and ecocentric perspective that recognises the interdependent nature of the world (5-6). Ecocentrism is an ethical perspective or world-view that differs from an anthropocentric perspective in that it views the earth as one vast interconnected community in which all life forms have value, not just humanity. The recognition of the world as one interconnected community gives rise to Bryson’s second attribute of ecopoetry, which is the necessity of human humility in relationships with non-human nature and the recognition of human lack of control over nature’s essential wildness (6). Thirdly, and flowing from this humility, is inherent doubt regarding

contemporary trust in the supremacy of science and fear of over-dependence on technology in the modern world (6).

Australian essayist and poet Martin Harrison, who wrote extensively on post-colonial expressions of Australia's troubled relationship with our landscapes, asserted that a sense of ecological interconnectedness is crucial for undertaking the essential work of ecopoetry: the redefinition of humanity ("The act of writing and the act of attention" 10). Australia's short post-colonial history remains fraught with both unresolved tensions with the Indigenous communities dispossessed by colonial settlement and critical, ongoing human-wrought damage to our ecosystems. As a result, Australia is a nation in need of the kind of subversive thinking that reconceptualises humanity and speaks out against the dominant discourses that have been so socially and ecologically damaging. Poet and academic Ali Alizadeh, in his editorial on teaching ecopoetics in the edition of the journal *Angelaki* dedicated to Ecopoetics and Pedagogies, sees the revolutionary potential of ecopoetry in its challenge to dominant discourses, insofar as this subversion acts to disrupt anthropocentrism (55). Politically and philosophically my position corresponds with Alizadeh in that "the ecopoem becomes a subversive form of writing, presenting an anti-possessive, anti-oppressive contemporary challenge to the dominant discourses of English literature since Romanticism" (55). This said, I do not agree that ecopoetry must totally eschew its Romantic roots in order to be deemed ecopoetic. Alizadeh asserts "Ecopoetry ... is neither a linguistic celebration of nature nor an attempt at, as it were, capturing it in a piece of writing..." (55) and I agree that the ecopoem should attempt to move beyond these Romantic traditions and an element of subversion needs to be present.

Yet, I would not follow Australian poet and essayist John Bennett's lead in excluding work from the definition of ecopoetry on the basis of use of the pathetic fallacy or anthropomorphism. In his essay on Australian ecopoetics, Bennett delineates ecopoetry as "not traditional nature poetry updated; it avoids the pathetic fallacy, seeks out the ordinary not the sublime" (Bennett "I Blame Romanticism" np). Anthropomorphism has long been out of favour in both literary and scientific communities since the suggestion that animals possess intention, emotion and even consciousness is assumed to display a lack of objectivity on the part of the writer. Since no definitive scientific evidence as yet exists that animals share common mental, social, and emotional capacities with humans, to resort to the kind of subjectivity that delves into the possibility of animal emotion, selfhood or agency is still deemed overly subjective and sentimental. Both Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall's work with great apes was initially denounced as displaying "that worst of ethological sins – anthropomorphism" (Masson and McCarthy 9). However, in my opinion this Ruskin-inspired denunciation of anthropomorphism in poetry risks the marginalisation of a literary device that allows exploration of potential connections between animal species and humanity, connections that are fundamental to an ecocentric perspective. From an activist perspective, access to a metaphor-rich anthropomorphic language can be an important literary tool in rendering the non-human more comprehensible and, as a result, allowing for the generation of human empathy towards other species and the potential extension of ethical consideration to encompass more than the human interests.

My position is that the ecopoetic boundary should embrace work that broadens conceptions of the human self to include the self's ecological connections to the rest of the world and I would argue that use of the pathetic fallacy / anthropomorphism

can be an effective tool to achieve this objective. This assertion is discussed further in the chapters on Edward Abbey and Mary Oliver's influence on the writing of *The Sixth Creek*.

The essential eco-poetic criterion that I have worked towards in the writing of *The Sixth Creek* is the ecocentric recognition of the interconnectedness of all life and I agree with Harrison's position that "to understand interconnectedness with natural, biological and cosmological systems is now paramount in how we define ourselves as humans" ("The act of writing and the act of attention"10). The redefinition of humanity is a difficult and ongoing challenge, particularly with human-centrism being so ingrained in our philosophical history but I believe the reformulation of humanity's conception of self to a more ecocentric vision is central to eco-poetry's work regardless of how fundamentally unreliable and mutable our individual concepts of "self" may be.

I attempted to meet the above eco-poetic criteria in *The Sixth Creek* primarily by writing with a focus on place and ecological interconnectivity. This necessitated moving beyond Romantic traditions of landscape poetry and conventional rural/urban dichotomies and attending to land as subject. The poetry of *The Sixth Creek* is written in a lyric style that consciously (or perhaps self-consciously) attempts to avoid alienating readers who may not be regular readers of contemporary poetry. It is my opinion that a poem can contain the lyric and the pathetic fallacy and still lie within the definition of eco-poetry as I use both in deliberate attempts to subvert anthropocentric thinking. In *The Sixth Creek* I employ non-human lyric imagery and symbol to describe human experience as well as describing the non-human using the pathetic fallacy as a deliberate attempt to encourage the extension of ethical consideration beyond the human world. I hold that while these are techniques

common to neo-Romanticism and conventional nature poetry, the poems still lie within the domain of ecopoetry by instigating exchange and comparison between the experience of human and non-human nature and seeking to occupy a space that uses affective metaphor and anthropomorphism instrumentally to promote an ecocentric perspective and empathy toward the non-human.

My intention was for the poetry of *The Sixth Creek* to move beyond description of a place existing purely for the instrumental use of humankind and instead describe an ecological community in which the human is but one strand of life among many. The objective for the poems of *The Sixth Creek* was to describe a way of looking at the world that rejects the dichotomous relationship between nature and culture and inspires a broadening of ethical consideration to the non-human environment. Scigaj encapsulates my desire for this work with the observation that ecopoets “want the poem to challenge and reconfigure the reader’s perceptions... to put the book down and live life more fully in all possible dimensions of the moment of firsthand experience within nature’s supportive second skin and to become more responsible about that necessary second skin” (41).

The poetry of place and bioregionalism

One of the primary means by which ecopoets have attempted to stir readers to greater identification with the natural world and foster the development of empathy with the non-human is through writing that demonstrates awareness of humanity’s loss of relationship with nature. While they are aware of the permanency of this schism and their poetry may be steeped in regret for that loss, they are also able to offer visions of different realities, where they are no longer alienated from the natural world, rather

inhabitants of a “place” which they value in recognition of the interdependent relationship existing between themselves and the landscape they inhabit (Bryson *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space & Ecopoetry* 10-11).

In this the ecopoet shares central concerns with bioregionalists.

Bioregionalism is a body of thought that is primarily concerned with contemporary society’s disconnection from its natural base (Davidson 318). Humanity has historically superimposed political boundaries onto geographical regions in ways that ignore their underlying ecological functioning. Bioregionalism advocates a realignment of geographical, political and economic boundaries into bioregions that would follow ecological dividing lines such as climatic zones, water catchments or geographic features like mountain ranges (McGinnis 73). This realignment of natural and political boundaries allows for a return to what Berg and Dasmann call “living in place” that involves becoming “native to a place through becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships which operate in and around it” (Berg 399).

Bioregionalists and ecopoets agree that it is through identification with place that the groundwork is laid for the cultivation of a caring attitude towards nature. In his writing on spatial theory and sense of place, scholar Yi-fu Tuan asserts that place is constituted when space, or an abstract, unknown place, becomes endowed with value and value develops as a result of increased knowledge and identification of the region by a subject (6). Mark Long in his ecocritical analysis of the poetry of William Carlos Williams states that ecopoets do more than simply provide a reflection of the natural world; they use poetry to shape a vision of nature and a means of constructing alternative ways of thinking and acting in the world (59). The technique employed to accomplish this in poetry is often a form of “place-making” in which the poet attempts to move the reader “out of an existence in abstract,

postmodernised space, where we are simply visitors in an unknown neighbourhood, and into a recognition of our present surroundings as place and thus as home” (Bryson *The West Side of Any Mountain* 11). Tuan calls this creating “topophilia” or an affective bond between people and a specific place (4). Bioregional poets attempt to create topophilia as a means of challenging readers to look with new eyes and view their surroundings as valued places rather than just empty, unknown spaces.

Kirkpatrick Sale, one of the founders of bioregional philosophy, identifies bioregional literature as a scholarship of advocacy or literary activism (Lindholdt 125). Bioregional writing attempts to counter the alienation of people from their ecosystems through literature that reconnects inhabitants with their local landscapes, fostering a kind of inhabitant that knows, loves and cares for their land. This has the dual function of restoring both communities and ecologies together (Lindholdt 126). In essence, bioregionalism works to replace political boundaries with ecological and cultural ones. It aspires to connect ecology, geography and anthropology by linking ecosystem, region and culture in such a way that would transcend ethnicity and politics by forging fresh social bonds that decentralises power but does not promote parochialism (Lindholdt 126). Ursula Heise, in her analysis of the future of environmentalism in a cosmopolitan world, sees bioregionalism as a form of society, deeply rooted in place, that has the potential to liberate individuals from the large-scale social and political structures that insulate them from the visible environmental consequences of their actions (*Sense of place and sense of planet* 34).

To situate *The Sixth Creek* within the genre of bioregional literature all the poems are entirely located within my local bioregion, the catchment area of the Sixth Creek in the Mount Lofty Ranges of South Australia. The writing of Gilbert White inspired use of the catchment area as a bioregional framing device and this choice is

explored in Chapter 1. Gilbert White's position as a progenitor of the field of ecology and the ways in which *The Natural History of Selborne* influenced the form and objectives of *The Sixth Creek* are discussed in the light of an ecocritical reading of a writer whose work focussed on his local region yet achieved intercontinental reach. Chapter 1 further delineates the objectives for the poems to fall within contemporary boundaries of ecopoetry in terms of recognition of ecological interconnectivity, emphasis of an ecocentric perspective and underlying advocacy for the natural world.

Chapter 2 analyses Edward Abbey's critique of anthropocentrism and his desire to erase anthropomorphism from his thinking in *Desert Solitaire*. Abbey's discussion of anthropocentrism as being at the heart of environmental destruction was instrumental to outlining the ecocentric perspective of *The Sixth Creek* and honing my thinking on the place of anthropomorphism in ecopoetry and its potential for as a literary tool for expanding ethical concern for the non-human world.

Chapter 3 examines the poetry of Mary Oliver concerning its potential as a form of environmental advocacy. The effectiveness of Oliver's poetry in drawing attention to ecological interconnectivity and her use of ecocentrism 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 Chapter 4 as activist poets, since both have written extensively about protection of 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*.

My intention is for this exegesis and *The Sixth Creek* to function together as an ecocritical and ecopoetic exploration of how nature writing can affect environmental ethics far beyond the scope of subject landscapes by 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.

The Sixth Creek, in being a work of ecopoetry and bioregional focus, shares the objective of both genres in the attempt to *create place* through observation, analysis and resultant lyric description, so as to invoke a curiosity about the world and stimulate a change in thinking about and attitude to the surrounding non-human world. This increased interest and knowledge hopefully leads to expanded consideration and an enlarged circle of ethical concern for the natural world. By encouraging ecological curiosity and a devotion to place through the poetry of *The Sixth Creek* I am attempting to “make something happen”, struggling to reorient perspectives away from anthropocentrism through the demonstration of different ways of perceiving, valuing and living in our landscapes.

Chapter 1

Gilbert White and writing *The Sixth Creek*

The Natural History of Selborne as bioregional text

The initial impetus behind the poetry collection *The Sixth Creek* was born from the desire to honour the work of Gilbert White in his capacity as a progenitor of the ecological sciences. Gilbert White's sole publication, *The Natural History of Selbourne*, is widely considered to be the first text to bring together consideration of the biological, earth and social sciences. In discussing the connections and interrelationships between these disparate fields of study White inadvertently developed a method of observing and understanding landscape and species dynamics that would eventually give rise to a new field of scientific endeavour: ecology. This seminal work has been continuously in print since its first publication in 1789, with nearly three hundred editions by 2007, making it one of the most frequently reprinted books in the English language (White *Illustrated Natural History of Selborne* ix).

While White's work was epistolary prose, it was his process rather than his form that sparked my interest. My creative practice at the time of undertaking this study was exclusively lyric poetry, so it was never a consideration to use White's compositional style or form as a model. In acknowledging White as an inspiration for my creative project it became clear that I would need to explore *The Natural History of Selbourne* in more subtle ways.

Worster, in his historical analysis of the development of ecological thinking, recognises Gilbert White as a founder of modern ecological thought and, due to his local focus combined with his weaving together of observations from diverse

scientific fields that were at the time considered discreet arenas of study, he deems *The Natural History of Selborne*, Gilbert White's only publication, to be a canonical work and the genesis of the genre of localism (7).

The Natural History of Selborne is structured as a compilation of a total of one hundred and ten letters written between 1769 and 1787 by White to two correspondents. The first section comprises forty-four of White's letters to Thomas Pennant, an eminent British zoologist, and the second section comprises sixty-six letters to the Hon. Daines Barrington, a Welsh barrister, judge and also a Fellow of the Royal Society. In these letters White records his meticulous observations of the area around the vicarage of Selborne in the county of Hampshire in southern England. He describes the geography, geology and wildlife but also spends some time detailing aspects of community life and the rural idiosyncrasies of his surroundings.

White was a local curate and the borders of his parish circumscribed his subject area, a district roughly thirty miles in circumference. The act of walking was intrinsic to White's writing. For over two decades he walked his parish, recording detailed observations of every aspect of natural history that caught his attention, demonstrating particular interest in avian species and the relationships between flora and fauna species. The publication of these observations proved to be the foundation of the genre of natural history writing in Britain and America, profoundly influencing later writers such as Emerson and Thoreau, and White's inter-disciplinary approach to the natural sciences resulted in his recognition as a progenitor of modern ecological thought (Worster 5). This process of walking, recording observations of the natural world and weaving field notes into an ecological and social rendering of place became the starting point for the composition process of my poetry manuscript.

Menely's analysis of the global reach of White's local writing notes the significance of the historical context in which White's work was published and his counter-intuitive popularity given that White was confining his attentions to understanding the local at a time when Britain was concentrating on its imperial ambitions and contemporary science was focused on the global scale (47). Given this cultural and historical backdrop, White could be understood as cultivating toponophilia in the reader, or "place-making" by rendering Selborne in text as a familiar and knowable home (Menely 47).

Local and nature writing from this period has been critiqued as being overly vulnerable to nostalgic and idealising tendencies in their representations of place, prone to overlooking the broader ecological, economic and ideological contexts in which they are situated (Menely 48). An authentic knowledge of a place and its rendering into text which aspires to a readership beyond the local requires contact with the world outside in order to situate properly and contextualise the local within the global and this is not possible without access to networks that extend beyond the local.

White had access to an intellectual environment that extended far beyond the confines of his parish, as exemplified by the correspondence that comprises his book. He was an avid amateur naturalist and devotee of contemporary science writing with a particular interest in the scientific taxonomy system of Carl Linnaeus. White was very well read in the genre of Enlightenment science and he used his knowledge of Linnaean taxonomy to classify the species found in Selborne, thus situating his own region within the broader global environment. His understanding of his local environment and its unique natural character is only properly revealed against the

background of the rapidly expanding knowledge of the global environment that was occurring at the time (Menely 48).

The timing of the publication of *The Natural History of Selborne* in 1789 is also significant. In the years following the French Revolution, Britain underwent an intensification of nationalism in reaction to the anti-monarchist sentiment and perceived cosmopolitanism of the Continent from across the channel. The British people constructed a national identity in opposition to this perceived cultural and political threat from Europe and so began to derive national capital from their geographic isolation from the mainland, investing with social value the local characteristics that they considered made them a people and nation distinct from their Continental neighbours (Menely 51). Selborne came to represent a relic of the old England, untouched by industrial development, urbanisation and reminiscent of a home county to a people that were spreading across the globe in the most geographically extensive empire in human history (Menely 50).

Gilbert White's writings were a common accompaniment to colonists and emigrants in the nineteenth century as a remembrance of England, thus while White wrote about Selborne because he considered it unique in terms of its natural characteristics, its global reach was achieved due to its popular adoption as a representation of national landscape and symbol of Englishness. The social significance of White's writing at the time of publication and subsequent growth in import since its recognition as a seminal ecological text has seen *The Natural History of Selborne* achieve and sustain global influence on environmental ethics. White's example of the potential of nature writing to affect global environmental ethics through a focus on the local was the catalyst leading me to seek out other nature writers and ecopoets whose work had similar tight focus yet broad effect.

The world as local: Globalisation and cosmopolitanism

In the publication of the Selborne letters, the natural history of a small local precinct achieved global reach and impact at a time when the world was being opened up to world-wide trade and commodification. Today, writing can easily accomplish global reach via electronic media, but, as a result, global impact is far more difficult to achieve. Since the rise of the concept of “globalisation” in the late twentieth century, the entire world has come to be viewed as local, with particularly members of the global North³ perceiving themselves as global citizens.

Globalisation has transformed the way we view space and place, from the local, through the national to the global, and has consequently affected the cultural and political value we assign to these concepts of place. Heise, in her work *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, compiles studies that illustrate how in the modern, socially mobile world a multiplicity of places and place experiences can be more powerful in generating identity in individuals than being embedded in a single location (5). As a result, the term “cosmopolitanism” began to be used to describe a form of belonging that extends beyond both the local and the national. While there are variable definitions of cosmopolitanism, they all share the assumption that ideas of national identity and attachment are artificial, constructed and are maintained and legitimised by complex cultural practices and institutions (6).

³ When speaking of the global North/South divide, despite the geographic terminology the division is an economic one, with the “North” containing only one-quarter of the world population yet controlling approximately four-fifths of global income. Conversely, the South, with three-quarters of the world’s population and possessing the majority of the world’s raw resource materials, only has access to one fifth of world income. (Mimiko, Oluwafemi. *Globalization: The Politics of Global Economic Relations and International Business*. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic, 2012:47 Print. & Steger, Manfred. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009: 31 Print.)

Historically, the environmental movement in the US and Australia has been characterised by a focus on the local as the site of reconnection with nature and an ambivalence towards the global (27). In Alexander's overview of the concept and definitions of bioregionalism he notes that the rhetoric of place has functioned in Western environmental thought as one of the most significant ways for modern environmentalists to articulate their environmentalism and ethical stance (161). The bioregionalist movement, in particular, has employed notions of "reinhabitation" and "dwelling in place" as anchoring concepts in its discourse (162).

Poet and essayist Nandi Chinna's recent essay on the links between walking and creative production observes that white, male environmentalist writers, such as Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey and Gary Snyder, have commonly used the physical immersion of the self in the landscape as a literary device through which to articulate ethical epiphanies in terms of their relationship with usually wild, rather than rural or urban nature (58). While women writers and Indigenous writers have criticised the individualist focus of such writing, and advocated a shift towards more communal forms of re-inhabitation and connection with nature, all these writings share a concern and investment in a form of "situated knowledge" (Heise 29).

Bioregional or locally focussed nature writing across genres generally promotes attainment of intimate knowledge of local ecology through sustained attention and or physical immersion in the environment. The central tenets of environmentalist theory such as decentralisation of power, food and energy self-sufficiency, egalitarianism and grassroots democracy are also emphasised and long-term residency in one place is one of the means by which progress towards these ideals envisioned (Heise 30).

However, the rise of the environmental justice movement in the twenty-first century has been critical of the package of assumptions tied up in the rhetoric of

place, arguing that it is a privileged position of the white middle class, ignoring the race and class issues which make it clear that environmental problems affect the most economically disadvantaged disproportionately (Heise 31).

Despite these valid criticisms, contemporary environmental theory still adheres to the belief in sense of place as the basis for environmental awareness and advocacy (Heise 33). This is exemplified by the continued ubiquity of Rene Dubos' famous slogan from the 1970s "think globally, act locally" (Shapiro np) which expresses the pervasive assumption within environmentalist theory that the local integrates with the global by functioning as a microcosm of the whole earth or that the global functions as a multiplicity of local scenarios (Heise 33).

In writing *The Sixth Creek* I acknowledge the privileged and problematic nature of siting within the local the potential for human reconnection with non-human nature. Yet, in terms of personal experience, walking in my local landscape proved to be a powerful method of recovery of my desire to act as an environmental advocate. I acknowledge that as a white, middle-class writer I enjoy a position of privilege but it is also my understanding that supporting the quality of life I enjoy, along with the rest of my privileged middle-class demographic, is putting more pressure on ecosystems per-capita than other nations, particularly those of the global South. Therefore, it is the people with whom I have the most in common, both culturally and economically, that I feel it is most important for my writing to reach. In much the same way, I cannot overlook the fact that it was white, middle-class nature writers who inspired me to the practice of walking to achieve physical immersion in landscape and consequent thinking about the place in which I am embedded. It was writers such as White, Abbey, Oliver, Wright and Crisp whose footsteps I followed in text who

reassured me that, as a form of activism, writing about the local could have global reach.

Gilbert White and the development of objectives for *The Sixth Creek*

In undertaking this project it was my intention to create an imaginative, ecologically focussed, lyric poetry collection that would sit within the genre of bioregional nature writing; a tradition in which White is both a canonical and progenitive figure.

The aspects of Gilbert White's work that were instrumental in the creation of *The Sixth Creek* were both conceptual and procedural. In terms of concept, it was the circumscription of White's ecological observations to a well-defined geographic area that proved to be the impetus for defining my own area of observation. To ecological historians White is the original bioregionalist and it was this contemporary reading of his work that provoked the decision to restrict my creative work within bioregional boundaries.

White's ornithological and natural history work was primarily undertaken within the geographical limit of his curacy in the parish of Selborne in Hampshire. White describes the area in his first letter to Thomas Pennant in a manner that exemplifies his diverse interests in multiple aspects of natural history such as geology and biology. It is this interweaving of observations from what were at the time distinct fields of scientific inquiry that would later come to exemplify the holistic methods of landscape ecology.

The parish of Selborne lies in the extreme eastern corner of the county of Hampshire, bordering on the county of Sussex, and not far from the county of Surrey; is about fifty miles south-west of London, in latitude fifty-one, and near mid-way between the towns of Alton and Petersfield... The soils of this district

are almost as various and diversified as the views and aspects. The high part of the south-west consists of a vast hill of chalk, rising three hundred feet above the village, and is divided into a sheep-down, the high wood and a long hanging wood, called The Hanger. The covert of this eminence is altogether beech, the most lovely of all forest trees, whether we consider its smooth rind or bark, its glossy foliage, or graceful pendulous boughs. The down, or sheepwalk, is a pleasing park-like spot, of about one mile by half that space, jutting out on the verge of the hill-country, where it begins to break down into the plains, and commanding a very engaging view, being an assemblage of hill, dale, woodlands, heath, and water. The prospect is bounded to the south-east and east by the vast range of mountains called the Sussex Downs, by Guild-down near Guildford, and by the Downs round Dorking, and Ryegate in Surrey, to the north-east, which altogether, with the country beyond Alton and Farnham, form a noble and extensive outline. (White 5)

While I acknowledge that parish boundaries rather than definitive ecological borders defined the limits of White's observations, he is still writing from a geographically defined region, as most parish boundaries historically followed topographical features in the landscape. The parish/topographical boundaries are also significant to this study since White's writing practice arose from his preferred method of travel. White carried out his parish duties primarily by walking through the landscape or travelling on horseback. Being out in the environment on most days, attending to the pastoral needs of his human community, White was in a position to observe and note diverse aspects of ecological change throughout the year, compiling comprehensive notes on seasonal variations in landscape and biota. So in addition to using the concept of geographic limits, White's work has been used as a model in

terms of his daily practice of walking in the landscape, using the time to collect and record ecological observations and engage in social interactions with members of the local community.

Following White's conceptual and procedural examples, I decided that the creative work would be restricted to subject matter encompassed within the ecological boundaries surrounding my home and the method of gathering material from which to craft poems would be primarily generated by a daily practice of walking within these boundaries, observing the natural world and interacting with the human and non-human species encountered each day.

In this way, the creative project would tie together the concepts of ecopoetry and bioregionalism by delivering a manuscript comprising a collection of poems thematically centred on my own local region. In addition, the creative work would include elements of my history, research and experience of and within this precise geographical and ecological location. The poetry written as a result of this process would be a means of bearing witness to human and non-human histories of this particular place. In writing exclusively about this local catchment area, the objective was for the work to expand the readers' knowledge of this ecologically defined region and, as a result, enhance their ethical concern for the natural world.

My intention was for the creative work to lie within the genre of place-oriented writing, alongside authors whose subject was the land and the more-than-human world that surrounded them. The creative piece was to have its point of origin in the Sixth Creek but I would also tap into the rich tradition of the previously mentioned nature writers and variously take inspiration from their lyric style, selection of subject matter, philosophical perspective and creative practice. My objective was for *The Sixth Creek* to be a work of lyrical ecological description and an

imaginative engagement with the landscape I inhabit. I wanted to find a natural correlation between the terrain of my home and the terrain of my writing and develop poems that were a personal expression of being embedded in this specific place.

In Cranston and Zeller's overview of literary responses to the Australian environment it is noted that, unlike North America, Australian writers do not yet possess a significant length of tradition in this kind of literature (12) yet this is being addressed, particularly in Australian poetry, by the recent outpouring of work engaging with colonial and post-colonial relationships to country and a reconceptualising, in an ecological sense, of what it means to be human (Elvey np). In further refutation, Indigenous cultures in Australia have traditions traceable over millennia that describe intimate human-ecological connections by way of visual art, dance, song and oral story telling (Kelly 18). Recent Australian publications such as *Outcrop: A Radical Australian Poetry of Land* (Balus & Wakeling), *Activist Poetics: anarchy in the Avon Valley* (Kinsella) and the 2009 issue of *Angelaki* on "Ecopoetics and Pedagogies" speak to a sustained interest in Australian post-colonial literature in finding ways to embody or describe the complicated and diverse relationships that Australians have with their landscapes, the species that inhabit them and the issues of indigeneity and white constructions of Aboriginal people and culture.

The Sixth Creek, in being a work grounded in and growing from local ecology, should explore the relationships between species and the landforms of this particular ecosystem, yet take as part of its understanding of this ecosystem that humanity is just one of the inhabitant species, a presence and co-habitation that has existed for millennia. As the writer I am preoccupied with the human perspective, and as a result the work is necessarily subjective, however, I have self-consciously avoided overtly

anthropocentric judgements in an attempt to explore ecocentric concepts of ecological interconnectivity between species and belonging to place.

However, the intention is that the work also communicates a feeling of unease, which I interpret as being the hangover from a European colonial anxiety about this country, resulting in large part from the dispossession of its Indigenous inhabitants. As Harrison observes in his analysis of the construction of Australian identity, there is a history here of white disquiet about this land and suppressed guilt about our violent manner of occupation ("Country and how to get there." 106-7). It follows that white writers of place in Australia have found it difficult to conceive of belonging to a place in which the history of their own occupation is so fraught with the violent eviction of peoples who had their own intimate relationship to the same land. I agree with Harrison's observations that this troubled history has hampered post-colonial development of an ecological imagination, our ability to feel a sense of belonging to country and we remain conflicted, with our expressions of belonging resultantly uneasy and contingent ("Country and how to get there." 106-7). We have inherited from our Indigenous predecessors an understanding of and a longing for that kind of connection to place but we have been prevented from achieving it due to guilt and lack of cultural precedent. As a result, contemporary white nature writing in Australia is full of combinations of anxiety and longing; examples I would cite include the novels of Kate Grenville, Andrew McGahan and the poetry of John Kinsella (Grenville; McGahan; Kinsella *The Divine Comedy*). I share with Harrison and the above authors this inheritance of both anxiety and desire and feel a deep unease about my right to claim a sense of belonging to the country I inhabit due to my cultural ancestors' dispossession of the Peramangk peoples from what we now call the Mount Lofty Ranges. While *The Sixth Creek* includes references that honour and

acknowledge the Peramangk people's prior occupation and ownership of the area I am limited to this, as I lack the authority to speak for or on behalf of the Indigenous community. There is an unfortunate paucity of information about Peramangk culture due to the swift removal of people from their lands after white settlement of the Ranges and little interaction between Aboriginal communities due east and west of the Mount Lofty Ranges (Coles 16, 20 & 112-114). Little publically accessible evidence of Peramangk occupation remains within the Sixth Creek catchment, with the exception of some rock art within what is now called Giles Conservation Park (formerly Hornsnell Gully which is how I have referred to it in *The Sixth Creek*) due to topography and rainfall making the catchment area comfortably habitable only in the warm and dry months of each year (Coles 16 & 201). Paucity of information, infrequent Indigenous inhabitation of the area and anxiety over cultural appropriation influenced my level of engagement with Indigenous history in the catchment. My sense of the obliteration of Peramangk presence in the area is reflected in the composition of *The Sixth Creek* in the way Peramangk history is officially acknowledged but unseen, the absence of traditional owners an unspoken undercurrent of unease, cropping up from time to time but never overtly addressed or reconciled. The poems of *The Sixth Creek* reflect this with the collection bearing an official acknowledgement and historical Indigenous presence mentioned in several pieces, including "Horsnell Gully"(13-14), "Marble Hill III: weight of loss"(54-55), "Domestic Ecology"(69-70) and "What will we inherit?"(95). The intention was for the collection to make this noticeable absence a statement about white eradication of Indigenous presence in the catchment, reflecting contemporary lack of engagement of the region's ancient history and the official prioritisation given to white history and natural history.

Places are more than mere static space. They are dynamic, constantly in flux and acted upon by external and internal forces. They consist of the visible and invisible: an animate and inanimate community that constitutes a habitat, incorporating all species from humans to the microbial. As Mark Tredinnick observes in his analysis of the work of various contemporary American and British nature writers, a place includes the silent presences and the processes, the rocks and systems of weather and geology that shape and erode them (*The Land's Wild Music* 15). A landscape is the sum of these things and the relationships between them over time and as a consequence writing of and about place should therefore not merely represent the landscape but attempt to articulate its innate dynamism. It is the interplay of biological and physical forces particular to a specific geography that constitutes the unique character or identity of a particular place.

The Sixth Creek is an attempt to articulate the unique character of the Sixth Creek catchment in the Mount Lofty Ranges of South Australia. It contains narrative elements but is in no way exclusively narrative, containing as it also does the fragmentary and the episodic. It is a sustained lyrical bearing of witness. It speaks primarily in a human voice but again, not exclusively as, for example, one poem speaks from the imagined perspective of a kangaroo. The inclusion of poems from imagined human and non-human perspectives, considered use of the pathetic fallacy and the attempt to eschew a hierarchy of species are methods by which I attempt to articulate an ecocentric rather than anthropocentric world-view. However, the text makes clear that my subjective presence and habitation within the Sixth Creek is acknowledged as I explore my geographical and historical terrain. This is a deliberate act for the purpose of engaging readership, for there is a deeper objective; the desire to break through anthropocentric perspectives and stimulate the extension of ethical

consideration to those beyond the human realm. These ideas, including the use of anthropomorphism as a tool for stimulating empathetic identification with the non-human, are examined more fully in the following chapter.

As a writer, I am certainly not alone in considering the experience of walking as a creative tool and as an environmentalist, the act of being outside with my feet in rhythmic contact with the ground is a way of strengthening my relationship with the Earth as a home. I walked my catchment as an element of creative practice, I was in the landscape as a subject: observing, perceiving, interpreting and deliberately invoking a mindset in which the mind, body and the world were integrated; a condition which Rebecca Solnit describes “as though [mind, body and the world] were three characters finally in conversation with each other”(5). It was the daily practice of achieving this state of mind that stimulated my sense of “being in place” and its creative interpretation in poetry.

My experience in the environment movement left me with a conviction that it will only be through a transition from anthropocentrism towards ecocentrism that humanity will be able to limit the critical damage it is currently inflicting on ecosystems worldwide. I walked the terrain of the Sixth Creek catchment, attempting to capture the sense of being immersed in place, imagining the landscape in times past and from the perspective of other species and then translating those imaginings into poetry. I wanted my encounters with the outside world to work towards reframing ethical limits to encompass the non-human and to stimulate ecocentric thinking. Reconnection with the non-human world, in my opinion, can be assisted through individuals reforging connections with their local environments and, as a result, developing relationships that foster a sense of care and responsibility for their home as a habitat.

The Sixth Creek is my attempt at speaking of my own encounters with the non-human, my acknowledgment of my local area as an ecosystem and my consideration of non-human neighbours as valued members of my community who are deserving of ethical consideration. White, Abbey and Oliver all worked (or still work) in different subgenres of nature writing but they have all shared a common practice of habitual walking through their local environs, valuing the non-human nature for its inherent rather than instrumental worth and translating their interpretations of these peripatetic experiences into text. In doing so, these writers extend the reach of their walking and thinking beyond the local into the global as they enable others to enter into the experience with them.

Chapter 2

Ecocentrism in Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*

I first came to the work of Edward Abbey with little understanding of his significance within the genre of nature writing. As a professional activist deeply concerned with methodologies of politically effective campaign strategy and philosophical positions on the ethics of direct action, I had seen references to Abbey primarily in material that advocated methods of environmental activism that fell outside the arena of socially and legally acceptable forms of non-violent direct action (Nash 167-8, Best & Nocella 59, Zakin 7, Foreman & Haywood “Forward” in *Ecodefense*).

Edward Abbey was a prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction but it was his first work of fiction, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, published in 1975 that initially attracted the attention of disillusioned environmentalists in the United States (Best & Nocella 59). As is still the case today, there exists across the spectrum of environmentally concerned individuals a section of the activist community who are frustrated at what they perceive as unacceptable levels of political compromise engaged in by mainstream green groups across the globe. In the late 1970s, in response to government policies that would see dam building, logging and development that threatened biodiverse habitats across the United States, a group of such individuals coalesced into the activist group *Earth First!* The group's philosophies were informed by biological conservation theory from an ecocentric perspective and they advocated methods of direct action that were frowned upon by more mainstream environmental advocacy organisations (Nash 190).

It was Abbey's fictional accounts of questionable protest methods such as industrial sabotage in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* that linked Abbey's name and writings to the formation of *Earth First!* Two of the group's founding members, Dave Foreman and Mike Roselle, listed *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and its author, alongside Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*, as works that significantly influenced *Earth First!*'s philosophy and methodology (Zakin 28 &36).

Earth First!'s advocacy and practice of eco-sabotage, or "monkey wrenching" as it was termed in Abbey's fiction, indelibly linked the writer to the group despite the author never publically claiming membership. Abbey did however write articles for *Earth First!* publications and was a known associate of the group's founding members (Zakin 335). Through this connection to *Earth First!* and their slogan "no compromise in the defense of Mother Earth" Abbey's name and work came to be firmly linked to the direct action practices of radical environmentalism (Nash 168).

It was as a result of my own disillusionment with the mainstream environmental movement that I first came to the writings of members of Deep Green Resistance (DGR), particularly the work of Derrick Jensen. DGR believes industrial civilisation to be fundamentally unsustainable and endangering the Earth's ecological health. The group argues that radical transformation of humanity's social structures and resource use is required in order to achieve ecological health for all species and social equality between all people (Jensen *Endgame; Vol 1 and Vol 2*). The principles and philosophies of Deep Green Resistance evolved from the ecocentric platform of deep ecology, in that all species are considered inherently equal and humanity's history of anthropocentrism is viewed as a causal factor in the ecological crises facing Earth's ecosystems (Curry 111-112). Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss first coined

the term “deep ecology” in 1973. Deep ecology’s core principles were ecocentric in that they held that the biosphere comprises diverse, complex yet interdependent ecosystems and should, as a whole, have the philosophical and legal right to exist independent of any utilitarian and instrumental benefit to humanity. Radical environmental groups around the globe including Earth First! and contemporary groups such as Deep Green Resistance adopted these principles as the philosophical basis for their organisations’ policies. (Næss; Taylor; Jacob; Jensen *Endgame, Volume 1: The Problem of Civilization*).

Contrary to the principles and practices of mainstream environmentalism, members of Deep Green Resistance hold that lifestyle changes are insufficient and mere commercialised responses to the large-scale environmental problems the world faces caused by western civilisation’s expansionist cultural mindset and addiction to overconsumption (Jensen *Endgame, Volume 1: The Problem of Civilization*). In terms of practical action, DGR and Jensen in particular advocate bringing about the dismantling of industrial civilisation by any means necessary (Jensen *Endgame, Volume 2: Resistance*). This call to action is a direct challenge to pacifism, which has long been held as a central tenet within green activism (Nash 165). Jensen, as a spokesperson for Deep Green Resistance, harks back to the writings of Abbey in the belief that the definition of violence does not extend to the damage to property and that violence in the form of eco-sabotage may be justified in certain contexts in defence of ecosystems and the oppressed (Jensen *Endgame, Volume 2: Resistance* 723-726). Jensen’s arguments, built on the foundation of Abbey’s advocacy for civil disobedience in defence of the non-human, was a powerful influence over my choices as an activist and decisions to participate in various illegal activities as forms of protest.

My introduction to the work of Edward Abbey may have been instigated by his position as a forefather of the radical direct action advocated by DGR but it was through reading his non-fictional work *Desert Solitaire* that Abbey came to inspire me as a nature writer. *Desert Solitaire* proved instrumental to the writing of *The Sixth Creek* in terms inspiring the objective of attempting to write from an ecocentric perspective. Abbey's wrestling with the problems of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism were constantly on my mind during the composition of the poems, continually forcing me to interrogate my objectives. If I could not solidly justify to myself use of the pathetic fallacy or anthropomorphism on the grounds of intention to inspire extension of ethical consideration to the non-human then I would eliminate its use. The issue of the pathetic fallacy and anthropomorphic imagery is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Edward Abbey

By the time of his death in 1989, Edward Abbey had written nineteen works of fiction and non-fiction and in the process become one of the most popular nature writers in the United States and a leading figure of the radical environmental movement.

Despite being raised in Pennsylvania, the bulk of his writing was set in the southwestern deserts of the American west. *Desert Solitaire*, first published in 1968, was based on Abbey's experiences during two extended periods in which he served as a ranger at the Arches National Monument in Utah in the late 1950s.

At that time, the Arches National Monument was an isolated and seldom visited National Park, comprising 33,000 acres of slickrock wilderness, a landscape devoid of vegetation, just stone and sky forming a "geological sublime" (Scheese "Desert Solitaire: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden" 307). Abbey's

duties during his employment were to maintain hiking trails, collect camping fees and provide information to tourists. He was provided with a house trailer for living quarters but preferred to sleep and cook outside.

Throughout his writing life Abbey would be preoccupied with the promulgation of ecocentric over anthropocentric modes of thinking and continually interrogated the conflict between the freedom of the individual in the wilderness and the intrusive nature of civilisation (Knott, J.R *Imagining Wild America* 113; Scheese "Desert Solitaire: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden" 309). He revelled in the stance of the extremist to the extent of creating significant friction and debate within the newly emergent environmental movement. He disdained conservative and traditional approaches to conservation on the basis of their inherent anthropocentrism and instead, by insisting on the equality of all species, advocated defending species threatened by humans by any means necessary (Abbey in Foreman & Haywood 4). Abbey stated:

That wilderness is our ancestral home, the primordial homeland of all living creatures including the human, and the present dwelling place of such noble beings as the grizzly bear, the mountain lion, the eagle and the condor, the moose and the elk and the pronghorn antelope, the redwood tree, the yellowpine, the bristlecone pine, even the aspen, and yes, why not say it?, the streams, waterfalls, rivers, the very bedrock itself of our hills, canyons, deserts, mountains. For many of us, perhaps for most of us, the wilderness is as much our home or a lot more so than the wretched little stucco boxes, plywood apartments and wallboard condominiums in which we are mostly confined by the insatiable demands of an overcrowded and ever expanding industrial culture. And if the wilderness is our true home, and if it is threatened with

invasion, pillage and destruction – as it certainly is – we have the right to defend that home, as we would our private rooms, by whichever means are necessary.

(4)

One of Abbey's more blatant attempts to distance his form of nature writing from its Transcendental roots was articulated in his work *Down the river with Henry Thoreau and other friends*, a fictionalised dialogue with the esteemed but long-deceased writer, in which Abbey challenges the Emersonian tradition of reading nature as symbolic of a transcendent spiritual reality by asserting that “the fading light has no meaning but its own intrinsic beauty” and “the planets signify nothing but themselves” (*Down the River* 19-20).

Despite his protestations to the contrary, Abbey did indeed follow in the tradition of nature writers such as Thoreau and Emerson, in that his intention is not only to describe nature but to advocate on its behalf. He says, “It is not enough to understand nature; the point is to save it” (*The Journey Home: Some words in defense of the American West* xii).

This is not surprising given the historical and cultural context at the time of publication of *Desert Solitaire* in 1968. This was the height of the countercultural movement and modern environmentalism was emerging as a political discourse as affluent Northern societies became increasingly aware of the damage human culture was inflicting on ecological systems worldwide. With the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, nature writing had begun to turn from its traditional form of genteel landscape description towards advocacy for the natural world, and in Abbey's case, take on radical and iconoclastic themes and an argumentative, adversarial tone.

It is clear that the writing of Edward Abbey is fuelled by a love and respect for wilderness, to the extent that his work has been characterised by some scholars as a twentieth century Romanticism (Knott *Imagining Wild America* 112, Lawrence 150). Abbey himself was aware of this tendency, as can be seen in his self-conscious attempts to restrain it.

Abbey writes that “a writer should be fuelled in equal parts by anger and love” (*Desert Solitaire* 176) and his love of the wilderness is evident throughout the subjects, themes and language of his entire body of work. His anger, however, is documented by means of his devastating critique and satire of contemporary western culture (Knott 132), his attraction to ruins and other symbols of the transitory nature of human presence in the landscape (128) and his legacy as a progenitor of the radical arm of the environmental defence movement (Merchant 172).

Indeed, the publication of *Desert Solitaire* places Abbey at the forefront of the radicalisation of nature writing. This narrative recounts his first forays into non-violent direct action when he deliberately uproots surveyors’ pegs marking the proposed routes of paved roads within the park. Scheese classifies *Desert Solitaire* as a landmark text in the evolution of American nature writing, pinpointing the surveyor peg incident as a historical moment in nature writing, as it was one of the first instances of a nature writer recording his deliberate breaking of a law as a means of protecting the rights of nature over the interests of humanity (*Nature Writing : The Pastoral Impulse in America* 115). Emulating Thoreau’s position in “Resistance to Civil Government” Abbey decides to let his “life be a counter friction to stop the machine” (Preface to 1988 ed of *Desert Solitaire* 12). Abbey’s later writing would eventually see his *Desert Solitaire* fantasies about the destruction of the future Glen

Canyon Dam find another outlet in his novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, published in 1975.

Abbey's fictional work ponders the same themes that run through his non-fiction in that both are deeply political, philosophical and dramatise the plight of non-human species in the face of human greed and assumptions of superiority. In writing *The Sixth Creek*, I wanted to capture and translate this depth of passion for the non-human world, finding in my own voice, a way to illustrate that we are not superior: we are one species among a throng, with the health of the one dependent on the well-being of the many. It was Abbey's ongoing interrogation of his work for evidence of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism that inspired me to question my perspectives and their translation into poetry and whether anthropomorphism has a role in ecopoetry or nature writing that entertains activist objectives.

Ecocentrism and anthropomorphism in *Desert Solitaire*

One of the elements of *Desert Solitaire* that I found most influential in the creation of *The Sixth Creek* was Abbey's awareness of anthropocentrism and his desire for its elimination in both his thinking and writing. Prior to reading *Desert Solitaire* I had been intellectually aware of the environmental consequences of anthropocentric thinking but had not fully comprehended how entrenched human-centred language was in our literature. Abbey's focus on anthropocentric language catalysed my thinking about the ramifications of unquestioned human-centred perspective regarding the potential for ethical transformation. *Desert Solitaire* is a work in which the author finds the time and space in which to think deeply about his and his species' place in the natural world. He is clearly well-versed in the traditions of nature writing and the foundation of anthropocentrism upon which it rests. In the opening chapter

Abbey is clear about his objectives to erase both anthropocentrism and its related literary device anthropomorphism from his thinking and his writing.

The personification of the natural is exactly the tendency I wish to suppress in myself, to eliminate for good. I am here not only to evade for a while the clamour and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront, immediately and directly if that's possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and the fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us. I want to be able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description...even if it means risking everything human in myself. ... the naked self merges with a non-human world and yet somehow survives intact, individual, separate. (6)

This passage reveals Abbey's desire for sanctuary from civilisation, both physically and intellectually, and his preoccupation with freeing himself from the burden of inherited modes of thinking about the natural world and humanity's place within it (Knott 117-118). He wants to remain isolated from humanity and completely immerse himself in this non-human world while simultaneously maintaining his own identity in the face of this predominantly non-human wilderness (Knott 118 & Sheese *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America* 110).

The passage quoted above is a denunciation of anthropomorphism and the pathetic fallacy and Abbey's landscape description throughout the book, for the most part, falls into line with this desire to change his way of thinking about and seeing the world. Passages of writing which describe the slickrock landscape of the Arches National Monument and its biodiversity are noteworthy for their strict absence of metaphor or simile, relying instead on literal yet eloquent description. Where he

notices his anthropomorphic tendencies creeping in, such as in his description of what he speculates as gopher snake lovemaking, he calls it out, questioning his reactions to and assumptions about the act he is witnessing (Abbey 23).

How can I descend to such anthropomorphism? Easily – but is it, in this case entirely false? Perhaps not. I am not attributing human motives to my snake and bird acquaintances. I recognise that when and where they serve purposes of mine they do so for beautifully selfish reasons of their own (23-24).

Abbey analyses why he was so swift to view the mating of the snakes through the lens of human relationships and eventually concludes that it stems from his philosophical belief in the ecocentric premise that “all living things are kindred” (24) and that “it’s a foolish, simple-minded rationalism which denies any form of emotion to all animals but man and his dog”(24). It is because I agree with Abbey’s premise regarding the emotional lives of non-human animals that I felt the use of anthropomorphism, particularly in my poem “Western Grey Kangaroo”(38-39), to be justified in service to the objective of stimulating empathy and consequently cultivating the desire to protect the natural world, an idea I explore more fully later in the chapter. This episode with the gopher snakes immediately precedes the chapter in which Abbey needlessly kills a rabbit by hurling a rock at it, which at face value seems to contradict all that has just been argued in terms of his concept of the non-hierarchical kindred of all species. Abbey is unrepentant, saying: “I try but cannot feel any sense of guilt. I examine my soul: white as snow. Check my hands: not a trace of blood” (38). He defends his actions.

No longer do I feel isolated from the sparse and furtive life around me, a stranger from another world. I have entered into this one. We are kindred all of us, killer and victim, predator and prey, me and the sly coyote, the soaring

buzzard, the elegant gopher snake, the trembling cottontail, the foul worms that feed on our entrails, all of them, all of us. Long live diversity, long live the earth! (38-39)

This is ecocentrism extending the pastoral into previously unexplored territories of human evolution, where in our natural state humans reveal their wild ancestry as animals, potentially devoid of compassion and justice (Sheese *Nature Writing : The Pastoral Impulse in America* 112). The poems “Anthropologist at he ceremony”(9-10), “The dam”(30-31) and “The animal within”(44-45) in *The Sixth Creek* demonstrate the influence of Abbey’s thinking on humans as animals, the kinship of species and non-hierarchical thinking. But this perspective is not without problem for Abbey as is later revealed by his thinking about the discovery of the body of a tourist who had died after becoming lost in the park. Abbey equivocates between thinking “we are well rid of him. His departure makes room for the living” (*Desert Solitaire* 242) and a humanist view that each person’s life “is significant and unique and supreme beyond all limits of reason and nature”(242). He then switches again, now thinking of the man from the vulture’s perspective as carrion, before widening his perspective yet again in an attempt to embrace an ecological view in the following passage:

I feel myself sinking into the landscape, fixed in place like a stone, a small motionless shape of vague outline, desert-coloured, and with the wings of imagination look down at myself through the eyes of the bird, watching a human figure that becomes smaller, smaller, smaller in the receding landscape as the bird rises into the evening – a man at a table near a twinkling campfire, surrounded by a rolling wasteland of stone and dune and sandstone monuments, the wasteland of stone surrounded by dark canyons and the

course of rivers and mountain ranges on a vast plateau stretching across Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, and beyond this plateau more deserts and greater mountains, the Rockies in the dusk, the Sierra Nevadas shining in their late afternoon, and farther and farther yet, the darkened East, the gleaming Pacific, the curving margins of the great earth itself, and beyond earth that ultimate world of sun and stars whose bounds we cannot discover.

(243)

In this single passage Abbey swings from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, from the individual or microscopic to the whole or macroscopic, from the local to the universal. Within a page of espousing the significance of each individual human life he swings out to a universal perspective that illustrates the insignificance of his own existence. As Sheese points out, it is this passage that reveals that the lococentrism of pastoralism results not in provincialism but in true cosmopolitanism, revealing as it does the possibility of viewing or encompassing the whole world from a single point (*Nature Writing : The Pastoral Impulse in America* 113).

Despite this understanding of humanity's and the individual's place in the grand scheme of life on Earth, anthropocentric thinking proves a hard habit to break even for one as drawn to places that seem completely indifferent to human presence as Abbey.

How difficult to imagine this place without a human presence; how necessary. I am almost prepared to believe that this sweet virginal primitive land will be grateful for my departure and the absence of tourists... Grateful for our departure? One more expression of human vanity. The finest quality of this stone, these plants and animals, this desert landscape is the indifference manifest to our presence, our absence, our coming, our staying or our going.

Whether we live or die is a matter of absolutely no concern whatsoever to the desert. (300-1)

He catches himself but this demonstrates that even for a writer dedicated to weeding out his own anthropocentric tendencies it is an ongoing process, so embedded is this mode of thought and construction of humanity in our philosophical traditions. In addition to the objective of counteracting anthropocentrism in the writing of *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey had a secondary intention of cultivating an aesthetic appreciation of this singular landscape in the reader and inviting them to extend their definition of beauty to embrace this unique environment.

Ecocentrism, anthropomorphism and environmental ethics in *The Sixth Creek*

Similarly, in the writing of *The Sixth Creek*, I was preoccupied with exploring the possible ways in which to encourage the extension of the concept of beauty to aspects of the local environment that may be so familiar as to be unseen and in doing so promote an ecocentric perspective of my ecosystem. Further to this, if anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism could not be eliminated from my thinking and writing, then I wanted to explore ways of using them to counter what seems to me an alienation of many members of contemporary western society from the environments they inhabit.

Urban and suburban landscapes are commonly not considered part of the natural world by their inhabitants despite the functioning of these landscapes as ecosystems. The environment is popularly considered to be “out there”: a place that is other than home. In writing *The Sixth Creek*, I attempted to engage with this

assumption by constituting home and the local environment in which it is embedded without making distinctions between them in style, voice or gaze. In these poems home, the landscape, the biota and my place within them are all woven together in an attempt to create an awareness of the integral ecological connections between species.

The poem “Anthropologist at the ceremony” is the second poem in the collection and is significant as it plays a dual role in the manuscript. In the opening stanzas the poem attempts to weave imagery of home and human ritual into an observation of the functioning ecosystem. The poem employs metaphors for the natural world using wedding and family imagery in an attempt to dissolve boundaries between the human and non-human worlds.

The trunk is fat and taut
making the sound of plapping
your palm on the warm belly
of a sleeping dog....

among the clumps of eucalypt leaves
the tree holds out to the valley
like bridal bouquets...

Time is counted in the ticking of grass seeds
you eavesdrop on the conversations of bees
that congenial hum, the gossip of grandmothers
heard through a window on cards night. (8-9)

However, the poem’s most important work is undertaken in the last three stanzas. The subject is sitting in a tree, viewing the landscape from a privileged

position, intellectually acknowledging that she is part of the landscape yet finding the transformation from anthropocentric thinking to ecocentrism an almost impossible challenge. This point is clearly articulated in the lines but also subtly alluded to in the double meaning of the word “lying”. On the surface the word appears to signify the physical position of the subject but on another level it alludes to the self-deception of thinking avoidance of an anthropocentric perspective is achievable.

Lying, heart pressed to the trunk
lungs and leaves partnered
in an intricate quadrille
listening to the birds tuning their instruments,

able only to watch but never to know
and in the breathing, the stillness, imagine
and find content in the knowing
but not the sense of kin. (10)

In the same way that Abbey desired the elimination of anthropocentrism from his work he cannot help but notice when it creeps back into his thinking. Similarly, in writing this account of my local environment, despite my desire to adopt an ecocentric perspective I cannot deny the unavailability of human-centred thinking. In the final stanza I attempt to acknowledge my subjective anthropocentrism yet still aspire to a non-hierarchical world-view. I may be human and unable to purge myself of human-centredness completely yet I can still maintain that there are other, equally valid perspectives. Humans are but one species among billions and we, as a species, can also be the object of a gaze. All species have a viewpoint, a place where we stand and observe the world and while humans may never be privy to the conscious

viewpoint of another species, humans can still be viewed as “the other”. Further, in anthropomorphising the moon as an anthropologist, I am simultaneously harking back to and subverting a Romantic tradition by endowing the moon with a gaze that is usually reserved for white, economically privileged humanity; that of objective analyst.

The stars wheel out, the moon
who has seen everything, wonders anew
at the opacity of these familiar beings,
another anthropologist opening a notebook. (10)

In this final stanza I employ anthropomorphism to shift the scale of the poem from the micro to macro and inject the hopefully unsettling thought that the human perspective is one of many and it should not be assumed that it is automatically the most privileged.

The Sixth Creek illustrates a tension between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives in numerous poems throughout the collection. Primarily, the non-hierarchical element of an ecocentric approach is explicated through the acknowledgement of the animal nature of humanity. In “The dam” the final lines are “Only now, in your animal skin / do you belong” (31).

This is drawn out in more detail in “The animal within”. The poem situated at the end of section II, which is composed like a field guide to species of the catchment and therefore listing humankind as just one component of the biodiversity of the region. Further to this the poem details my desire to reclaim and honour the mammalian heritage of my species.

I want to claim my mammalian dowry
and welcome the pariah home.

Not in the daily particulars of belly and shelter
but the reflex kick of instinct,
of noticing all, analysing none. (45)

In addition, this poem also introduces another tension at play in the manuscript, that of use of the pathetic fallacy or the ascribing of human traits and emotions to inanimate aspects of nature. As referred to earlier, Ruskin criticised the Romantic poets for their overuse of this device, believing it to be overly sentimental and an aversion to this brand of anthropocentrism in poetry by poets and critics alike is still felt today as Australian poet and essayist John Bennett notes in his definition of what constitutes ecopoetry (“I Blame Romanticism” np). Despite the parallels between the pathetic fallacy and personification as literary devices, the taint of Ruskin’s campaign for truth in art is still felt and the presence of the pathetic fallacy remains emblematic of the divide between conventional nature poetry and ecopoetry (“I Blame Romanticism” np). However, to my mind, anthropomorphism can be a useful tool in terms of advocacy as it renders the non-human more comprehensible, more memorable and encourages the development of empathy towards the natural world and empathy is fundamental to the objective of extending ethical consideration beyond solely human interests.

Ruskin described the pathetic fallacy in his 1856 book, *Modern Painters*, as any “description of inanimate natural objects that ascribes to them human capabilities, sensations and emotions”. While Ruskin does say “inanimate objects”, popular understanding of the term has broadened it to include the non-human animate world, rendering the ascription of human sensations or emotions to non-human animals as philosophically indefensible. As writers, we are cautioned against extending or exporting our feelings onto the non-human as this is seen as an act of appropriation or

colonisation that erases their essence and over-writes our own onto them. I agree that we cannot know the mind or feelings of a non-human animal. However, in using the pathetic fallacy or anthropomorphism it is not my intention to erase or colonise the animal in question. Rather, it is an attempt, by means of extension of human feelings to the non-human surrounding us, to generate empathy. If humans can only understand human feelings then projecting those feelings onto the non-human is a means of trying to render understandable what cannot ultimately be known. To me this is significant in that the cultivation of empathy for the natural world is the way in which we as humans will develop and amplify the motivation and desire to protect the ecosystems upon which all life depends. In addition, denial of empathetic identification with non-human animals also denies the potential translation of animal experiences of suffering into human language and so not only works against environmental change but maintains an anthropocentric status quo.

Anthropomorphism has dual functions; it not only translates our conceptions of animal experience into human language it also encourages humans to attempt to see the world through the eyes of an animal. So while we can never claim to understand the exact experience of an animal we certainly attempt it and, in doing so, conceive of an animal's suffering in human terms. While anthropomorphism may just be reflecting back to us our own experience of our animal nature it still encourages us to conceive of ourselves in the place of the animal and thus open ourselves to the notion that animal suffering may be akin to our own. Anthropomorphism can create a bridge between the human and non-human using the power of imagination. While to know the non-human is impossible, attempts to imagine ourselves into their position makes empathetic identification a possibility even if confirmation of our anthropomorphic imaginings is unachievable. Knowledge is not a precursor for

respect but anthropomorphic imaginings open up the possibility of animal consciousness, self-awareness and intrinsic value that is completely independent of humanity.

One of the objectives in writing *The Sixth Creek* was to create work that reflected my views regarding the intrinsic value of nature and, as a result, make space for the broadening environmental concern beyond the human. To achieve this in a non-didactic way I employed multiple points of view, both human and non-human.

In attempting to speak from the point of view of the non-human, the aim was to emphasise the ethical perspective that human existence is but one strand of concern at work in the catchment. However, as stated above, I recognised that any attempt to speak on behalf of the non-human world would be unavoidably anthropocentric. Poetry (and any writing) requires the use of language and language is fundamentally and inescapably human-centred. In acknowledgement of this intrinsic anthropocentrism I wrote primarily in a version of a first person perspective, while recognising that this subjective voice and the self it purported to represent was mutable, unreliable and relative. In addition, I also made the attempt to capture the points of view of other human and non-human residents of the region over time with different value systems and relationships with their landscape.

The one perspective I avoided any attempt to write from was an Indigenous one. I did not have the authority or permission to do so and felt that any attempt on my part would be an act of cultural appropriation. As a result I restricted myself to acknowledgement of traditional owners of the Peramangk community and when writing from a human perspective I wrote only from the cultural perspective over which I had claim: that of a descendant of European colonisers.

The poems “Marble Hill I: The Maid of Marble Hill”(50-51), a poem about a maid in the employ of the Governor of South Australia in 1882, and “The slab hut”, a poem about a female colonial settler who lived in the slab cottage on our property back in the 1850s, were both works of imagination informed by historical research into the Marble Hill vice-regal residence and the living conditions of tiersmen’s families in the district (Bishop & McGowan 18-19; Hallack 97-106).

However, when I came to attempt writing from a non-human perspective I found attempting to embed myself in an alien mindset in addition to ridding myself of human assumptions and preoccupations was impossible. I tried and failed many times, unable to achieve my multi-faceted goal of eliminating human subjectivity, human knowledge and value systems and creating poetry that I felt attained a publishable standard. Since writing through non-human eyes was a stated objective from the very beginning of the project I felt that I needed to include one poem in an attempt to illustrate the difficulty of the undertaking. “Western Grey Kangaroo”(38-39) proved to be the best result from a lengthy experiment in writing from the non-human. In this poem I attempted to render the kangaroo as a being embedded in its environment but also go further and speak from the kangaroo’s perspective about the impact of human presence in terms of habitat fragmentation and loss and predation by domestic dogs.

Soft light time is for eating
the time for slow steps
when bird song stretches with the sun
before the insects rise like wind,
and the itching, itching...

Sometimes the chasers
howl me from shallow sleep,
or the tall two legs
with the loud smokers

who nibble, nibble and scratch
at the edges, the trees
until the pouches of land left whole
don't hold enough. (38)

My lack of success in crafting anthropomorphic poems that avoided sentimentality and didacticism left me in a difficult position. My intention was for this manuscript to expand environmental consideration in the reader and the method by which I hoped to achieve this was unsuccessful. The idea might have been sound but my writing and inability to conceive of how the world would look or function without the lens human-centredness meant that the product of my attempts felt trite and clichéd and far from publishable. This left me in the unfortunate position of needing to fall back upon Ruskin's scourge: the pathetic fallacy. Unfortunately, the pathetic fallacy, or any form of anthropomorphism, is easy to employ, to the extent that I used it with abandon and several early drafts of the manuscript needed significant editing with an eye for its overuse. However, the poetry of *The Sixth Creek* explores a real world location using human-centred language because the writer, and predominantly the subject, of the work is human. This is unavoidable. In attempting to circumvent anthropomorphism yet still render the location ecocentrically I found myself, like Abbey, in a difficult position. I needed more than literal language and could not

totally eschew metaphor and simile as that is how we, as humans, make each other understand another perspective. Employing a lyrical style to draw attention to the non-human residents of the catchment and explicate their ecological interconnectivity with each other and humanity called for more than literal observation.

Breaking away from anthropocentrism is an exotic thought experiment for many. Introducing the idea that species other than our own may have emotional lives, thought processes or even basic self-awareness are challenging concepts. I found that anthropomorphism or ascribing human feelings to non-human entities was an effective method for generating empathy, suggesting that there is value to nature that is independent of its instrumental use to humanity and that environmental protection involves extending ethical considerations beyond ourselves.

My self-consciousness about use of the pathetic fallacy and anthropomorphism yet acceptance of their usefulness to the project is expressed in “The animal within”.

Within my world, all is conscious,
everything has an opinion.
Dogs sulk, trees rejoice,
stones endure. The household
extends beyond the window.

I need to reverse the pathetic fallacy
of painting the world human,
to dig out the subcutaneous animal,
and learn by forgetting. Sit necessity
at the table’s head and choice out in the yard. (44)

Contemporary nature writing appears to have one overwhelmingly common feature, despite the diversity of cultural biases the writers bring to the genre and the landscapes they choose as their subjects. This commonality is that they all assume an inherent value in the natural world (Knott 189-90). These writers all interpret their subject landscapes in unique and imperfect ways, coloured as all perceptions are by assumptions, desire and cultural influences. Despite coming to Abbey's writing through his influence on the history of environmental activism, I continue to be inspired by his work as a nature writer. His acknowledgement of the significant environmental issues stemming from our society's addiction to anthropocentric thinking and his self-conscious struggle to cleanse his mind and work of its effects deeply resonated with me when I first encountered it and it feels fitting that preoccupation with anthropocentrism, ecocentrism and the intrinsic value of the non-human occupy central themes in *The Sixth Creek*.

Chapter 3

“To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work” – the poetry of Mary Oliver

Although I was familiar with the work of White and Abbey, I did not discover the attraction of Mary Oliver’s poetry until much later, during a time when I had lost all hope in humanity’s ability to live within its ecological means. My activism, both legal and illegal, and campaign work in the environmental non-government sector felt ineffective in the face of the breadth, scale and number of environmental crises facing the planet. I had withdrawn from activism and my social networks. I felt paralysed by hopelessness for the future survival of the Earth’s biodiversity and guilt over being unable to halt its demise.

It was at this point in my life that I opened Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge* (1992) and found the poem “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver used by Williams as an epigram. This poem brought about a fundamental change in the direction of both my poetry and my life. Oliver’s poetry showed me that activism could be located in more and varied forms and places than I had considered possible. This idea and the impetus behind my work is encapsulated by Oliver’s statement:

Before we move from recklessness into responsibility, from selfishness to a decent happiness, we must want to save our world. And in order to want to save the world we must learn to love it – and in order to love it we must become familiar with it again. This is where my work begins, and why I keep walking, and looking. (Oliver “Among Wind and Time” 34)

Oliver's thinking about how to stimulate care for our ecosystems through a chain reaction beginning with personal discovery of the local leading to knowledge and eventually to love and protection showed me the possibility of a new way into activism. As a campaigner, I had found one of the most frustrating aspects of the work to be the resistance people felt to change. Personal values and beliefs lie at the heart of motivating behavioural change. Scholars such as Margaret Gooch, studying the factors motivating environmental activism, find that in terms of encouraging people to act in support of environmental protection, possession of a "sense of place" plays a significant role in people's decisions (26-28). The complex web of beliefs and values that people hold about their local environment and community is a significant contributor to the generation of a sense of place and this in turn influences their motivation to become involved in participating in caring for their local environments (Gooch 26-28). Motivation towards environmental protection is contingent on the level of knowledge and understanding people possess of environmental issues (Jamison 715). The alienation from the natural world commonly felt by people living in urban and suburban landscapes and lack of ecological knowledge about their landscapes can make development of a "sense of place" challenging.

Mary Oliver's work opened my eyes to an alternative method of stimulating behavioural change. Rather than solely trying to effect behavioural change through education and public awareness of environmental issues, Oliver's poetry illustrated a way of stimulating the development of a sense of place. Oliver's method of encouraging close observation of nature, particularly sustained focus on individuals of a species and bearing witness to species or ecological processes that can often pass outside human notice, seemed to me a creative means of inspiring attention to the non-human world, learning to love or at least respect it and as a result perhaps act to

protect it when threatened. This realisation opened me to the powerful potential of creative practice as a form of activism. I began to walk and watch and listen. I began to write.

Mary Oliver

American poet Mary Oliver, born in Ohio in 1935 and living the majority of her life in Provincetown Massachusetts, is considered by many to be one of the United States most esteemed and successful poets (Garner np). Her work is typified by the celebration and exploration of possibilities for experiencing empathy with wild nature (Knott 180). She asks the question: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?” (“The Summer Day” *New and Selected Poems: Volume One* 94) gently requesting we examine our choices and priorities.

Knott, in his analysis of nature writers who have been instrumental to the transformation of American attitudes to wilderness, characterises Mary Oliver as a nature poet whose writing celebrates the non-human through observation and intimate attention to the details of the cycles of life and death which play out in her surrounding natural world (163). Oliver’s poetry demonstrates an awareness that one need not travel far from home to find wilderness and that the distinction between the wild and the familiar is a perception rather than a physical reality (184).

Oliver has lived in Provincetown Massachusetts since the 1960s and her poetry, especially her work focussing on her local environment, expresses a passion for and fascination with human potential for reconnection with nature. Oliver characterises her own work as detailed observation translated into short, lyrical lines,

that while acknowledging the beauty and intricate detail of the natural world, also refuse to shy away from the darker side of ecological functioning by accepting death, decay and violence as essential components of wild nature (*Winter Hours* 102).

“Attention and devotion” – bearing witness and ecocentrism

Oliver’s transformation of powerful experiences in nature into poetry seems to flow from a three-stage process. The initial stage involves observation and close examination of the subject. This then evolves into an intense focus on or an enhanced attentiveness to the subject. Finally, she embeds her readers with her in the experience by inviting us to witness what she is seeing through her eyes so we become present in the moment and also Oliver’s thinking about the moment. In an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1992 Oliver describes this final stage and her ambitions for her poems to speak to readers as experiences with which they can identify.

It's like an epiphany; I see something and look at it and look at it. I see myself going closer and closer just to see it better, as though to see its meaning out of its physical form. And then, I take something emblematic from it and then it transcends the actual.... I almost never give the speaker of the poem a gender, so that the poem will fit as an experience to either a male or female reader.

Many poets, especially women poets right now, are trying to write poems about their personal lives ... to share, as they say, with the reader. And I'm trying to write a poem which was not the experience of the reader but might have been. I use present tense a lot for the same reason. Every way that I can, I try to make it a felt experience. (Ratiner np)

When questioned on how she prepares herself for her daily walk in terms of mindfulness and kindling the poetic gaze Oliver answers simply "No ritual, no preparation. Just attention and devotion" (Mary Oliver *Facebook post*).

It is this emphasis on attention and the attitude brought to the practice of observation that Oliver sees as key to finding ways towards empathy with the wild.

The combination in Oliver's work of daily walks embarked upon with an attitude of rapt attention produces poems in which we see the world through a lens of wonder and amazement. In the poem "When Death Comes" Oliver says "all my life/ I was a bride married to amazement" (*New and Selected Poems: Volume One* 10) and when read in conjunction with the line from the poem "Yes! No!" in which Oliver says "to pay attention, this is our endless and proper work" (*White Pine* 8) this grants insight into the method and mindset through which she achieves her voice of attentive and intimate engagement with the non-human world.

While her work is rooted firmly in her local environment, some feminist critics claim Oliver subscribes to an outmoded Romantic tradition of over-identifying nature with the feminine (Graham 352). However, Mary Oliver has never overtly expressed or promoted any particular social or political agendas in her work (Russell 21), with her poetic focus and sensibility firmly rooted in her unique vision and lyrical description of the natural world and humanity's relationship with the wild. It could be argued however that Oliver positions herself as an advocate for the wild in the sense of bearing witness in her role as rapt observer. Oliver's act of bearing witness is not overtly political but can be interpreted as having a political undercurrent in that it is a non-didactic act of subversion to Western cultural paradigms. Oliver's subversion of anthropocentrism lies in her poetry's challenging stance that seeking harmony or empathy with the natural world should take precedence over social conformity and

the desire for standard conceptions of success (Knott 184). In preserving the memory of intense moments of connection with the natural world I interpret Oliver's work as activist in the sense that it works towards inspiring a sense of wonder, compassion and eventually love for the non-human life that surrounds us. In inspiring love and empathy she also hopes to stimulate the desire to protect and it is within this poetic strategy to stimulate protection of the wild that Oliver's environmental advocacy is located. It is this method of indirect advocacy that I emulated in the writing of *The Sixth Creek*.

In an interview with Maria Shriver, when asked about her objectives as a poet Oliver responded:

I am not very hopeful about the Earth remaining as it was when I was a child. It's already greatly changed. But I think when we lose the connection with the natural world, we tend to forget that we're animals, that we need the Earth. And that can be devastating. Wendell Berry is a wonderful poet, and he talks about this coming devastation a great deal. I just happen to think you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. So I try to do more of the "Have you noticed this wonderful thing? Do you remember this?"... Yes, I try to praise. If I have any lasting worth, it will be because I have tried to make people remember what the Earth is meant to look like. (Shriver np)

Oliver's objectives of bearing witness to and honouring the natural world are shared by many of the authors examined in this exegesis. White, Abbey, Oliver and Wright and Crisp (who will be discussed in the next chapter) all attempt, through their lyrical or literal observations of their local environs, to awaken humanity to the non-human context in which we are embedded. Thomashow eloquently expresses in the following quotation what I would argue these authors, and hopefully I too, share as a

common objective for their writing, which is that through attention and bearing witness to the ecosystems on which we, as humans depend, we will come to understand the interdependence of species, and through this knowledge come to extend ethical consideration to other forms of life on Earth.

Through familiarity and intimacy, you learn how to pay closer attention to the full splendour of the biosphere as it is revealed to you in the local ecosystem. In those moments when you can wade through the distraction of business and task, when you catch a glimpse of the unfathomable world at your doorstep, you open yourself to biospheric perception. Through a deliberate place-based gaze, by learning how to move between worlds, you allow those glimpses to last a little bit longer each time. By developing appreciation for the biosphere, in liberating your sense of wonder, in summoning praise and reverence, in contemplating the mystery and circumstances of processes that you can never fully understand, you feel a sense of gratitude and appreciation. You learn to honor biogeochemical cycles as intrinsic as your breath and thirst. You find your origins in the history of life on earth. You forge alliances and affiliations with people and species from all corners of the globe as you watch them pass through your neighbourhood. You summon praise for whatever lies behind this outstanding journey – Gaia, God, evolution? With the passing of praise comes the cause for celebration. (Thomashow 212)

Affect and advocacy – writing *The Sixth Creek*

Spinoza argued that affect is central to ethics and that as a consequence the artist occupies an important cultural position (143). To Spinoza, the power of reflective

understanding was of utmost importance since “the more the body is rendered capable of these things [being affected and being capable of affecting others] the more the mind is rendered capable of perceiving” (143). Therefore, if we follow Spinoza’s thinking that affect leads to perception which in turn leads to understanding, this positions the artist and writer as ethically critical in that they can generate the chain of affect impacting on perception leading to understanding that ultimately has the power to effect societal change. When it comes to ethical consideration of the non-human, affect and its power to shift perceptions has the potential to awaken an ethical drive to care for and about non-human nature. Poetry that inspires empathetic identification with non-human species has the power to transform our perceptions of them as unconscious, unfeeling beings of purely utilitarian value, disrupting our most deeply held anthropocentric assumptions and fostering thinking about new, imaginative ways of existing in the world alongside the species that share it with us.

The “Affective Fallacy”, a term coined by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in their essay of the same title in 1949, implied that judging a work by its emotional impact on the reader was misguided and the acceptance of this notion would have significant impact on the critical standing of the lyric in the second half of the twentieth century (Brooks 49). As an environmental advocate and writer I cannot help but be concerned for the *affect* or emotional impact of my writing. Indeed, I write with the desire to communicate and stimulate and, far from being detached from my subject, I am deeply interested in and concerned about the affect that my writing generates. In order to promote care for our ecosystems and compassion for non-human species we cannot overlook the literary potential of writing with affective intention and using the tools available to stimulate empathetic identification, including anthropomorphism and the pathetic fallacy.

Bennett argued that physical contact with nature is necessary if it is to be known and if a desire to preserve it is to be stimulated then it is essential for land to be explored by foot (“Get out of the house and go for a bushwalk: disciplining the flâneur” 60). My daily practice of walking in the catchment was undertaken with the intention of observing the landscape with the kind of close attention I desired to imbue in my subsequent poetry. However, I often found myself dwelling on the subject of ecopoetry during this daily practice. In particular, my concern was the issue of how to compose ecopoetry that satisfied common definitions while also fulfilling my own criteria about non-didactic bearing-witness and constituting place in order to encourage extension of ethical consideration to the non-human.

Bennett, in his writing on ecopoetry, recognised that the ecological crisis, more than a technological effect, is a cultural crisis and that traditional poetic forms such as the lyric, the georgic, the eclogue and the pastoral have failed to translate the depth of this human generated crisis into contemporary understanding (“I Blame Romanticism” np). Ecopoetry is a poetic form suited for correcting this and Bennett describes his delineation of the form in this way: “Ecopoetry is not traditional nature poetry updated; it avoids the pathetic fallacy, seeks out the ordinary not the sublime” (“I Blame Romanticism” np).

While my issues with use of the pathetic fallacy and anthropocentrism have been fully discussed in the chapter on Edward Abbey, I agree with Bennett’s further exposition on the subject of place and space put forward in his *Southerly* essay. He suggests that a poetics of space requires various elements including an ecological account of a place/space, a truly embodied account of dwelling and an enlarged aesthetic that appreciates attention as well as distraction, both investigation and reverie and responsibility as well as play (Bennett 54). Poems in *The Sixth Creek*

such as “Power cut”(28-29), “Body poem”(66), “Domestic ecology”(69-70) and “Vegetable garden”(74) illustrate my attempt to delineate an ecological account of space/place and an embodied account of dwelling. To analyse just one of these examples in the light of Bennett’s criteria, “Body poem” puts forward literal illustrations of embodied dwelling and enlarged aesthetic by transcending human scale and context, likening my prostrate skeleton to the topography of Basket Range in the line “My bones, the range curled from Ashton to Uraidla, valleys folded soft between my ribs” and my circulatory system to the waterways and air currents in “My blood, the shimmer wrinkling every summer surface, the wind combing through acacia veins”(66). Distraction, investigation and reverie can be seen in lines that leap between exploration of personality traits and physical places: “My tongue, the knobbed scatter of creek stones, loathe to shift from its cool, dark bed” (66). Playfulness is apparent in those lines indulging in self-mockery and borderline sentimentality such as: “My brain, encrustations of street art tucked away in Stirling’s back-ways, fluorescent anxieties layered with imaginings, sporadically whitewashed for public approval” and “My heart, a brown kelpie, gently breathing, asleep” (66).

“House work”(71), “Perseid meteor shower”(84), “The allegory of bin night”(72-73), “Fire track gate number 13”(47-49) and “The 820”(85) invoke a sense of distraction and play layered with ecological attention. An aesthetic that extends beyond human-scale is frequently attempted, examples being “The grand unifying question”(86), “Reading Fractals”(8) and “Body poem”(66). In fact, many poems overlap in meeting some or all of these criteria: exhibiting in the one poem a sense of play, multi-scaled perspectives, embodied habitation and ecological account of space/place. “The dam”(30-31) and “The animal within”(44-45) are two examples of poems that

attempt to check several of these ecopoetic boxes. To elaborate on the ecopoetic criteria contained in one of these examples, “The dam” is a play on the pastoral, invoking urban imagery to describe a rural riparian habitat. The opening lines set up the pastoral inversion: “This city hums tunelessly through the day / flashing nonchalant sequins at cockatoos”(30). The poem adopts both aerial and ground-level viewpoints, shifts focus between the microscopic (the springtail, a freshwater invertebrate) and macroscopic (the moon) and employs an ecocentric, non-hierarchical perspective by calling for humility in identifying humanity as an animal species.

Know yourself as you are
to the triumphant mouthed frog,
to the springtail twitching the surface,
and that ghostly lily pad, the moon.
Here, with still attention, accept yourself as a citizen.
Only now, in your animal skin
do you belong. (30-31)

Engagement with environmental issues is evident in all sections of *The Sixth Creek* but in particular the issue of climate change and fear of the consequences in the region is played out in Section III: “Edge of an Emergency”. The poems of this section are all concerned with the ecological and human impact of bushfire, which is the overriding consequence of climate change in the catchment. The section begins with “Fire track gate number 13”(47-49) which follows the structure of Wallace Steven’s poem “Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird”. The poems of this section recount the ecological and human history of Marble Hill which is a famous bushfire

ruin, describe community participation in fire fighting and conclude with a personal account of the catchment, the landscape and my home being threatened by bushfire.

Acknowledgement of feelings of fear of and alienation from the natural world are another important sub-theme in my collection. Despite my desire for reconnection and the attainment of ecocentric perspective, I wanted this work to illustrate my authentic relationship with the non-human world rather than resemble a work of eco-propaganda. There are instances when my separation from the natural world feels real and this is often as a result of fear of the uncontrollable nature of natural processes. Harking back to the second of Bryson's characteristics of ecopoetry and human humility in relationships with non-human nature and recognition of our lack of control over nature's essential wildness, the themes of fear and feelings of alienation are explored in the poem series "Edge of an Emergency" and the individual poem "Night walk"(87). In the latter, all sense of play is abandoned and the poem hinges on the walk occurring in my local area but this time in the dark. This poem explores the way a familiar landscape is perceived differently at night and how a place in which the subject feels secure during the day can stimulate fear in the absence of light.

Foreign as the nearest star
the forest leans in, a welcome I can't translate
new to the ecology of darkness I hurry
an immigrant reluctant to learn the tongue.

Untrammelled as fresh snow, the dark
holds all, even familiar trees dangle alien leaves
breath and feet quicken, grasses grasp my legs

but without sun they are strangers...

I am lame, heart hollow with fear
my eyes strain for the light of the known.

Then the vixen's song echoes in the quarry
the forest swarms with sound
I turn for home where clock and fire tick
the forest latching hard at my back. (87)

The final stanza illustrates how feelings of familiarity and belonging in terms of relationship with the landscape can be contingent on particular contexts and certain sets of conditions. The unseen can be quickly re-characterised as the unknown and, as a result, an instigator for fear and perceptions of alienation.

A poetics of space as envisioned by Bennett, requiring an enlarged aesthetic, alerts us to pay attention to the natural rather than pass through it in a distracted reverie, our mind on the day to day of living rather than what surrounds us. This kind of alert attention is the key to developing a placed-based gaze, an intimacy with the biosphere as it is observed in the local ecosystem or what Thomashaw calls biospheric perception (Thomashaw 212).

“Reading Fractals” in *The Sixth Creek* is the poem that best exemplifies my attempt to create a poetics of space, promote alertness to the ecological processes occurring all around us and inspire what Oliver might call “attention and devotion” to the natural world. Its placement at the start of the collection immediately following the Oliver quote is significant. The poem is also a tribute to Oliver’s “Wild Geese”, the poem that inspired me to set foot on the path I am currently travelling.

Does it surprise you how it seems good,
this world, viewed from your knees?
Just look. You are not repenting
anything, the actions or thoughts of the body
asked only to let go of what the mind loves.
I'm sure your assumptions are the same as mine
our teachers reading from the same books
on the how, but illiterate
to the italics of rain,
the fractal curl of landscape within landscape,
the galaxies shouldered in trees.
Down here droplets surge like rivers,
stones rinsed under tides of air.
What was seen yesterday will not appear again.
How can we ever be lonely?
This home is a wilderness impatient for imagination,
our voices rush into stutter, exclaiming the exciting
unearthing of this place
these tensile filaments webbing all things. (8)

This is the objective of the entire collection: to inspire close attention, knowledge of, love for and ultimately protection of the ecosystem that surrounds us. The poem introduces Section I in which the catchment's landscape, community and connections between them are described.

This ecological perception of space and its translation into text goes beyond conventional landscape depictions such as the pastoral or georgic, as it encompasses

the macro and the micro, the large-scale ecological processes and the microscopic. Humans are fully immersed in their environments and these environments are dynamic, multi-sensory and operate beyond at levels and scales that are often beyond human perception (Bennett “Get out of the House, Go for a Bushwalk” 60).

Being outside, walking, paying close attention and bearing witness to natural processes will not solve environmental problems. However, it will allow for learning about the local, instil a sense of being present in the world and hopefully stimulate both a sense of place and sense of wonder. The hope is that these feelings will lead to the generation of a sense of empathy towards the non-human world and desire to protect it. I feel that as a way to change the world this may be a worthy point of origin.

Chapter 4

Owning the activist: the poetry of Judith Wright and Louise

Crisp

In 1994 I attended an environmental protest that was to prove a pivotal event in my life. It was not the first protest I had been involved in, having attended various feminist, anti-war and social justice rallies during my undergraduate days. This particular gathering was to protest against the development of a marina and a bridge linking Hindmarsh Island to Goolwa in South Australia. Elder women from the Ngarrindjeri community held that the land under development was sacred to them but they could not and would not reveal the reasons on cultural and spiritual grounds. This “secret women’s business”, as it came to be termed, ignited political controversy and the protests against the Hindmarsh Island bridge and marina saw an alliance develop between Indigenous rights groups, environmental groups and local residents. I stood in the crowd listening to impassioned speakers, one after the other, stand up and speak about the issues, particularly (as we called it at the time) the intersection of green and black politics. Finally, one speaker stood up, took the microphone and read a poem by Judith Wright. It was “Australia 1970”. By the time the final stanzas were read I was more than moved; I was ignited.

For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
more than scorpion or snake
and dying from the venoms that we make
even while you die of us

I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust,
the dying creek, the furious animal
that they oppose us still;
that we are ruined by the thing we kill. (*Collected Poems* 292)

Judith Wright once again became a potent figure in my life as I approached the writing of *The Sixth Creek*. I had always attributed to the power of her words the initial inspiration that led me to study ecology and environmentalism. The fire ignited by her poetry had illuminated my path towards environmental activism. However, now that I was writing poetry with a sub-textual activist agenda, she was becoming an even more significant figure to my work.

Ecocentrism and the home as habitat in the poetry of Judith Wright

Australian poet, intellectual and political activist Judith Wright, unlike the other writers examined in this exegesis, cannot strictly be labeled a bioregional writer. While her most famous and iconic work dealt with the contentious settlement history of her family's pastoral holdings in the New England region of New South Wales, she wrote these poems while living in Queensland, at a far remove from the landscapes in which the poems were based. Poems such as "South of my Days", "Bullocky" and "Nigger's Leap, New England" dealt with the fraught relationships between settlers, Indigenous people and the Australian landscape; themes that would preoccupy Wright throughout her career as a poet, public intellectual and activist.

Australian scholar and poet Philip Mead, in his comprehensive analysis of Wright's life and poetry, described her writing as conservative in style and traditional in its version of lyricism yet simultaneously subversive in its critique of the

construction of national identity and its expression of environmental consciousness (271). Wright was descended from one of the original pastoral families that had settled New England soon after first European contact and felt that her family's regional legacy was one of Indigenous dispossession, white settlement and questionable land management practices. Wright's poetry and activism on behalf of environmental causes and Indigenous rights were informed by her personal experiences of landscape and family history rather than purely ideological or academic positions (Mead 279). From her earliest work, Wright delves into her past and explores the tension she experiences between her deep connection to her childhood landscapes and her family's settler history of Indigenous dispossession.

Wright clearly expresses her deep connection to the rural New England landscapes she knew as a child in the iconic poem "South of My Days", published in her first collection *The Moving Image* in 1946.

As is clear from the first line, "South of my day's circle, part of my blood's country / rises that tableland,..." (*The Moving Image* 28) Wright is writing about her homeland from a distance. At the time of composition she was living in Queensland and using her distance from New England in both time and space to articulate her feelings of connection to the landscape and her unease with her relationship to its white history.

In her later critical writings on Australian poetry, Wright speaks of the depth of knowledge about landscape and history she feels is necessary before poetry of place can be written effectively, saying: "Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's imagination can move unhindered, it must be first observed, understood, described and, as it were, absorbed" (*Preoccupations in Australian Poetry* xviii).

In hindsight, Wright justified her preoccupation with writing about the Australian landscape and its human history as stemming from both a sense of guilt and an acknowledgement of Indigenous dispossession claiming “I have, I suppose, been trying to expiate a deep sense of guilt over what we have done to the country, to its first inhabitants of all kinds, and are still and increasingly doing” (*Because I Was Invited* 172).

In writing *The Sixth Creek* I experienced similar undercurrents of guilt over the dispossession of the Peramangk people, whose lands comprised what is now named the Mount Lofty Ranges. At the time of writing the poetry my research uncovered a wealth of material concerning the white settlers but very little on the original inhabitants who had been swiftly moved off their lands as the region was colonised. I refer to the overwhelmingly white focus of history in the region in the poem “Marble Hill III; Weight of loss” which details an excursion to the ruins of the Governor’s residence on the 26th of January 2011: “The people here all seem the kind that would know the second verse to the national anthem and are unlikely to have any friends that call this Invasion Day” (*The Sixth Creek* 54).

The Sixth Creek catchment has the only permanent creek within the central Mount Lofty region and retains more than forty percent of its original native vegetation cover, compared with an average seven percent for the entire Mount Lofty Ranges due to the steep and often inaccessible nature of the terrain (Sixth Creek Catchment Group np). These conditions meant that the catchment was a steep and densely vegetated region that was particularly wet and cold during the winter months. Peramangk communities would generally move down to the warmer grasslands to the east in the winter, a region that was swiftly depopulated by disease and appropriated by white settlers post-colonisation (Coles 16, 112 & 114). Little publically accessible

evidence of Peramangk occupation remains within the Sixth Creek catchment, with the exception of some rock art within what is now called Giles Conservation Park (Coles 201). These sites are being documented and not repainted as the late Richard Hunter, traditional custodian of Peramangk art sites, believed the works couldn't be retouched (Coles 214). Not being of Indigenous heritage, I did not feel it appropriate to attempt an imaginative rendering of the Peramangk lives or perspectives pre-colonisation. However, the issue of dispossession needed to be acknowledged. The poem "Horsnell Gully" is an example of an attempt to acknowledge the original presence of the Peramangk people and explore my assumptions about the various filters through which we perceive the landscape, including scientific classification of flora and fauna and a less anthropocentric, more ecocentric ecological model.

I am searching for Peramangk rock art
tucked away
like secret letters hidden
at the first sound of footsteps.

People sat here once
looking over the plain to the sea,
back when the fabric was whole.

They painted in red and white ochre
symbols, stories, cyphers
stashed under rock overhangs,
the shadows a vault with rusted locks.

With scalpel eyes, I dissect what's bare,
Platycercus elegans subadelaidae nesting high
in the polyp-plump hollows of *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*
I dismember the arcane with precision...

Eyes sharp with taxonomic conceit
I begin the autopsy, *Eucalyptus obliqua*
leaf leather still turgid, shattered heartwood moist amberpink
time of death - last night's storm...

These lessons lie open
to all eyes, this world
asking to be tasted with more
than human tongues. (13-14)

Unlike the bioregional focus of *The Sixth Creek*, the poems of Wright's *The Moving Image* are not all set in New England, which is why I am not claiming her collection as a cohesive bioregional text as noted above. Nor do any of her subsequent collections deal exclusively with a particular geographic region. However, as scholar Brigid Rooney observes in her history of activists among Australia's literary intellectuals, *The Moving Image* is a significant work in terms of the poetry of place and eco-poetic representations of the Australian landscape as it represents one of the first tremors in Australian poetry to jostle the foundations of contemporary conceptions of national identity (9). The New England poems also express conceptions of home and homeland that Wright will continually revisit, reimagine and politicise throughout her work, which makes her poetry on this subject significant to

this study. In addition, Wright's recognition within the canon of Australian poetry as an activist poet whose environmental politics are grounded in personal experiences of her local landscapes makes her writing highly pertinent to this exegesis.

Philip Mead, in his comprehensive analysis of Wright's oeuvre, characterises the primary aspects of Wright's work to be poetry and local oppositional politics (284). As an environmentalist, Wright's advocacy was grounded in her experience of ecological threat to her local landscapes such as her opposition to the development of coastal and hinterland areas of South East Queensland and oil-drilling on the Great Barrier Reef. While much of Wright's work engages with environmental, political and social justice themes, especially Indigenous sovereignty and rights, I wish to concentrate my analysis on a particular poem sequence in order to focus on bioregional and ecocentric themes within Wright's extensive catalogue. Despite environmental and social justice activism preoccupying Wright's life and work so extensively, I will discuss the activist themes embedded in *The Sixth Creek* when exploring the work of Louise Crisp later in this chapter.

In Wright's poetic imaginings and descriptions of "home", I wish to refer to a nine-part poem series titled "Habitat" published in the collection *Alive* as an example of a Wright poem that expresses a deep connection to place yet paradoxically is geographically non-specific (*Alive: Poems, 1971-72* 1-13). The poem also conveys an ecocentric philosophical perspective and in doing so manages to be both profoundly political yet non-didactic.

Throughout Wright's poetry there is a continual exploration of her experience of the world using the dichotomous concepts of inside and outside. Philip Mead posits that Wright's early work attempted to understand the dialectic of inside / outside in terms of gender, with inside being feminised space and the outside a male

domain (313). Wright's biographer Veronica Brady suggests it was Wright's experience of motherhood that prompted this gendering of space in her work (Brady 147). In later works her inside/outside symbolism broadens away from gender into ideas of outside representing freedom and geographic space and inside representing the limitations of social convention (Mead 313). By the time of writing the "Habitat" sequence, however, Wright's ideas on the symbolic load of the inside/outside dichotomy have undergone a transformation. For Wright in the 1970s, the inside has shed its negative, constrictive and gendered baggage, and come to represent not only a positive space but also a habitat (314). Brady sees Wright's work of this period as becoming more relational and moving away from studying individual objects. In this way Wright's poetry was echoing scientific thinking of the time in terms of recognizing ecological interdependencies and the place of humanity as part of the ecosystem and subject to its laws (Brady 148).

In the "Habitat" sequence, the inside is now as much an ecological landscape as the outside had been in the New England poems of the mid 1940s. Again, in sharp contrast to the early New England poems, this domestic habitat, this interior is not a specific geographic space and it is not named. This can be read as a deliberate allusion to the practice of colonial naming of place being yet another form of Indigenous dispossession (Mead 315). The unnamed and yet beloved space in "Habitat" is an inclusive rendering of "home", a domicile for both non-human and human inhabitants.

The house, in being termed and described as a habitat, is rendered as being a part of nature and here Wright's writing takes on a clearly ecocentric perspective. Rather than anthropomorphising the house, the house is instead described as an ecological object, a part of both the human and non-human world. In representing a

dwelling in this way Wright is removing any sense of species hierarchy, a common value system that generally has humans at its peak. In the “Habitat” poem, humanity is counted as just one species among many who share this ecological location. The lack of specificity acts not only to free the location in space and time but it is also freed from the cultural and historical baggage of dispossession, settler history and damaging land use practices and as a result allows ecological connectivity and interdependence of species to be brought into focus. In section III this is made explicit by listing some of the non-human species that call the house home – possums, mice, spiders – just to name a few. The final lines spell it out: “Symbiosis – / that’s our fate, / my wooden house” (*Alive: Poems, 1971-72* 4).

This is not to say that the house’s human history is under-represented. In fact, it is just the opposite, with all the poem’s sections delivered from the human perspective and time-scale. Yet the lack of time and place context and the avoidance of pathetic fallacy and anthropomorphism privileges an ecocentric mindset and speaks to a recognition of ecological symbiosis between the human, the built environment and the non-human. Section II elucidates the house’s history as shelter from extremes of climate and weather. Section IV evokes images of the furniture as organic material with a lifecycle that includes death and decay. Taken as a whole, the poem series celebrates a more environmentally sustainable concept of habitation and an ecocentric perspective at a time when such thinking was truly radical in Australian culture. As Mead states: “Wright provides a kind of Gaian, post-national and reconciled myth of habitation and dwelling at the opposite end of her poetic work from the “national” landscape of New England” (326-7).

Interestingly, “Habitat” is the Mt Tambourine residence from which “South of My Days” was envisioned (Mead 327). The ecological, ecocentric perspective of

“Habitat” and the subversion of the European historical notion of landscape and settlement are what make this an effective activist poem.

Wright’s ecocentric linking of the concepts of house, home and ecosystem were fundamental to the writing of *The Sixth Creek*. The evolution of ecological thinking has moved beyond the assumption that the term “nature” refers only to the wild as is demonstrated in the now common use of the concept “urban environments”. This development in terminology illustrates inclusive thinking in which humanity is now an accepted facet of the natural world, no longer considered separate or elevated from the rest of non-humanity. While writing *The Sixth Creek* I attempted, through ecological observations and entwining natural and personal worlds, to explore ecocentric perceptions and valuations of nature while simultaneously paying tribute to Wright’s influence in both my development as a poet and her role as a radical thinker in Australian literature.

The poem “Domestic Ecology” is both a tribute to and a contemporary, but vastly truncated, rendering of Wright’s “Habitat” sequence, flattening and upending hierarchies and explicating the house as an ecosystem functioning as habitat at a variety of scales rather than an ecological niche for one species.

This house, its DNA and mine interwoven,
each stone’s mortar churned
with water first sluiced over my body
marrying cells, lint, spirals of hair
into the calcium of the walls’ stretch.

We raised these walls foot by foot
until they housed us, squatting

over camp stoves, windows just holes for wind,
this process the antithesis of burrowing
but the product the warm, safe same...

Life layers itself through this house
in uneasy coexistence. Rats and snakes
rustle in the cool world of footings...
Bats in the chimney shuffle lashings of soot,
dogs sleep on couches, cats claim the bed.
The hierarchy of species stretches, then lies flat.
I feed us, the birds, those creatures flashing
for notice. The house picks up the pieces
and feeds the unseen with the rich harvest
of leftovers, a surplus for the hidden,
microscopic worlds curled in the compost,
the septic tank, the folds of our skin. (69-70)

The concept of house and home are fundamental to what commonly constitutes the cornerstone of Australian suburban identity: the “Australian dream” of the freehold quarter-acre block. By representing the Australian home as a site of ecological reconciliation Wright has subverted contemporary conceptions of Australian national identity and raised the still unresolved issues of urban and suburban environmental degradation and Aboriginal dispossession (Mead 328).

Wright was clearly a radical, not only in her political views but in her attempts to weave together the two strands of her professional career: poetry and activism. It is a credit to the strength of her commitment to both that she continued to write poetry

possessing political themes as long as she did at a time when poetry itself was gradually becoming marginalised and considered an elitist form of cultural expression (Mead 330). As Mead states:

The idea that there could be some positive articulation of the relations between policy and aesthetics, or between poetics and the social conditions of postmodernity, was literally unthinkable. In this sense, Wright felt and understood personally the failure of poetry as a social technology and an ethico-political practice. (331)

It was not until the turn of the twenty-first century and the rise of the fields of ecopoetics and ecocriticism that Wright's work was revalued and her position as a ground-breaking and influential activist poet working ahead of her time established in the Australian literary canon. Writers working at the intersections of language, land management and ecological thought have come to consider Wright an intellectual and creative pioneer (Rooney 5-6). It is now a common assumption in the environmental movement to accept creative practitioners, not just as allies, but also as important disseminators of politicised messages to the broader community. This is due to contemporary social acceptance of the notion that to motivate political activism the community must be emotionally moved to engage in direct action. Creative production is seen as a means of stimulating empathy and acknowledgement of interconnectivity, including with place and the non-human, and as a result the linking of artistic practice with social praxis is accepted within the tradition of contemporary political activism.

John Kinsella and Patrick Jones are examples of contemporary ecopoets whose creative practice straddles the fields of literature and activism. For Jones poetry, activism and family life are all creatively intertwined in what he terms

“permapoesis”. This concept of permanent making is a holistic creative practice that combines ethics and politics with activist praxis in such a way that every aspect of family life is both art and activism (Jones np). Kinsella is critical of writing in a time of catastrophe: “My problem with all writing is that it is a delaying tactic: we still make use of the tools of destruction to create and disseminate it” (Fagan, Kinsella and Minter 2). Nevertheless, he does not let this hinder his prolific creative production, regularly publishing ecopoetry, essay and short story collections over the last decade, all exploring ecological and post-colonial themes.

While the environmental movement generally accepts these links between creative and political practice there still lingers within the literary establishment some reticence in accepting that politicised literature can be of high literary merit (Mead 334). As Mead notes, it is a judgmental cliché that has unfortunately characterised much critical analysis of Wright’s work, promoting the assumption that significant literary achievement is fundamentally incompatible with social and political action (335). It is fortunate that the recent development of the field of ecocriticism and the work of post-colonial writers and scholars has provided a place outside the traditional boundaries of literary criticism in which work such as Wright’s, with its use of historical, Indigenous and ecological language, can now be analysed and discussed with reference to its concern for environmental degradation and social justice.

“The only way I know to write is to walk”: Louise Crisp and field notes as poetic activism

I cannot claim to have come across the poetry of Louise Crisp prior to embarking on either the composition of the creative work or the exegetical component. Unlike the

other writers discussed in this exegesis, as a poet her work had not been significant to my development as an environmentalist or writer prior to writing *The Sixth Creek*. I read Crisp's work in the hope that her poetry collections, which were inspired by the Gippsland region, could be considered bioregional and I wanted to explore the commonalities and differences between Crisp's writing about her home region and my own. In addition, I felt that the exegesis needed to include an examination of the work of a contemporary Australian ecopoet.

Louise Crisp lives in the East Gippsland region of Victoria and published her first collection, *The luminous ocean*, in 1988 in a shared volume with Valery Wilde's *In the Half-Light*. Her subsequent collections of poetry include *Pearl & Sea Fed* (1994), *Ruby Camp: a Snowy River series* (1998) and *Uplands* (2007).

Crisp's poetic language is particular to her place in terms of her extensive ecological knowledge of the Gippsland region. This heavily forested upland landscape is Crisp's geographical and political site of concern, with activism being a consistent theme in much of her work as a result of the dual threats to the ecological health of the region from forestry and mining. Crisp's poetry is characterised by concise and literal representation of country, written from the perspective of a poet and an environmental advocate who has a non-hierarchical and ecocentric perspective on her landscape.

Crisp's "Valley" in *Uplands* (85) expresses a combination of perspectives including the ecological, human, non-human, local and global with the poem working in a way that creates both a sense of place and a sense of the poet's identity (Costello np). This poem explores the connections the poet feels to her home, the landscape, its history and its biota and the ways in which they have interwoven to create her sense of self.

A friend says: you grew up in hard country
meaning, you were free to wander. The dry hills
pelting me with loneliness. A black kelpie
followed my horse. We ate from fruit trees
of abandoned houses around the gold diggings.
The valley was in permanent drought. Words were
infrequent as rain. Even the creek stopped flowing.
The dry hill was my home and words were thoughts
uttered in silence. No one to encounter them
but the trees, friendly as the pitch black dark.
How else can I explain myself? (*Uplands* 85)

Crisp's prose-poem "The Walk" in the journal *Ecopoetics* employs a similarly clear subjectivity but without any ego-centrism attached to this perspective. While the poet is positioned directly within the scene, the self is only mentioned as a means of stating a relationship to the landscape and as a vehicle for proffering observations of the environment in which the self is embedded. "I wanted to lie down in the sun. Yearning was not a / useful thing to encourage so I curled up in the shade, just a glint of sun slip /-ping down the leaves of the apple box like a waterfall" (Crisp in Skinner 27).

On discovering Crisp's work I was drawn to her straightforward use of language and the way in which she avoided metaphor and lyric description in her construction of the sense of being in the landscape. From reading *Uplands* it was clear that much of Crisp's intimate knowledge and imagery stemmed from close observation as a result of regular walking in these landscapes. However, it was not until I read examples of her long-form poetry that I found the work of Crisp's that

would eventually come deeply influence the themes and construction of the manuscript for *The Sixth Creek*. “Wild Succession” would inspire the field guide composition of the second section of *The Sixth Creek* and Crisp’s non-didactic but clear advocacy for the wild would influence my choice to include various poems that I had previously felt to be too overtly activist in their voice and intention.

Her poems “Remnants” in *Cordite* (“Remnants” np) and “Wild Succession” published in *Plumwood Mountain* (“Wild Succession” 1-17) are clearly the result of Crisp undertaking a regular practice of walking the land throughout the year, observing place and species closely, recording ecological changes and the thoughts the landscape inspires. In fact, the opening line to Crisp’s poem “Walk” is “The only way I know to write is to walk” (Skinner 27). While non-didactic in voice and tone, Crisp’s opinion on the various land-use practices employed in the Gippsland region, such as logging and mining, are clear throughout her work. Crisp records the prevalence of weed species in native forests, the presence of heavy metals from leaking tailings dams left by mining companies and the ecological devastation wreaked by historical and contemporary farming practices. She uses non-judgmental language in plain-speak statements and observations of place but the subtext regarding the environmental effects of human land use is unequivocal.

VI. Blond Bay Wildlife Reserve

Hog deer hunting season hasn’t yet begun. Four-wheel drive tracks cut deep into the steep dunes. Romawi Run taken up for black wattle bark and burnt continually until moving sands shifted inland in the late 1950’s. At the northern end of the reserve a few red gums wait together under the wide slope of cleared land running all the way down to Lake Victoria. At Waddy Point, waves lap

mussel shells, beer cans and a discarded nappy under old saw banksias.

(“Remnants” np)

2nd October

Deep pot-holed tracks

wend

through Moormung (Forest) Reserve

– clans of determined Murnong *Microseris lanceolata*

inhabit hard ground

thin grassland –

cattle grazed until two decades ago:

eliminated scores of understory species. (“Wild Succession” 4)

She makes her ecological judgments and activist intentions clear and not just in her creative work. “To care for a place, however, involves more than simply feeling a fondness for it” (“Louise Crisp: The Other Side of the Snowy” np). Crisp calls for coordinated community action to protect those places ecologically imperiled by human industry or land use practices. Resistance is called for, taking a stand – this is the language of her prose and the sub-text of her poetry. “Where is the vision that will protect Corringale Lagoon? Where is the vision that will protect the Snowy River? All the communities along its length have been fighting for its survival. They depend upon the health of the river. We all do” (“Louise Crisp: The Other Side of the Snowy” np).

Louise Crisp’s “Wild Succession” in *Plumwood Mountain* is an account of a year-long traverse and poetic biological survey of a familiar and ecologically endangered terrain. (“Wild Succession” 1-17) From the 19th of August 2011 to the 16th of August 2012 Crisp explores remnant patches of the Gippsland Red Gum

Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grasslands ecological community which was listed as critically endangered in 2009, recording her observations of the species she sees and the land use practices that effect the ecological functioning and survival of these vegetation communities. The poem is multi-faceted: a catalogue of primarily flora (including both common and Linnaean nomenclature), an account of two hundred years of human impact on a biodiverse grassland ecosystem and a poet's journal of mindful attention to non-human species and human impact upon them. Her style emulates the observations recorded within a field notebook and she does not shy away from judgment.

19 August 2011

Across Fernbank Reserve

Golden moths fly among the legs of black cattle

Diuris lanceolata

A muddy track through the gate to water

The department is reluctant to act with alacrity

Grazing licence re-issued over rare grassland...

23 September

Last spring where purple Diuris

Diuris punctata

At Fernbank crossing

Spread along the high bank

Above the rail-line

And billy buttons, copper wire *Craspedia variabilis*, *Podolepis jaceoides*,

Daisy, common rice-flower, leopard

Pimelea humilis, *Diuris pardina*,

Orchids and chocolate lilies *Arthropodium strictum*

All mingled

Among the sparse

Kangaroo grass *Themeda triandra*

There are three Diuris and two rice-flowers

Since V-Line slashed

The rail-side flower field. (“Wild succession” 1)

Despite the field note style and calling to account regarding human impact on the ecosystem, the poem is not without humour or the occasional break from literal description. Crisp uses a lighthearted touch by listing the likely model of hoons’ car as if it were a species name.

30th September...

Wire fences repeatedly cut

By local hoons *Toyota Hilux*

Intent on the direct route

Through to farmland. (“Wild succession” 4)

Her species observations are not mere cataloguing of species, her descriptions of ecological interaction occasionally allowing metaphor.

4th July...

red correa in a tangle of yellow spike wattle *Correa reflexa, Acacia*

oxycedrus

strikes a match against the bitter cold. (“Wild succession” 14)

The final stanza is particularly powerful in its combination of simile and statement of the impending extinction of this ecological community.

& elsewhere

in the isolated fragments of remnant grassland:
rare sites like exquisite stars
flaring intensely
before they are extinguished
one by one
and the darkening sky of the red gum plains
is
emptied. ("Wild succession" 17)

Crisp's ability to weave poetry from the literal style and format of field notes played a significant role in the conception and composition of section II of *The Sixth Creek*. My initial intention had been to write a series of poems focusing on flora and fauna species endemic to the catchment. However, "Wild succession" spurred me to move beyond consideration of only species indigenous to the region and instead create a section looking at species as part of a functioning ecosystem: a field guide, of sorts, to local flora and fauna, which didn't exclude environmentally damaging, introduced species such as colonial and post-colonial humans. To emphasise the non-hierarchical theme of this field guide section I chose to conclude it with "The animal within", a poem acknowledging my animal nature.

Until reading Crisp's work, my embryonic manuscript for *The Sixth Creek* had been a collection of poems influenced quite strongly by the poetry of Mary Oliver in terms of the form and intensity of the poetry's environmental advocacy. A prime objective of the work was to encourage close observation in order to bear witness to and foster knowledge about the natural world, thereby indirectly promoting activism through stimulating empathy and care for the non-human. In this way my manuscript was an Oliver-inspired attempt at bearing witness to my local catchment. However,

the activist within me was struggling with this limitation. I wrote several poems that I subsequently removed from the manuscript, deeming them too didactic and thus not adhering to the approach I had shaped around my interpretation of Oliver's method. My experience as an environmental campaigner had taught me a great deal about effective communication. Most significantly I learned that if you are perceived as either trying to convey a moral point or inhabiting a moral high ground then the recipient of the information is likely to either ignore you or feel insulted. Avoidance of the perception of being patronising or telling your audience how to think was a key factor in encouraging receptivity. With this in mind, early drafts of *The Sixth Creek* saw me eliminate any poems from the collection in which my political or ethical position was too blatantly stated.

Reading the poetry of Louise Crisp and Judith Wright I felt like I had been given permission to step back into the role of advocate. It was a carefully placed step and several of the poems that had been removed as too didactic were not returned on the basis of quality control; I felt they were not of a high enough standard regardless of their didactic tone or activist intent. However, the collection eventually came to contain several poems I would classify as activist in both imagery and message, some examples being "The hunt" (25-26) which is an account of saving ducks from duck shooters, "The revegetation equation"(17-18) which recounts the experience of preparing tube-stock for a guerilla gardening native revegetation project and "Tried to save the world but she ran me down"(88-89), a biographical poem about my activist experience. Originally, the activist poems were corralled into the final section of *The Sixth Creek*. My reasoning was that the preceding sections were intended to foster a desire for connection with the natural world and stimulate wonder and devotion through close attention to aspects of the non-human that are commonly overlooked.

My original design was for Section I to break down boundaries between the home, the community and the bush, Section II to function as a basic field guide to species of the catchment, Section III to deal with fire and the effects of climate change while section IV constructed the home and human environment as an ecosystem. The work undertaken by the final section (V) was to inspire advocacy and encourage the transformation of the expanded environmental ethic hopefully generated by the first three sections into praxis.

However, in the final draft I reconsidered this position and eventually reconfigured the poem order so that the poems I deemed more activist were littered throughout the collection rather than collected in the final section. The reason for this was the realisation that these poems spoke about my history and character and it seemed important for the cohesion and readability of the work as a whole that these elements to appear earlier in the collection rather than be relegated to the end. Since the idea behind the inclusion of such poems as “Hope is a perennial”(11-13) and “Tried to save the world but she ran me down”(88-89) is for any inspiration to environmental praxis to be tempered by my experience of activism and the potential pitfalls of compassion fatigue, it seemed fitting that this become a narrative thread throughout the collection rather than a moralising lesson at the end. The intention in writing the *The Sixth Creek* was not to overtly incite readers into direct action activism. Rather, it was written from a desire to encourage empathy with other species with whom we share the planet.

Conclusion

This exegesis has described the ways in which various nature writers, across genres from epistolary prose to ecopoetics, have influenced the method of production, objectives and underpinning philosophy of my creative work *The Sixth Creek*.

My educational and professional background introduced me to the majority of the writers examined here but it was the process of planning and writing of *The Sixth Creek* that ultimately allowed me to tease out the elements that spoke to me most forcefully and integrate them into a text.

As a writer, I am certainly not alone in believing in creative writing's potential to stimulate, provoke and promote change in the world. As an environmentalist, I see the creative arts as powerful tools in humanity's challenge to find ways to exist within our ecological means. As a white, economically privileged, environmentally conscious writer, the act of being outside with my feet in rhythmic contact with the ground is a way of strengthening my relationship with the Earth as a home. In writing the poems of *The Sixth Creek* I walked as creative practice; I was in the landscape as a subject, actively observing, interpreting and deliberately invoking a mindset in which the mind, body and the world were integrated, a condition that Solnit describes in *Wanderlust; A History of Walking* "as though [mind, body and the world] were three characters finally in conversation with each other"(5). It was the daily practice of cultivating this state of mind that stimulated my sense of "being in place" and its creative interpretation in poetry.

My experience in the environment movement left me with a conviction that it will only be through a transition from anthropocentrism towards ecocentrism that

humanity will be able to limit the critical damage it is currently inflicting on ecosystems worldwide. As a predominantly urban / suburban species, humanity, particularly socio-economically privileged Northern humans, are becoming increasingly alienated from the ecosystems that support them. I believe that reconnection with the non-human world can be facilitated by individuals reforging connections with their local environments, developing relationships that foster a sense of care and responsibility for their home as a habitat. *The Sixth Creek* is my attempt at speaking of my encounters with the non-human, my acknowledgment of my local area as an ecosystem and my consideration of non-human neighbours as valued members of my community who are deserving of ethical consideration.

White, Abbey, Oliver, Wright and Crisp all worked, or still work, in a variety of genres but they have all shared a common practice of habitual walking through their local environs, valuing the non-human for its inherent rather than instrumental worth and translating their interpretations of these peripatetic experiences into text. In doing so, these writers extend the reach of their walking, thinking and their ethical valuation and consideration of the non-human beyond the local into the global. They do this by enabling others, perhaps others who are disconnected from their local landscapes, to enter into the experience with them, view the world through a filter that notices what can lie unnoticed, value what has previously seemed only useful.

By walking in the Sixth Creek catchment, attempting to capture the sense of being immersed in place, imagining the landscape in times past and from the perspective of other species and then translating those imaginings into poetry, I desired to encourage the expansion of ethical consideration to the natural world. I wanted my encounters with the outside world to reframe ethical limits to encompass the non-human and to stimulate ecocentric thinking.

The choice of Edward Abbey was made on the grounds of his significance to my development as an activist but it was his critique of the environmentally destructive consequences of anthropocentrism and dedication to challenging anthropocentric paradigms in his writing that led me to *Desert Solitaire*. Abbey's struggle to attain an ecocentric outlook and erase anthropomorphism from his work 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. It was following Abbey's attempts to meet his own strict criteria that exposed the barriers to total elimination of human-centred thinking. My attempts to transcend anthropocentrism and human-centred perception in communication were critical to the resolution that if elimination was not feasible, then anthropocentrism and, in particular, anthropomorphism, could be put to instrumental use in *The Sixth Creek* in terms of aiding expansion of ethical consideration to the non-human world.

The desire to write ecopoetry that declared an ecocentric perspective yet did not eschew anthropomorphism in working towards the objective of promulgating transformative ethics led to thinking about methods of advocacy in poetry. My activist and campaigning experience had taught me the ineffectiveness of overt didacticism in terms of achieving eco-conscious behavioural change. With this in mind, I chose to examine the poetry of Mary Oliver in terms of its potential function as environmental advocacy. I found Oliver's poetry functioned as a form of advocacy through her technique of drawing focussed attention to ecological interconnectivity in her landscape. Oliver's poems bear witness in an activist sense to the natural world and her attempts to construct an ecocentric perspective function, in my opinion, as

environmental advocacy by encouraging the expansion of empathy and ethical concern beyond the human.

The exegesis then turned to the Australian landscape and poets whose work can be read as having ecopoetic intent. Australian poets Judith Wright and Louise Crisp have written extensively about Australian landscapes and the environmental impact of human activity post-colonisation and as such their work was examined with particular focus on ecocentrism. While *The Sixth Creek*, as an attempt at advocacy, was primarily modelled on the method of bearing witness employed by Mary Oliver, the work of Wright and Crisp proved powerful stimuli to the inclusion of more overtly didactic activist poems that strove to meet the underlying advocacy intentions of the work.

The Sixth Creek and this exegesis were intended to illuminate and contextualise each other. They are the dual result of an ecocritical examination of how nature writers can affect environmental ethics far beyond the scope of their subject landscapes. Through inspiring reconnection with the non-human world and reforging connections with local environments, these writers' works foster the development of a sense of care and responsibility for home as habitat and habitat as home.

Auden may assert that "poetry makes nothing happen" however I would argue that nature writing, in general, and ecopoetry, in particular, wakes us up as a society and makes us alert to other possibilities, other ways of thinking and being in the world. Despite the issues of attaining an ecocentric perspective and use of the pathetic fallacy and anthropomorphism in *The Sixth Creek*, I feel the collection sits within the genre of ecopoetry as a text that bears witness to a particular landscape, actively attempts to stimulate ecocentric thinking and constitutes an embodied interpretation of my home as an ecological habitat and my relationship with the non-

human beings that share it with me. Whether or not these poems stimulate a process of ecological learning that may lead to feelings of responsibility and eventual protection is an open question. Therefore, it seems fitting that *The Sixth Creek* ends with an equally ambiguous answer to what the future may hold - “only the fire can say”(95).

Works cited

- Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968. Print.
- . *Down the River*. New York: Dutton, 1982. Print.
- . *The Journey Home: Some words in defense of the American West*. New York: Dutton, 1977. Print.
- . *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. 1975. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.
- Alexander, Donald. "Bioregionalism: Science or Sensibility." *Environmental Ethics* 12.2 (1990): 161-73. Print.
- Alizadeh, Ali. "Transgressive Lyric: Teaching Ecopoetry in a Transcultural Space." *Ecopoetics and Pedagogies special issue Angelaki* 14.2 (2009): 51–61.
- Auden, W. H. "The Public V. The Late Mr. William Butler Yeats." *The Partisan Review* Spring (1939): 46-51. Print.
- Auden, W.H. "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" *Another Time* London: Faber & Faber, 1940. Print.
- Balius, Jeremy. *Outcrop - Radical Australian Poetry of Land*. Ed. Jeremy Balius and Corey Wakeling. Australia: Black Rider Press, 2013. Print.
- Bennett, John. "Get out of the House, Go for a Bushwalk: Disciplining the Flaneur." *Southerly* 65.3 (2005-6): 54-68. Print.
- Bennett, John. "I Blame Romanticism: extract from 2010 Poetry Festival" *John Bennett – a commonplace book blog*. 2010. Web.1.9.2015
- Berg, P and Dasmann, R. "Reinhabiting California." *The Ecologist* 7 (1977): 399-401. Print.

- Best, Steven and Anthony J. Nocella II. *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals*. New York: Lantern Books, 2004. Print
- Bishop, Geoffrey & Roz McGowan. *Tier on Tier: A History of Basket Range*. South Australia: Investigator Press, 1985. Print.
- Brady, Veronica. "The Poetry of Judith Wright and Ways of Rejoicing in the World." *The Littoral Zone: Australian contexts and their writers*. ed Cranston, C.A. & R. Zeller. Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2007. 145-152. Print.
- Brooks, David. "The Fallacies: Theory, Saturation Capitalism and the Animal" *Southerly* 73/2 (2013): 47-60. Print.
- Bryson, J. Scott. *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2002. Print.
- . *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space & Ecopoetry*. University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 2005. Print.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962. Print.
- Chinna, Nandi. "Poepatetics: walking and writing in the Anthropocene" *Westerly* 60.1. (2015): 50-61. Print.
- Coles, Robin and Hunter, Richard *The Ochre Warriors : Peramangk culture and rock art in the Mount Lofty Ranges*. South Australia: Axiom, 2010. Print.
- Costello, Moya. "To See: A Literary Ecological Point of View (Some Australian Examples of Ecocritical Creative Writing, with Particular Emphasis on the Prose Poem)." *TEXT* 2013. Web. 8.12 2014.

- Coupe, Laurence, ed. *The Green Studies Reader : From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*.
London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Cranston, C.A. & R. Zeller. *The Littoral Zone: Australian contexts and their writers*.
Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2007. Print.
- Crisp, Louise. "Louise Crisp: The Other Side of the Snowy". *Environment Victoria*.
2004. Web. 8.12.2014.
- . *Pearl & Sea Fed. Hazard Poets*. Parkville, Vic: Hazard Press Publishers, 1994.
Print.
- . "Ruby Camp : A Snowy River Series." *Ruby Camp & Travelling Alone Together*.
North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1998. Print.
- . *Uplands*. Carlton, Victoria: Five Islands Press, 2007. Print.
- . "Remnants" *Cordite Poetry Review* 1.12.2013. Web. 5.12.2013
- . "Wild Succession." *Plumwood Mountain* 1.1 (2013) 1-17. Web. 15.07.2014
- . "The Walk." *Ecopoetics*. Vol. 6/7 Ed. Jonathon Skinner. Maine: Periplum
Editions, 2009. Print.
- Crisp, Louise, and Valery Wilde. *The luminous ocean and In the Half-Light*. [Friendly
Street Poets]. South Australia: Friendly Street Poets, 1988. Print.
- Curry, Patrick. *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*. 2nd ed Cambridge: Polity Press,
2011. Print.
- Davidson, Stewart. "The Troubled Marriage of Deep Ecology and Bioregionalism."
Environmental Values 16.3 (2007): 313-32. Print.
- Elder, John. *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*. Chicago:
University of Illinois Press, 1985. Print.
- Elvey, Anne. "Editorial" *Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry
and Ecopoetics*. Vol. 1. No.1. (2014) Web. 8.12.2014

- Fagan, Kate, John Kinsella and Peter Minter. "Editorial Introduction." *Ecopoetics and Pedagogies* special issue of *Angelaki* 14.2 (2009):1-4. Print.
- Foreman, Dave & Bill Haywood. *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*. 3rd Ed. California: Abzug Press, 2002. Print.
- Fox, Warwick. *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*. Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, 1990. Print.
- Garner, Dwight. "Inside the List." *New York Times*. 2007. Web. 15.10 2014.
- Gifford, Terry. *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995. Print.
- Gilcrest, David. *Greening the Lyre: Environmental Poetics and Ethics*. Reno: University of Nevada, 2002. Print.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. xv-xxxvii. Print.
- Gooch, Margaret. "A Sense of Place: Ecological Identity as a Driver for Catchment Volunteering." *Australian Journal on Volunteering* 8.2 (2003): 23-32. Print.
- Graham, Vicki "Into the Body of Another: Mary Oliver and the Poetics of Becoming Other." *Papers on Language and Literature* 30:4.Fall (1994): 352-53, 66-68. Print.
- Grenville, Kate. *The Secret River*. Australia: Text, 2005. Print.
- Hallack, E.H. *Toilers of the Hills*. 2nd Edition. South Australia: Investigator Press, 2008. Print.

- Harrison, Martin "Country and how to get there." *Who Wants to Create Australia? Essays on Poetry and Ideas in Contemporary Australia*. Sydney: Halstead, 2004. 100-107. Print.
- Harrison, Martin "The Act of Writing and the Act of Attention." *TEXT* October Special Issue 20: Writing Creates Ecology and Ecology Creates Writing, edited by Martin Harrison, Deborah Bird Rose, Lorraine Shannon and Kim Satchell (2013). Print.
- Heise, Ursula. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.
- Jacob, Merle. "Sustainable Development and Deep Ecology: An Analysis of Competing Traditions." *Environmental Management* 18.4 (1994): 477-88. Print.
- Jamison, A "The Making of Green Knowledge: The Contribution from Activism." *Futures* 35 (2003): 703-16. Print.
- Jensen, Derrick. *Endgame, Volume 1: The Problem of Civilization*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006. Print.
- . *Endgame, Volume 2: Resistance*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006. Print.
- Jones, Jill. "Traces of Being and Making" *Poetry and the Trace*. ed Ann Vickery and John Hawke. Sydney: Puncher & Wattmann, 2013. 151-158. Print.
- Jones, Patrick *Permapoesis Blogspot*. 2008. Web. 02.09.2015
- Keats, John. *Selected Letters of John Keats: Revised Edition*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.
- Kelly, Noelene J. "'Singing Up' the Silences: Australian Nature Writing as Disruption and Invocation." *Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* (AJE) 1 (2011): 18-26. Print.

- Kinsella, John. *The Divine Comedy: Journeys through a Regional Geography*. UQP Poetry Series. St Lucia, Qld.: The University of Queensland Press, 2008. Print.
- Kinsella, John. *Activist Poetic : Anarchy in the Avon Valley*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. Print.
- Knott, John R. *Imagining Wild America*. Ann Arbor, USA: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Print.
- Lawrence, Claire. "Getting the Desert into a Book: Nature Writing and the Problems of Representation in a Postmodern World." *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words*. Ed. Peter Quigley. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, (1998): 150-67. Print.
- Lindholdt, P. "Literary Activism and the Bioregional Agenda." *The ISLE reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003* (2003): 243. Print.
- Long, Mark. "William Carlos Williams, Ecocriticism and Contemporary American Poetry." *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*. Ed. Scott J. Bryson. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2002. 58-74. Print.
- McGahan, Andrew. *The White Earth*. Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2004. Print.
- McGinnis, Michael. "Boundary Creatures and Bounded Spaces." *Bioregionalism*. Ed. Michael McGinnis. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff; Susan McCarthy *When Elephants Weep: Emotional Lives of Animals*. New York: Vintage. 1996. Print.
- Menely, Tobias. "Traveling in Place: Gilbert White's Cosmopolitan Parochialism." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28.3 Fall (2004): 46-65. Print.
- Mead, Philip. *Networked Language: Culture and History in Australian Poetry*. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008. Print.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical Ecology*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

- Mimiko, Oluwafemi. *Globalization: The Politics of Global Economic Relations and International Business*. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic, 2012. Print.
- Næss, Arne "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement." *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95-100. Print.
- Nash, Roderick Frazier. *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989. Print.
- Oliver, Mary. "Among Wind and Time." *Sierra* Nov-Dec (1991): 34. Print.
- . *White Pine*. San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994. Print.
- . *West Wind: Poems and Prose Poems*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. Print.
- . *Winter Hours*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Print.
- . *New and Selected Poems: Volume One*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1992. Print.
- . Mary Oliver Facebook Post. *Facebook*. 17th October 2014. Web. 18.10.2014
- Ratiner, Steven. *Poet Mary Oliver: A Solitary Walk*. Christian Science Monitor. 1992. Web. 15.10 2014.
- Rigby, Kate "Writing After Nature" *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 39-40, 2006. Web. 24.4.2016.
- Rooney, Brigid. *Literary Activists: Writer-Intellectuals and Australian Public Life*. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2009. Print.
- Ruskin, John. "Of the Pathetic Fallacy." *Modern Painters* Vol. III Part IV. New York and Chicago: National Library Association, 1856. 152-67. Print.
- Russell, Sue. "Mary Oliver: The Poet and the Persona." *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* 4:4.Fall (1997): 21-22. Print.

- Scheese, Don. "Desert Solitaire: Counter-Friction to the Machine in the Garden." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 303-22. Print.
- . *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*. Studies in Literary Themes and Genres No. 7. New York London: Twayne Publishers; Prentice Hall International, 1996. Print.
- Scigaj, Leonard M. *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999. Print.
- Shapiro, Fred. "Quotes uncovered: the real McCoy and acting locally" *Freakonomics: the hidden side of everything*. 3.11.2010 Web. 20.08.2015
- Share, Don. "Poetry Makes Nothing Happen... Or Does It?" *Harriet; a poetry blog*. *The Poetry Foundation* 4th November 2009. Web. 18.03 2015.
- Shriver, Maria. "Maria Shriver Interviews the Famously Private Poet Mary Oliver." *O Magazine* 2011. Web. 15.10.2014.
- Sixth Creek Catchment Group. "6th Creek Catchment." *Sixth Creek Catchment Group* 2007. Web. 02.05 2015.
- Skinner, Jonathan. *Ecopoetics* No.6/7 2006-2007 Maine:Periplum Editions. 2009. Print.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust : A History of Walking*. London: Verso, 2001. Print.
- Soper, Kate. "The Idea of Nature." *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 123-26. Print.
- Spinoza, Benedictus de. *The Ethics and Selected Letters*. Ed. Seymour Feldman. Trans. S. Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co. 1982. Print.

- Steger, Manfred. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- Taylor, Bron. "Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part I): From Deep Ecology to Radical Environmentalism." *Religion* 31 (2001): 175-93. Print.
- Thomashow, Mitchell. *Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002. Print.
- Tredinnick, Mark. *The Land's Wild Music: Encounters with Barry Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Terry Tempest Williams and James Galvin*. San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 2005. Print.
- Tuan, Yi-fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1977. Print.
- White, Gilbert. *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. 1789. London: The Folio Society, 1994. Print.
- . *The Illustrated Natural History of Selborne 1789*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Print.
- Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Vintage, 1992. Print.
- Worster, Donald. *Nature's Economy : A History of Ecological Ideas*. Studies in Environment and History. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.
- Wright, Judith. *Alive : Poems, 1971-72*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973. Print.
- . *Because I Was Invited*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975. Print.
- . *The Moving Image : Poems*. Folios of Australian Poetry. Melbourne: Meanjin Press, 1946. Print.

---. *Collected Poems 1942-1970* A&R Modern Poets, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975. Print.

---. *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1965. Print.

Yuasa, Nobuyuki, ed. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches; Matsuo Bashō*. Matsuo Bashō. 6th ed Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1975. Print.

Zakin, Susan. *Coyotes and Town Dogs: Earth First! and the Environmental Movement*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002. Print.

Bibliography of Additional Works

- Abbey, Edward. *Good News*. New York: Dutton, 1980. Print.
- . *One Life at a Time, Please*. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1988. Print.
- Abbs, Peter, ed. *Earth Songs: A Resurgence Anthology of Contemporary Eco-Poetry*.
United Kingdom: Green Books in association with Resurgence Magazine,
1990. Print.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 241-63. Print.
- Astley, Neil, ed. *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*. Tarnet, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 2007. Print.
- Bate, Jonathan. *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. London: Picador, 2001. Print.
- Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature Criticism and Theory*. 4th ed. Harlow, U.K.: Pearson/Longman, 2009. Print.
- Berry, Wendell. *Collected Poems, 1957-1982*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985. Print.
- Branch, Michael. "Indexing American Possibilities: The Natural History Writing of Bartram, Wilson and Audubon." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 282-302. Print.

- Brewster, A. "Engaging the Public Intimacy of Whiteness: The Indigenous Protest Poetry of Romaine Moreton." *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* (2008): 56. Print.
- Buell, Lawrence. "Representing the Environment." *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 177-81. Print.
- . *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell Manifestos. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005. Print.
- Campbell, Sueellen. "The Land and Language of Desire : Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 124-36. Print.
- Carter, Paul. *The Lie of the Land*. London: Faber & Faber, 1996. Print.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness." *Sustainability*. Ed. Michael Redclift, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005. 358-80. Print.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.
- Dashorst, Gilbert and Jessop, John. *Plants of the Adelaide Plains and Hills*. Adelaide: Botanic Gardens of Adelaide and State Herbarium, 1998. Print.
- Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974. Print.
- Dolezal, Joshua A. "Literary Activism, Social Justice and the Future of Bioregionalism." *Ethics & the Environment* 13.1 (2008): 1-22. Print.

- Evernden, Neil. "Beyond Ecology." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 92-104. Print.
- Felstiner, John. *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* Yale University Press, 2009. Print.
- Fisher-Wirth, Ann, and Laura-Gray Street, eds. *The Ecopoetry Anthology*. United States: Trinity University Press, 2013. Print.
- Fromm, Harold, and Cheryll Glotfelty. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Gander, Forrest, and John Kinsella. *Redstart: an ecological poetics*. University of Iowa Press, 2012. Print.
- Garrard, Greg. "Radical Pastoral?" *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 182-86. Print.
- Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral. New Critical Idiom*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- . "The Social Construction of Nature." *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 173-76. Print.
- Gilcrest, David. *Greening the Lyre: Environmental Poetics and Ethics* Reno: University of Nevada, 2002. Print.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll and Fromm, Harold. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Gros, Frederic. *A Philosophy of Walking*. Trans. John Howe. London: Verso, 2014. Print.

- Hallack, E.H. *Toilers of the Hills*. 2nd Edition. South Australia: Investigator Press, 2008. Print.
- Hay, Daisy. *Young Romantics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010. Print.
- Hawthorne, Susan. *Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation and Bio/Diversity*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2004. Print.
- Heise, Ursula K. "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies." *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (2008): 381-404. Print.
- Heiss, A. "Black Poetics." *Meanjin* 65.1 (2006): 180. Print.
- Holmes, Richard. *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*. New York: Random House, 1996. Print.
- Howarth, William. "Some Principles of Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 69-91. Print.
- Iijima, Brenda, ed.) (*Eco(Lang) (Uage(Reader)) the Eco Language Reader*. New York: Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs and Nightboat Books, 2010. Print.
- Johnson, Colin. "Guerilla Poetry: Lionel Fogarty's Response to Language Genocide'." *Long Water: Aboriginal Art and Literature* (1986): 72-81. Print.
- Keats, John. *Selected Letters of John Keats: Revised Edition*. Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.
- Kavanagh, Patrick. Interview. Recorded by Claddagh Records, Ireland. 1963. Audio.
- Keats, John. *Selected Letters of John Keats: Revised Edition*. Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.
- Kinsella, John. *Shades of the Sublime & Beautiful*. Fremantle, W.A.: Fremantle Press, 2008. Print.

- Kolodny, Annette. "Unearthing Herstory." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 170-81. Print.
- Knowles, David, and Sharon Blackie, eds. *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry*. United Kingdom: Two Ravens Press, 2012. Print.
- Kraehenbuehl, Darrell. *Pre-European Vegetation of Adelaide: A Survey from the Gawler River to Hallett Cove*. Adelaide: Nature Conservation Society of South Australia, 1996. Print.
- Landry, Donna. "Green Languages? Women Poets as Naturalists in 1653 and 1807." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.4 (2000): 467-89. Print.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *Wild Oats and Fireweed : New Poems*. New York: Perennial Library, 1988. Print.
- Knott, John R. "Edward Abbey and the Romance of the Wilderness." *Western American Literature* 30.4 (1996): 331-51. Print.
- Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac: With Other Essays on Conservation from Round River*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949. Print.
- Lindholdt, P. "Literary Activism and the Bioregional Agenda." *The ISLE reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003* (2003): 243. Print.
- Love, Glen. "Revaluing Nature : Towards an Ecological Criticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Lyon, Thomas J. "A Taxonomy of Nature Writing." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 276-81. Print.

- Marx, Leo. "The Machine in the Garden." *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe,. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 104-08. Print.
- McDowell, Michael J. "The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight." *The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 371-91. Print.
- McKibben, Bill. "Introduction." *Walden*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2004. vii-xxii. Print.
- Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1993. Print.
- Mitchell, John Hanson. *Walking Towards Walden: A Pilgrimage in Search of Place*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997. Print.
- Norwood, Vera L. "Heroines of Nature: Four Women Respond to the American Landscape." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 323-50. Print.
- Oliver, Mary. *American Primitive : Poems*. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 1983. Print.
- . *Dream Work*. 1st ed. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986. Print.
- . *House of Light*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990. Print.
- . *West Wind: Poems and Prose Poems*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. Print.
- . *Red Bird*. Tarsset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2008. Print.
- Oswald, Alice, ed. *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006. Print.
- Pipher, Mary. *Writing to Change the World*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.

- Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, 1993.
Print.
- Rigby, Catherine E. "Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)Possibility of Ecopoiesis." *New Literary History* 35.3 (2004): 427-42. Print.
- Rigby, Kate. "Writing after Nature." *Australian Humanities Review*. (2006): 39-40.
Print.
- Riordan, Maurice, and John Burnside, eds. *Wild Reckoning: An Anthology Provoked by Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring."* United Kingdom: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004. Print.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1953. Print.
- . *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Trans. France, Peter. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1979. Print.
- Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 105-23. Print.
- Sanders, Scott Russell. "Speaking a Word for Nature." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 182-95. Print.
- Simpson, David. "Being There? Literary Criticism, Localism and Local Knowledge." *Critical Quarterly* 35.3 (1993): 3-17. Print.
- Sisman, Adam. *Wordsworth and Coleridge; the Friendship*. Hammersmith, London: Harper Perennial, 2007. Print.
- Slovic, Scott. "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary*

- Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 351 - 70. Print.
- . "Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes, Practicing Doctrine." *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. Ed. Laurence Coupe. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 160-62. Print.
- . *Going Away to Think: Engagement, Retreat and Ecocritical Responsibility*. Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2008. Print.
- Smith, Pamela and Donald Pate, eds. *Valleys of Stone: The Archaeology and History of the Adelaide Hills Face*. Australia: Miln Walker and Associates, 2006. Print.
- Smith-Lovin, Lynn, and David R. Heise. *Analyzing Social Interaction: Advances in Affect Control Theory*. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988. Print.
- Snyder, Gary. *Turtle Island*. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1974. Print.
- . *The Practice of the Wild*. Washington: Shoemaker and Hoard, 1990. Print.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Storming the Gates of Paradise; Landscapes for Politics*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007. Print.
- Stewart, Frank. *A Natural History of Nature Writing*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995. Print.
- Tarlo, Harriet. "Radical Landscapes: Experiment and Environment in Contemporary Poetry." *Jacket*. 32 (2007). Web. 30.03.2010.
- . ed. *The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry*. Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011. Print.

- Thomas, Brook. *The New Historicism and Other Old-fashioned Topics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991. Print
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Excursions, Vol. 5 of the Writings of Henry David Thoreau*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906. Print.
- . *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. 1854. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2004. Print.
- . "Walking." *The Essays of Henry David Thoreau* ed. Richard Dillman North Carolina: NCUP, 1990. Print.
- . "Walking." *The Natural History Essays*. ed. Robert Sattlemeyer. Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1989. Print.
- Thoreau, Henry David, Owen Paul Thomas, and Henry David Thoreau. *Walden: And Civil Disobedience : Authoritative Texts, Background, Reviews, and Essays in Criticism*. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton, 1966. Print.
- Tredinnick, Mark. *A Place on Earth : An Anthology of Nature Writing from Australia and North America*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003. Print.
- . *The Blue Plateau: A Landscape Memoir*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2009. Print.
- . *Fire Diary*. Glebe, N.S.W.: Puncher & Wattmann, 2010. Print.
- Tuan, Yi-fu and Gretchen Holstein Schoff. *Two Essays on a Sense of Place*. Madison: Wisconsin Humanities Committee, 1988. Print.
- White, Gilbert. *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. 1789. London: The Folio Society, 1994. Print.
- Wilson, Frances. *The Ballad of Dorothy Wordsworth*. London: Faber and Faber, 2008. Print.

Wordsworth, Dorothy. *Home at Grasmere: Extracts from the Journal of Dorothy Wordsworth and from the Poems of William Wordsworth*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1978. Print.

Wordsworth, William. *Guide to the Lakes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

---. "Lyrical Ballads." *Anthology of Romanticism*. Ed. Bernbaum, Ernst. New York: Ronald Press, 1948. Print.