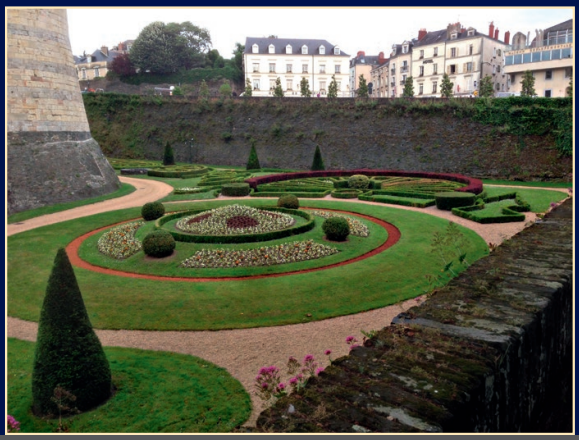
STUDIES IN LITERATURE, CULTURE,
AND THE ENVIRONMENT 1

Daniel A. Finch-Race /
Stephanie Posthumus (eds)

French Ecocriticism

From the Early Modern Period to the Twenty-First Century



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This book expounds fruitful ways of analysing matters of ecology, environments, nature, and the non-human world in a broad spectrum of material in French. Scholars from Canada, France, Great Britain, Spain, and the United States examine the work of writers and thinkers including Michel de Montaigne, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Arthur Rimbaud, Marguerite Yourcenar, Gilbert Simondon, Michel Serres, Michel Houellebecq, and Éric Chevillard. The diverse approaches in the volume signal a common desire to bring together form and content, politics and aesthetics, theory and practice, under the aegis of the environmental humanities.

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Daniel A. Finch-Race and Stephanie Posthumus

Introduction: Developing French Ecocriticism

This volume expounds fruitful ways of analysing matters of ecology, environments, nature, and the non-human world in a broad spectrum of material in French. Scholars from Canada, France, Great Britain, Spain, and the United States outline new directions for French ecocriticism by exploring a variety of aesthetic, literary, socio-historical, and ethical questions:

- How are concerns about land management expressed in early modern polemical and political writings?
- How is ecological sentiment given expression and form in nineteenth-century French poetry, as opposed to experimental French contemporary film?
- In what ways do Romanticism and Naturalism in France give voice to elements of the non-human world?
- To what extent do French contemporary texts reject the separation of nature and the natural world from the realm of culture, literature and the arts?
- How does post-apocalyptic French fiction reveal the problematic tone and form of predictions about environmental and ecological issues?
- What new ontologies, cosmologies and epistemologies does contemporary French theory make available for rethinking relations between humans and the non-human world?

The diverse responses in this volume signal a common desire to bring together form and content, politics and aesthetics, theory and practice, all under the aegis of the environmental humanities.

Whereas ecocriticism has rapidly grown in the anglophone world since the 1990s (alongside politically oriented approaches in feminist studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies, and animal studies), its implementation in France has been slower. Rather than enumerate the multifarious reasons for this delay (thereby running the risk of reifying difference), we prefer to identify a more general suspicion in France about politically driven cultural studies that are perceived as glossing over the aesthetic, formal and stylistic elements of cultural production. Whether the perception of ecocriticism as less attuned to poetics and literary form

is true or not,[1] it has been the basis for repeated objections. This volume illustrates that ecocriticism does not ignore questions of form and structure: the following chapters pay careful attention to aesthetics and poetics in terms of formal aspects such as versification, filming techniques and genre conventions.

The chapters in this volume reveal that an ecopolitical approach does not exist in isolation from an ecopoetic reading of a text's formal aesthetics. Both approaches adopt the prefix *eco-* in the sense of *habitat* or *home*, invoking place not as some abstract, imaginary construct, but as embedded in the material, physical world. In addition, they are steeped in the tradition of critique and interpretation, attentive to problematic assumptions about nature and ecology, and to issues of representation, mimesis and aesthetics. Rather than territorialise ecocriticism and ecopoetics, this volume works to underscore their confluences and convergences.

French Ecocriticism responds to the call for more ecocritical work in non-anglophone areas of cultural studies. Since the early 2000s, ecocritics have been aware of the problematic linguistic homogeneity of their field of study.[2] The current volume works to diversify ecocriticism by illustrating the wide range of French cultural periods and histories that can be considered from an ecocritical perspective. For those unfamiliar with French literature, this volume offers an excellent introduction. For curious scholars in French Studies who have yet to see how ecocriticism can be used in their particular area of expertise, this volume provides numerous examples. The timeliness of this collection is attested by the growing number of publications that analyse the intersection of ecocriticism and French Studies, including Alain Suberchicot's *Littérature et environnement* (2012), Douglas Boudreau and Marnie Sullivan's edited volume *Ecocritical Approaches to Literature in French* (2015), and Stephanie Posthumus's forthcoming *French 'Écocritique'*.[3] In addition to growing numbers of francocentric articles in

1 In the pioneering ecocritical text *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Lawrence Buell begins by defining the notion of mimesis and addressing the aesthetics of realism, both of which have been at the heart of literary theory since Aristotle's *Poetics*. Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1995), 83–114.

2 Ursula K. Heise, 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 121.2 (2006), 503–16; Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, eds, *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Greg Garrard, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

3 Alain Suberchicot, *Littérature et environnement: pour une écocritique comparée* (Paris: Champion, 2012); Douglas L. Boudreau and Marnie M. Sullivan, eds, *Ecocritical Approaches to Literature in French* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015); Stephanie Posthumus,

Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment[4] (the official journal of ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) and *Green Letters*[5] (the official journal of ASLE-UKI, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in the United Kingdom and Ireland), several journals have devoted special issues to ecological matters: *L'Esprit créateur* (2006); *Écologie & Politique* (2008); *Dix-Neuf* (2015).[6] This volume complements these publications, and investigates the extent to which the specificities of French material necessitate their own ecocritical framework.

The title of this volume merits elaboration. What do we mean when we refer to 'French ecocriticism'? First, we could respond that the objects of study under consideration in the volume are French, in the sense of being published or produced in France, but a closer examination reveals the limitations of this general assertion. During the early modern period, France was increasing its territories to become the modern nation-state of today, and French as a language was just beginning to be standardised as a common ground for many people accustomed to diverse dialects. Cultural production of the early modern period thus undoes a static, essentialist notion of 'French'. A similar issue arises in considering the example of Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–87), who is often cited as an author exemplifying the ideals of French literature. She won several French literary prizes, including the Grand Prix de l'Académie française (1977) and the Erasmus Prize

French 'Écocritique': Reading Contemporary French Theory and Fiction Ecologically (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

4 Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus, 'Reading Latour Outside: A Response to the Estok-Robisch Controversy', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20.4 (2013), 757–77; Keith Moser, 'The Eco-Philosophy of Michel Serres and J. M. G. Le Clézio: Launching a Battle Cry to Save the Imperiled Earth', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21.2 (2014), 413–40; Daniel A. Finch-Race, 'Ecosensitivity in Rimbaud's "Comédie de la soif"', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22.3 (2015), 623–40.

5 Stephanie Posthumus and Stefan Sinclair, 'Reading Environment(s): Digital Humanities Meets Ecocriticism', *Green Letters* 18.3 (2014), 254–73; Daniel A. Finch-Race, 'Ecopoetic Ruminations in Baudelaire's "Je n'ai pas oublié" and "La Servante au grand cœur"', *Green Letters* 19.2 (2015), 170–84; Françoise Gollain, 'André Gorz: Wage Labour, Free Time and Ecological Reconstruction', trans. by M. Ryle, *Green Letters* 20.2 (2016), 127–39.

6 Lucile Desblache, 'Introduction: profil d'une éco-littérature', *L'Esprit créateur* 46.2 (2006), 1–4; Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe, 'Littérature & écologie: vers une écopoétique', *Écologie & Politique* 36 (2008), 17–28; Daniel A. Finch-Race and Julien Weber, 'Editorial: The Ecocritical Stakes of French Poetry from the Industrial Era', *Dix-Neuf* 19.3 (2015), 159–66.

(1983); in 1980, she was the first woman elected to the *Académie française* [French Academy] – the venerable institution that has overseen matters relating to the French language since 1635. However, Yourcenar was born in Belgium, moved to the USA in 1939, and often cited the considerable influence of the North American landscape on her understanding of nature and ecology. Speaking of her work as 'French' raises the question of how other associations and identities are being co-opted by French cultural history.

Second, we could respond that the scholars whose research has been brought together in this volume are connected by their work in 'French Studies'. However, almost all of them work in French departments outside France. This points to an interesting characteristic of French ecocriticism as it emerges from different geographical locations around the world: it understands ecocriticism in a crosscultural way.[7] Moreover, many of our contributors work and publish in English *and* French, breaking down the idea of 'French ecocriticism' as something that is written, spoken and published solely in French. Although this volume is chiefly expressed in English, original French quotations are included throughout, highlighting the work involved in translation. The demands of code-switching between English and French encourage slow reading, and we hope that readers will take the time to compare the nuances of each translation. We have privileged the original text in French as a way of countering our tendency to treat language (particularly the English language) as a transparent medium. A more conscious practice of reading is required in cases such as a sentence in which a subject pronoun in English is followed by a quotation involving a conjugated French verb. From our perspective, bilingual behaviour is an inherent element of the hybrid field of French ecocriticism.

One final word about the volume's title: we are wary of the political work that the term 'French' is made to do, and of how 'French' can reductively refer to a set of

7 Ecocritical work in French universities has emerged from crosscultural contexts, particularly departments focussed on American Studies and/or Comparative Literature. In June 2016, the Université de Perpignan held a blingual conference on 'Lieux d'enchantement: écrire et ré-enchanter le monde [Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Reenchanting the Earth]' (<http://ecopoeticsperpignan.com> [accessed 25 May 2016]), and the Université d'Angers held a bilingual conference on 'Écocritiques: nouvelles territorialités [Ecocriticism: New Territorialities]' (<http://ecolitt.univ-angers.fr/fr/index/actualites-2/colloque-international-ecolitt.html> [accessed 25 May 2016]). The latter conference was part of the 'ÉcoLitt' project (2014–16) that included scholars of American, Canadian, Chinese, Francophone, German, Hispanic, and Irish cultures (<http://ecolitt.univ-angers.fr/fr/la-recherche-en-litterature-environnementale/l-etat-de-la-recherche-en-ecocritique.html> [accessed 25 May 2016]).

unchanging characteristics and attitudes. Part of the challenge in this volume has been to preclude assumptions about what is considered 'French'. Textual material is an excellent starting point for challenging such assumptions because its use of language often subverts notions of nation and culture. Although the chapters in this volume do not critique the notion of French nationalism, they analyse the use of language, revealing the ambiguity and polysemy that trouble a unitary meaning of 'French'.

It is useful to outline two terms that frequently appear in the following chapters. While 'ecology' and 'environment' have different semantic fields, the adjectives 'ecological' and 'environmental' are often used interchangeably in English. For the purposes of this volume, it is worth teasing out the etymological threads of the two terms in French. Whereas 'ecology' dates to Ernst Haeckel's definition in 1866 of the German word 'Oecologie' as the scientific study of an organism's relations to its milieu,[8] 'environment' has a much longer history. In Old French, *environemenz* meant 'the action of surrounding', with the underlying assumption of something in the middle. It is only recently that the word has taken on a more politicised meaning, corresponding to the emergence during the 1960s of USA-based grassroots movements concerned about the destruction of the natural world. For some French speakers, referring to environmental activism as *environnementalisme* [environmentalism] is still considered to be an anglicism; *écologisme* [ecologism] is preferred. As for *écologie* [ecology] and *écologique* [ecological], both terms initially referred to the science of ecology, but have been taken up by theories of political ecology to articulate relations to the non-human world in the *polis*. Even if language is constantly evolving under the influence of cultural exchanges, there is an important distinction in the use of these terms: *environnemental* [environmental] refers to an attitude of activism with regard to the need to save nature, and to preserve natural environments; *écologique* [ecological] refers to a view of the world based on the principle of human and non-human interrelatedness.

Heeding these linguistic distinctions, the contributions in *French Ecocriticism* attend to the ways in which the meanings of 'ecological' and 'environmental' are

8 'Unter Oecologie verstehen wir die gesammte Wissenschaft von den Beziehungen des Organismus zur umgebenden Aussenwelt, wohin wir im weiteren Sinne alle "Existenz-Bedingungen" rechnen können [by ecology, we mean the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment, among which we can include – in a broader sense – all the "conditions of existence"]'. Ernst H. P. A. Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen: Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1866), 286.

inscribed within socio-historical contexts. In terms of early modern writing about land management, we can ask how the notion of environment is being used to refer to 'surroundings', and what this means in terms of humans posited at the centre. How does early modern *anthropocentredness* differ from today's advanced capitalist anthropocentrism? Paraphrasing a point made by Louisa Mackenzie in relation to the French Renaissance,[9] this line of enquiry allows us to establish what the early modern period can bring to ecocriticism, as well as what an ecocritical perspective can bring to the early modern period. In attending to expressions of ecological matters, it is crucial for us to bear in mind the linguistic, socio-historical, geographical, and cultural realities of the era in question. By including analysis of texts from the early modern period to the twenty-first century, *French Ecocriticism* signals the possibility of socio-historically comparative understandings of ecology and environment.

The chapters in this volume are organised chronologically to provide a sense of historical perspective. The range of texts includes well-known names (Michel Houellebecq; Victor Hugo; Michel de Montaigne; Arthur Rimbaud; Michel Serres; Marguerite Yourcenar; Émile Zola) and lesser known authors, poets and artists (Stéphane Audeguy; Éric Chevillard; Marie Krysinska; Jean-Claude Rousseau; Sylvain Tesson). This variety offers a much needed introduction to the fruitful possibilities of French ecocriticism, as well as to important genres, periods and movements in French culture: the early modern period's political, polemical and philosophical essays; the nineteenth century's Romantic and Naturalist movements, and experiments with poetry; the twentieth century's diversification into historical fiction, experimental film and relational ontologies; the twenty-first century's engagement with ecological imaginings ranging from the erotic to the post-apocalyptic, from the sincere to the ironic.

Certain periods are regrettably absent from this sample of five hundred years of French literature and culture. We offer these lacunae as invitations to set about an ecocritical analysis of a piece of cultural production dear to the reader's heart, such as Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* [*The Princess of Cleves*] (1678), René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's *Astérix* series (1959–2009), Jean de La Fontaine's *Fables* (1668–94), Voltaire's *Candide* (1759), Jacques-Yves Cousteau's Oscar-winning underwater documentary *Le Monde du silence* [*The Silent World*] (1956), André Breton and Philippe Soupault's surrealist *écriture automatique*

9 Louisa Mackenzie, 'It's a Queer Thing: Early Modern French Ecocriticism', in *The Environment in French and Francophone Literature and Film*, ed. by J. Persels (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 15–42.

[automatic writing] in *Les Champs magnétiques* [*The Magnetic Fields*] (1920), or Yves Bonnefoy's poetics of presence in *Hier régnant désert* [*Yesterday Reigning Desert*] (1958).[10] The chapters in this volume demonstrate that French ecocriticism is not a *passe-partout* approach; it is a tool for examining the ways in which cultural production unsettles, imagines and renders palpable our relations to the non-human world.

If we accept that modernism, industrialisation, and the rise of capitalism have largely sundered economy and ecology, writings from the early modern period illustrate the ways in which the management of land and household intersect. In 'Through a Glass Darkly: Dominion and the French Wars of Religion', Jeff Persels takes up the historicist task of analysing polemical and political writings from sixteenth-century France. He argues that these texts can be ecocritically read as 1) records of a sovereign's wealth and goods, portraying the physical realities of the time, and 2) critiques of (mis)management of the land, revealing the import of an ideal sovereign capable of controlling his domain and French dominions. The subsequent chapter about early modern material, Pauline Goul's 'The Vanity of Ecology: Expenditure in Montaigne's Vision of the New World', examines a different relationship between ecology and economy – one of excess and luxury, rather than management and dominion. Paralleling new readings of Montaigne in light of the 'animal question',[11] Goul adopts an ecocritical perspective to analyse Montaigne's essays about the New World. Through a close reading of key expressions, Goul reveals a paradoxical relationship to expenditure – one that critiques the wasting of the land, and admires excesses of luxury. Asserting that Montaigne's relationship to expenditure prefigures Georges Bataille's postmodern

10 Ecocritical readings of material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are sadly missing from this volume due to a lack of responses to the Call for Papers that was issued in February 2015 (<https://www.fabula.org/actualites/french-ecocriticism-l-ecocritique-francaise_66940.php> [accessed 25 May 2016]). Recent studies of the period indicate much potential for fruitful analysis: Helena Feder, 'The Critical Relevance of the Critique of Rationalism: Postmodernism, Ecofeminism, and Voltaire's *Candide*', *Women's Studies* 31.2 (2002), 199–219; Bruno Sibona, 'Les Tritons de Théophile: sensibilité baroque de la Nature et sentiment écologique chez Théophile de Viau', *L'Esprit créateur* 46.2 (2006), 17–32; Roland Racevskis, 'Cyrano's Posthuman Moon: Comic Inversions and Animist Relations', *Symposium* 69.4 (2015), 214–27.

11 Benjamin Arbel, 'The Renaissance Transformation of Animal Meaning: From Petrarch to Montaigne', in *Making Animal Meaning*, ed. by L. Kalof and G. M. Montgomery (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 59–80.

economic theorisations, Goul points to the rewards of 'queer[ing] time'[12] in our approach to Renaissance texts.

With the end of *le siècle des Lumières* [the Century of Enlightenment] (1715–89), the advent of the Age of Revolution (1789–1848), and the onset of industrialisation (1815–60), the French landscape underwent important changes. State supervision of forested areas collapsed, leaving French peasants and the timber industry to clear forests at will, and the land became a casualty of transformations in governing structures in France. The political and social turmoil preceding the transition to the Third Republic (1870–1940) left its mark on rural and urban regions.

Cultural production responded to environmental, social and political changes in the nineteenth century by giving birth to Romanticism and Naturalism – the former emphasising nature's grandeur and a return to subjective sentiment, the latter immersing itself in the harsh reality of everyday conflicts between humans and the non-human world. The two chapters in the second part of the volume evoke how Victor Hugo and Émile Zola, figureheads of the respective movements, express a powerful aesthetics with regard to the non-human world. In 'Victor Hugo and the Politics of Ecopoetics', Karen Quandt shows Hugo's Romanticism to be embedded in a politics of nature that is pragmatic rather than escapist, and outward- rather than inward-facing. Breaking down categories of genre, Quandt reads passages from Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* [*The Wretched*] (1862) as examples of ecopoetry in prose. In '*Fauves* in the *Faubourg*: Animal Aesthetics in Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*', Claire Nettleton offers an insightful eco- and zoopoetic reading of Zola's Naturalism. Taking note of Darwin's influence on the author of *Thérèse Raquin*, Nettleton examines human animality as not only a violent, sexual drive, but also a pulsing, creative force. Her critique of human/animal and nature/art oppositions succeeds in demonstrating the worth of French ecocriticism as a way of enhancing animal studies.

The two chapters in the third part of this collection similarly refute the alignment of art with artifice in opposition to nature. Through a focus on works from the later years of the nineteenth century, an argument is made for reading poetry as a way of reconnecting with embodied and embedded experience. In 'Ecopoetic Adventures in Rimbaud's "Sensation" and "Ma Bohème"', Daniel Finch-Race analyses the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, renowned as one of France's *poètes maudits*, and an important precursor to surrealism. Finch-Race demonstrates that Rimbaud's early poems engage with the material world, conveying the changing reality of

12 Carla Freccero, 'Queer Times', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (2007), 485–94 (489).

rural landscapes by way of their distinctive versification as much as their environmentally oriented content. In 'Towards an Ecopoetics of French Free Verse: Marie Krysinska's *Rythmes pittoresques*', David Evans argues that free verse challenges highly codified representations of nature. Tackling the hermeneutic instability of Marie Krysinska's poems, Evans brings to light a 'negative ecopoetics' that aims to maintain the multiple, productive gaps between language and the world.[13] French free verse is shown to offer an invaluable contribution to ecocriticism because of the reading practices that it engenders beyond matters of environmental politics.

It is unsurprising that the majority of the chapters in this volume analyse pieces of cultural production from the last two centuries. Ecocriticism tends to focus on the last two hundred years because they constitute a period of radical change in terms of how humans live on the planet. As Michel Serres explains, the process of hominisation – becoming human – has undergone three major shifts since the 1850s: 1) longer human life spans, and reduced infant mortality rates (relation to self); 2) the movement from rural to largely urban centres (relation to the physical world); 3) the emergence of new forms of social communication (relation to others).[14] Serres breaks these tectonic shifts into micro-moments that make up the complex, networked, global reality of today's contemporary society. Whether we choose to call this reality the 'Anthropocene' depends in part on how much patience we have for the idea of the human and its relatively short legacy in comparison to the geological age of our planet.

The first two chapters about contemporary texts reveal different directions that can be taken in thinking about the place of humans in the global world: a familiar environmental critique emerges from Marguerite Yourcenar's body of work, whereas a broad *éco-pensée* is articulated in Michel Serres's recent works. In 'Marguerite Yourcenar's Ecological Thinking: Wilderness, Place-Connectedness, Biocentrism, and an Ethic of Care', Teófilo Sanz highlights environmental themes in Yourcenar's work that reflect multiple eco-cultural influences. Sanz links Yourcenar's place-connectedness to the North American ideal of wilderness, as well as to the writer's attachment to her Belgian ancestors' land, illustrating a cross-cultural perspective that is key to analysing evolving attitudes towards nature and environment. In 'Michel Serres: From Restricted to General Ecology', Chris Watkin argues for a mode of eco-thinking that moves beyond environmental concerns,

13 Kate Rigby explains that a 'negative ecopoetics' clearly foregrounds the problem of representation as a linguistic rendering of a material world. Kate Rigby, 'Earth, World, Text: On the (Im)possibility of Ecopoiesis', *New Literary History* 35.3 (2004), 427–42 (437).

14 Michel Serres, *Hominescence* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2001).

radically breaking down nature/culture dualism. Taking up Serres's analysis of practices as different as birdsong and billboard advertising, Watkin shows that pollution – without being condoned – can be reconceptualised in terms of eco-relations between organisms and their milieu. As Watkin carefully explains, Serres seeks to develop less parasitic, more symbiotic relationships between humans and the non-human world, with a view to the establishment of a fulfilling cosmocracy.

Although most contributions to this volume focus on written texts – reflecting the tendency of ecocriticism to align with literary studies – the subsequent two chapters raise the important question of image-text relations. In 'Ecoerotica in Stéphane Audeguy's *La Théorie des nuages*', Jonathan Krell illuminates the intersection of photography and historical fiction. In contrast to the notion of ecophobia (an inherent fear of nature), which has recently come into the spotlight in ecocritical theory,[15] Krell argues for a model of ecoerotica – a strong attraction to nature as (sexual) body, or to the (sexual) body as landscape. His analysis of Audeguy's fictionalisation of the history of cloud typology productively brings together geography and meteorology as tools for exploring our relationship with nature. Nikolaj Lübecker's 'The Individual as Environment: Watching Jean-Claude Rousseau's *La Vallée close* with Lucretius and Simondon' chimes with a non-dualist perspective on nature-culture and human-landscape. Drawing on Gilbert Simondon's philosophy, Lübecker not only articulates Jean-Claude Rousseau's filmmaking as a mode of worldmaking through which the director experiences individuation, but also makes a compelling case for ecological concepts embedded in ontologies of relation and becoming.

The (im)possibility of encountering and recounting nature in light of today's global socioeconomic and ecological issues is a central concern in the next two chapters. In 'Writing (on) Environmental Catastrophes: The End of the World in Éric Chevillard's *Sans l'orang-outan* and Michel Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île*', Anaïs Boulard focusses on a pair of contemporary novels in which familiar tropes of post-apocalyptic futures are framed by distinctive narrative and aesthetic techniques. Her analysis of novels by Éric Chevillard and Michel Houellebecq exemplifies an ecocritical method that reads genres and traditions comparatively, paying equal attention to content and form. Similarly, Hannes De Vriese brings together ecopoetics and ecocriticism in 'On the Meaning of Being Alone with Nature: Sylvain Tesson's Ecocritical Sincerity and Ecopoetic Sensuality in *Dans les forêts de Sibérie*', highlighting the productive tension in Sylvain Tesson's lucid

15 Simon C. Estok, 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16.2 (2009), 203–25.

(and occasionally ironic) desire to experience nature outside culture. De Vriese notes that Tesson's attempt to live in a cabin in the woods ultimately provides the author with an experience of writing, as opposed to harmonious co-existence with nature.[16]

The collection concludes with a standalone chapter that returns to the question of what 'French ecocriticism' can mean. In 'Engaging with Cultural Differences: The Strange Case of French *écocritique*', Stephanie Posthumus acknowledges the 'duplicity of culture'[17] when cultural differences are used to construct borders, and to police boundaries. Drawing on comparative studies and ethnography, Posthumus argues for an articulation of culture in terms of linguistic and literary particularities. Dealing with the micro-level of individual texts and images, Posthumus presents culture as a kaleidoscope of colourful, moving pieces that a reader experiences through a cognitive and embodied lens. For Posthumus, this micro-level resists macro-level definitions of culture that end up stereotyping attitudes towards nature and environment. She shows that French ecocriticism, by working at the level of the text, identifies possible narratives and figures for imagining our relations to the non-human world. Channelling Bruno Latour, Posthumus points out the non-existence of an already constituted common world that we co-inhabit (despite the massive effects of globalisation); instead, she argues, there is a common world that is constantly being made through processes of 'la composition, cette alternative à la modernisation [composition, that alternative to modernisation]'.[18]

Collaborative and constructive practices are at the heart of *French Ecocriticism* – our gathering on 8 May 2015 at Trinity College in Cambridge has given rise to a rich variety of exchanges and outcomes. The present volume unites human and non-human matters: we two editors – in common with all of our expert contributors – have relied on non-human, technical material to facilitate communication during the year-long orchestration of this volume. It will be you, dear reader, who

16 According to Timothy Morton, this tension between language and experience is typical of the ambient poetics that can be found in most getting-back-to-nature texts. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature*: *Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

17 Hannes Bergthaller, 'The Canon of East Asian Ecocriticism and the Duplicity of Culture', *CLCWeb* 16.6 (2014), 9 pages, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss6/6> [accessed 30 May 2016].

18 Bruno Latour, Élie During and Laurent Jeanpierre, 'Bruno Latour: "l'universel, il faut le faire"', *Critique* 786 (2012), 949–63 (963) [our translation].

continues the work of creation and composition, developing your own resonances with regard to the ideas and themes presented in this volume.

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Part I
Early Modern Economies and Ecologies

Jeff Persels

Through a Glass Darkly: Dominion and the French Wars of Religion

Abstract: This chapter proposes an ecocritical reading of early modern French political and polemical writing via the biblical notion of dominion. The frequent recourse to the conventional, didactic medieval genre of the *principum specula* [mirrors for princes] throughout the religious 'troubles' of the sixteenth century foregrounds and reworks the notion of advising the prince on how to address the associated destruction of infrastructure and economy. Essentially, the 'good' prince (Henri IV) is depicted as taking responsibility for conscientious management of the royal domain and French dominions broadly conceived, whereas the 'bad' prince (Henri III) is castigated for neglecting the same, and for ceding control to corrupt agents (the Gallican Church; royal favourites). This chapter focusses primarily on 'late' additions to *principum specula* literature, such as the variously attributed 1581 triptych of *Le Secret des finances de France*, *Le Miroir des François* and *Le Cabinet du roi de France*, as well as Jean-Aimé de Chavigny's 1594 repackaging of Nostradamus' prophecies, *La Premiere Face du Ianus François*, and references such classics as the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* [*On Twelve Forms of Abuse*], long attributed to Cyprian. These works, which often take the form of actual books of accounts, however exaggerated – even fabricated – for polemical purposes, undertake to assess the physical state of the realm late in the Wars of Religion. In them can be found early signs of an environmental consciousness for which the sovereign is held increasingly accountable, albeit always in the ultimate interest of *human* prosperity and wellbeing.

> Avant que l'homme, eut peché contre toy,
> D'ouailles & beufz, avoit la seignorie
> Incontinent, elle fut deperie
> Quand eut peché, en transgressant ta foy.[1]
>
> [Before man sinned against you,
> Over sheep and oxen he had dominion.
> It was lost abruptly
> When he sinned by transgressing your faith.]

To what extent – if at all – did contemporaries consider the French Wars of Religion (1562–98) in environmental terms? The question is of potential topical interest, given that crediting medieval and early modern Europeans with some form of ecological consciousness we 'moderns' can appreciate and elucidate

1 Mathieu Malingre, *Noelz nouveaulx* ([Neufchâtel]: [Pierre de Vingle], 1533), Cv-C$_{ii}$v [unreferenced translations are mine].

(if, primarily, the better to condemn) is manifestly an academic growth industry.[2] Period partisan accounts of the endemic violence and destruction occasioned by the 'troubles' over more than three decades, however diffuse and sporadic, themselves constituted something of an ephemeral publishing boom.[3] Replete with aggrieved reports of personal and/or collective injury and outrage, most often marshalled polemically as proof of a perpetrator's sacrilegious otherness, such accounts do necessarily include – but rarely foreground – incidents of environmental degradation. When they do, the referenced degraded environment is almost invariably man-made: the domestic, civic and military infrastructure, as it were, of sixteenth-century life.[4] Such a corpus might thus seem an unlikely source for signs of ecological awareness, (early modern or otherwise), in view of the common perception that such consciousness relates to a focus on the *natural* environment; on ways, as ecocritic Jonathan Bate so eloquently phrases it, 'of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth'.[5] Yet it is precisely

2 Richard C. Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); John Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2013); Bruce T. Boehrer, *Environmental Degradation in Jacobean Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2006); John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1974). For a thoughtful proof of the latter book's ecocritical *bona fides*, see Jason W. Moore, '*The Modern World-System* as Environmental History? Ecology and the Rise of Capitalism', *Theory and Society* 32.3 (2003), 307–77.

3 Andrew Pettegree, Malcolm Walsby and Alexander S. Wilkinson, *French Vernacular Books: Books Published in the French Language before 1601* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Jean-François Gilmont, *GLN 15–16: les éditions imprimées à Genève, Lausanne et Neuchâtel aux XVe et XVIe siècles* (Geneva: Droz, 2015).

4 As we might expect, acts of iconoclasm loom large in anti-Protestant polemic. See Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Lee P. Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel*.(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

5 Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 266.

here that at least one striking early modern formulation of a thoughtful relation between humans and the environment can nonetheless be found.

This chapter will thus focus on a sample of generically and thematically connected didactic and polemical works in French from the second half of the sixteenth century, all of which can fruitfully be read as contributions to the venerable tradition of the *principum specula* – mirrors for princes. These works profess to offer sage advice on the art of governance to novice sovereigns. Logically enough, works of this nature tended to proliferate in periods of political instability, and their dissemination was greatly enhanced by the exploitation of printing technology in the early modern era, especially during the Wars of Religion, when a significant percentage of vernacular polemical texts exhibited associated moralising characteristics. They multiplied almost exponentially under the last Valois monarch, Henri III (reigned 1574–89), not only in the form of the weightier self-proclaimed 'mirrors' considered here, but also in a torrent of short ephemeral works – often enough single-sheet, octavo, sixteen-page broadsheets or pamphlets – with telltale titles: so many *advertissements*; *advis*; *discours*; *harangues*; *remonstrances*; *responses*; *requestes*. Aside from attempting to (re)define relations between confessions, among subjects, and between subjects and sovereign (as to be expected in a series of conflicts that were ultimately as civil as they were religious), they disclose something about the way sovereigns and subjects should relate to the environment, advising on how best to manage it in the interests of personal and general prosperity.

In 1594, Jean-Aimé de Chavigny, a medically trained humanist, published poet, and former secretary to the oracular apothecary Michel de Nostredame (Nostradamus), brought out in Lyon *La Premiere Face du Janus françois*,[6] a bilingual exegesis of his late mentor's *Prophéties*, or *Centuries*.[7] Chavigny's unabashedly partisan work sorts and arranges the famously enigmatic quatrains into a triumphalist facing-page French/Latin chronicle of 'les troubles, guerres civiles & autres choses memorables advenuës en la France & ailleurs', from the arrival of Lutheran heresies in France in the 1530s, through the assassination of Henri III

6 Jean-Aimé de Chavigny, *La Premiere Face du Ianus François, contenant sommairement les trovbles, guerres ciuiles & autres choses memorables aduenuës en la France & ailleurs dés l'an de salut MDXXXIIII iusques à l'an MDLXXXIX fin de la maison Valesienne* (Lyon: Roussin, 1594).

7 On the historically cloudy identity of Chavigny, see Bernard Chevignard, 'Jean-Aimé de Chavigny: son identité, ses origines familiales', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 58.2 (1996), 419–25.

in 1589.[8] It is dedicated to the Bourbon successor, Henri IV, whose abjuration of Calvinism in July 1593 cleared the final obstacle to legitimate sovereignty and – Chavigny foretells – the assumption of universal empire, with an explicit and expansive guarantee of peace and prosperity for all.[9] In the second of two notes to the reader – the first delicately dispatches the hazardous issue of prophecy in an orthodox Catholic context –, Chavigny endeavours to give providential meaning to decades of confessional strife in France. They are to be understood, he argues, as divine punishments for French waywardness, for the French having shifted their devotion – like Noah's hapless contemporaries – from the creator to the creation. It was, according to Chavigny, the extraordinary largesse of that creation that led humans in Genesis, as in Valois France, into the impious 'vice d'ingratitude':

> Quiconque aura leu attentivement les sainctes escritures, & quelques histoires profanes aussi, aura apris & remarqué que ce tres sage & tres grand Architecte de tout le monde combien qu'il soit tres riche & abondant, & n'ait faute d'aucune chose qui se puisse voir, ou non voir, à creé neantmoins & fait de rien tout ce beau pourpris des cieux, la terre, le Soleil & ceste Lune, & toutes autres choses que nous apprehendons par les sens, *pour l'usage des hommes & commodité*: voire deployant les tresors de sa grande liberalité & magnificence *à conferé à l'homme* plus que pour ses necessitez ordinaires: de sorte que par la creation & *don gratuit* de tant de choses, l'humain genre *à moyen de iouyr de tous biens* avec plaisir & contentement, & se former ça bas un petit paradis terrestre.[10]
>
> [Whosoever will have read holy scripture attentively, together with a few profane histories, will have learned and noted that the very wise and great Architect of the entire world, however rich and abundant and lacking in nothing seen nor unseen he may be, has nevertheless created and made out of nothing the vast vault of the heavens, the earth, the sun and the moon, and all other things that we can perceive with our senses *for the use and comfort of humans*. Indeed, disbursing his treasures with great liberality and magnificence he has *bestowed on humans* more than their ordinary needs require, such that by the creation and *free gift* of so many things, the human race has the means *to use all goods* with pleasure and contentment and to make for itself here below a little earthly paradise.]

Like all post-Edenic terrestrial paradises, it has suffered – and will suffer – human and environmental degradation of quasi-apocalyptical proportion, be it flooding, war, famine and/or pestilence as a means of correction. Chavigny's copiously annotated edition of the *Centuries* proceeds to demonstrate that Nostradamus

8 Although only one edition of Chavigny's work is known to us, a number of close variations were published in Paris in 1594, 1596 and 1603.

9 Chavigny promises the second, forward-looking 'face' of Janus for 1607, once said empire will have been realised, but no sequel came to print.

10 Chavigny, *La Premiere Face du Ianus François*, 13 [my emphasis].

foresaw this most recent fall from grace, and prophesied the advent of its Bourbon redeemer.

As the excerpted passage repeatedly accentuates, Chavigny takes for granted the notion of dominion; in other words, as medieval historian Lynn White Jr so contentiously wrote a half-century ago, 'the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man'.[11] Chavigny's concerns are immediate and local: he invokes biblical dominion primarily as a potent analogy for the very real French royal dominion in its various manifestations – physical, spiritual, political, economic –, all of them devastated by war resulting from Valois misrule. In a controversial article published at the dawn of the 'ecocritical age', White Jr posited Judeo-Christian dominion as the historic root of, and justification for, our very different – in scope, in scale, in significance –, but not unrelated, modern 'ecologic crisis', the product of ostensible (Western) misrule. The profuse critical response provoked by his thesis has not, in common with the crisis, become exhausted or resolved.[12] It continues to generate, as White Jr fully intended, much worthwhile debate concerning medieval and early modern (lack of) European environmental consciousness, and its practically mandatory expression in terms of Christian cosmological hierarchy, as extrapolated from Genesis 1.28. Chavigny's treatment is perfectly consonant with White Jr's thesis: he assumes that his contemporaries' relation to creation, hence to the environment, must begin with Genesis, just as in the case of his rearrangement of Nostradamic prophecies. He can thereby herald a renewed post-war commitment to it, personified in the accession of a new and vigorous Catholic dynast (Henri IV), who will be responsible for restoring the proper management ('usage'; 'iouyr'; 'se former') of the environment for the benefit ('commodité'; 'plaisir'; 'contentement') of his subjects, as God the Master Builder ('grand Architect') intended when he freely gave the wealth of creation to his creatures ('conferer'; 'don gratuit'; 'tresors'). Good stewardship is, then, the defining feature of the monarch in Chavigny's formulation, and the *Ianus François* can be read as the latest variant in a long line of *principum specula*.

Chavigny's lesson is not terribly original: the chronic civil disorder under the last Valois kings – three brothers who each contended with some degree of *de*

11 Lynn T. White Jr, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155.3767 (1967), 1203–7 (1207).

12 Jacques Grinevald, 'La Thèse de Lynn White, Jr (1966): sur les racines historiques, culturelles et religieuses de la crise écologique de la civilisation industrielle moderne', in *Crise écologique, crise des valeurs? Défis pour l'anthropologie et la spiritualité*, ed. by D. Bourg and P. Roch (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2010), 39–67; Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*, chapter 3.

facto or *de iure* maternal regency – prompted numerous didactic works on kingship. If the veritable metastasis in France of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* following Jacques Gohory's 1571 translation[13] – not to mention such censorious reactions as Innocent Gentillet's *Contre Nicolas Machiavel*[14] and Jean Bodin's *République*,[15] both from 1576 – set political theory on a pragmatic modernising course, earlier paradigms of idealised just kingship persisted.[16] Closely aligned with Chavigny's interpretation was the tenacity of the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi*. Long attributed to third-century bishop Cyprian of Carthage, and reinvigorated by Catholic printer Fédéric Morel's translation (1563), coinciding with Charles IX's majority, it enjoyed multiple strategic reprintings through the 1570s (after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre; on the accession of Henri III). Morel's dedicatory epistle to Henri d'Angoulême – the legitimated half-brother of the last three Valois – in the third printing (1568) explicitly classes the text in the tradition of the princely mirror genre: 'Et quant à l'utilité d'iceluy traicte, lequel est intitulé Des douze abus du monde: ie n'en diray autre chose, sinon qu'il me semble estre *comme un certain & vray miroir de la vie humaine*, dans lequel un chacun, de quelque aage ou estat qu'il soit, peut appercevoir non seulement ce qui est de son devoir pour bien & Chrestiennement vivre: mais aussi s'il y a quelque tache ou macule en ses mœurs, le moyen de l'oster & du tout effacer'.[17] The most reprised of the twelve abuses in contemporaneous polemic was, unsurprisingly, the ninth 'mirror' – reserved for the prince –, 'Du Roy inique' ['Of the Unjust King'], whose principal latent 'stain' or 'blemish' is delineated in Morel's translation:

> Mais celuy qui ne gouverne son Royaume & soy-mesme selon ceste loy [Catholic doctrine], il se met au hazard, & est en danger d'endurer en son temps beaucoup d'iniures & d'adversitz. Car à cause de ce, souvent la paix est rompue entre les peuples & nations, & de là adviennent grands scandales & troubles en un Royaume. Les fruicts aussi de la

13 Nicolas Machiavel, *Le Prince*, trans. by J. Gohory (Paris: Le Mangnier, 1571).

14 Innocent Gentillet, *Discours svr les moyens de bien govverner et maintenir en bonne paix vn Royaume ou autre Principauté; contre Nicolas Machiauel* ([Paris]: [n. pub.], 1576).

15 Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République* (Paris: Du Puy, 1576).

16 On the topic of Machiavelli translated into French, see Willis H. Bowen, 'Sixteenth-Century French Translations of Machiavelli', *Italica* 27.4 (1950), 313–20; Donald R. Kelley, 'Murd'rous Machiavel in France: A Post-Mortem', *Political Science Quarterly* 85.4 (1970), 545–59.

17 [Cyprian], *De douze manieres d'abus qui sont en ce monde en diverses sortes de gents, & du moyen d'iceux corriger, & s'en donner garde*, trans. by F. Morel (Paris: Morel, 1568), 4 [my emphasis]. On the *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* in a much earlier but pertinent politico-historical context, see Rob Meens, 'Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm', *Early Medieval Europe* 7.3 (1998), 345–57.

> terre en sont diminuez, & les subsides des peuples empeschez. Beaucoup d'autres maux aussi corrompent & gastent la prosperité du Royaume. La mort des enfans, & plus chers amis, apporte de la tristesse: les courses qui font les ennemis gastent par tout les provinces: les bestes sauvages se iettent sur les troupeaux tant du gros que du menu bestail: les tempestes du printemps & de l'hyver empeschent la fertilité des terres, & le rapport de la mer. Et quelque fois la foudre & les esclairs bruslent les bleds & les arbres, les fleurs & les bourgeons.[18]
>
> [But he who does not govern his realm and himself according to this law [Catholic doctrine] puts himself in jeopardy and in danger of suffering in his time many injuries and adversities. For this reason peace is often broken among peoples and nations, whence great scandals and troubles in a realm arise. The fruits of the earth are diminished, and subsidies from the people impeded. Many other ills corrupt and destroy the prosperity of the realm. The death of children and dear friends brings sadness; enemy raids lay waste to the provinces; wild beasts attack herds of livestock big and small; spring and winter storms diminish the fertility of the earth and bounty of the sea. And sometimes thunder and lightning burn the wheat and the trees, the flowers and the buds.]

The prince who strays from the path of Christian virtue abandons the requisite qualities of the good steward, and his realm suffers the consequences in very real environmental terms: crops fail; children die; wild animals feast on the domesticated; weather patterns become devastatingly unpredictable. The realm's prosperity is 'spoiled and corrupted', leading to diminished state revenue ('les subsides des peuples'). The divinely instituted order of the human, animal and plant worlds is turned topsy-turvy; a punitive *mundus inversus* is realised. If the *Twelve Abuses* are generic enough to cover any monarchical regime, they are also sufficiently germane to the state of affairs in the sixteenth century to resonate with the chroniclers of France's protracted confessional conflict. Chavigny holds accountable one particular errant prince, Henri III, just as he credits his agnatic kinsman and heir Henri IV with the prophetically proven potential to set things right.

Between Morel and Chavigny, other forthright attempts to hold Henri III to account appeared, among which a striking (and strikingly understudied) trio of polemical publications from the early 1580s, the first two of which marketed themselves as annotated books of account, while the third presented itself as the critical handbook, or hand-mirror, to prompt the king to reflect on such works, and turn them to figurative and literal profit. In order of dated dedicatory epistles, the works are: *Le Secret des finances de France*, signed Nicolas Froumenteau, and addressed to Henri III (January 1581); *Le Miroir des François*, autographed Nicolas de Montand, and dedicated to Louise de Lorraine, the consort of Henri III

18 [Cyprian], *De douze manieres d'abus*, 37.

(October 1581); *Le Cabinet du roy de France*, attributed to Nicolas Barnaud, and – like *Le Secret* – addressed to Henri III (November 1581). All three issued *sans privilège* from anonymous presses. Of the three largely undocumented authors, only Barnaud – a medically trained alchemist and Calvinist convert from the Drôme who resided in Geneva during the 1570s and 80s – seems to have had a publishing life outside the material in question.[19]

These massive pamphlets, which exhibit varying degrees of Calvinist bias, offer a singularly prodigious array of fantastical statistics, fictional colloquies, imagined debates, and long-winded authorial harangues comprising well over two thousand octavo pages. Each is a coherent and autonomous work in its own right, but with sufficient shared internal references, points of style, and an overarching agenda to have long made the idea of a group reading – even a concerted strategy – attractive. They loosely form a definitive and authoritative, albeit often satirical, audit of the steadily worsening Valois fiscal crisis, and propose ways of addressing it. They thus provide a rare glimpse into the (imagined) workings of early modern provincial estates, the Estates-General, and associated gatherings for the expression of limited popular sovereignty, for which the manifest model was – not by chance – the defiant Estates-General at Blois in 1576–7. The serious challenges to royal authority made there by the Huguenots and, increasingly, the Catholic League multiplied the opportunities and the perceived need for such expression, in the (vain) hope of putting an end to the internecine destruction. The assembly was convened during the brief respite following the Edict of Beaulieu (May 1576), between the fifth and the sixth of eight wars, when damage to and mishandling of the economy, the commonweal and the environment had drastically reduced the revenue stream for the monarchy, obliging the king to increase exactions from the first and third estates. The works create a discursive triptych representing a polemically slanted *recensement* of the state of the realm circa 1580 with regard to its economic health (poor), its wealth (misappropriated and/or squandered), and

19 The most extensive effort to sort out this tripartite publishing enigma was undertaken by the brothers Eugène and Émile Haag, whose fascination and frustration are palpable in the biographical entries spread across three volumes and a dozen years of their encyclopedic *La France protestante* in the mid-nineteenth century. They ultimately throw up their hands, 'en attendant que de nouvelles recherches nous autorisent à nous prononcer [while waiting for new research to authorise a definitive decision]' (I, 256); the matter has yet to be resolved. Eugène Haag and Émile Haag, *La France protestante*, 10 vols (Paris: Cherbuliez, 1846–59), entries for 'Barnaud (Nicolas)', I (1846), 250–6; 'Froumenteau (Nicolas)', V (1855), 181–5; 'Montand (Nicolas de)', VII (1857), 449–53 [each entry contains a detailed synopsis of the attributed work].

its management (corrupt, but salvageable). They constitute a vast hall of princely mirrors for the direct and express edification of Henri III, with the aim of advising him about the most just (and lucrative) methods of taking back his largely alienated domain, and reasserting his dominion.

Le Cabinet du roi de France is divided into three books, each devoted to one of the three pearls 'd'inestimable valeur', revealed upfront as a metaphor for the three traditional estates of France: the clergy; the nobility; the bourgeoisie or the commons. Logically enough, the first pearl denotes the first estate, the Gallican Church, warranting Barnaud's most detailed and sustained treatment. Its principal conceit takes the form of an exposé or, more precisely, an 'outing' of the Gallican Church: the author claims to have obtained secret accounts ('catalogue'), akin to a confidential internal memo entitled *La Poligamie sacree*, which purportedly documents the deviant (and inextricably intertwined) sexual and financial practices of clerics of all ranks. The 'leaked' file is apparently so damning that, in the words of an anxious senior prelate who claims to have no direct knowledge of it, 'si l'on continuë à le publier, n'y aura grands ny petits, qui ne nous crache au visage [if we persist in publishing it, there will be no one, great or humble, who will not spit in our faces]'.[20]

This exposé ('mise en lumière') of *La Poligamie sacree* is seemingly a confused mishmash of Huguenot polemical thrusts and parries, familiar since the outbreak of the Wars. What is perhaps most striking and novel is the opening hundred pages of 'proof' – 'preuve' is one of Barnaud's terms of choice – in the form of detailed accounts of the real revenue of the Gallican Church, and its expenses. By Barnaud's calculations, the Gallican Church counts twenty-one archbishoprics (of which twelve in France), 160 bishoprics (of which ninety-six in France), 132,000 parishes, 540 archpriories, 1450 abbeys, 12,320 priories, 259 commanderies, 152,000 chapels, 567 women's priories and abbeys, 700 convents, and 180,000 castles belonging to the clergy, of which 83,000 exercise high, middle and low jurisdiction (which might be glossed as criminal, civil and small-claims courts) over some 1,377,000,000 subjects. The annual revenue from all this amounts to 92 million *écus* 'en deniers clairs & liquides', which – at 3 *livres* to the *écu* – comes to over 270 million *livres*.[21] Barnaud then accounts for the prodigious amount that the Church collects in kind – legumes and grains, including wheat; cattle and other stock; eggs; butter –, and inventories the number of farms and fields, the

20 [Barnaud, Nicolas], *Le Cabinet dv roy de France, dans leqvel il y a trois Perles precieuses d'inestimable valeur*, 3 vols ([Geneva]: [Laimarie], 1581), I, 120.

21 [Barnaud], *Le Cabinet du roy*, I, 2.

number and the size of fishponds and water-mills, and the acreage of vine, pasturage and woodland. He calculates that of the 200 million *arpents* of French land, the Gallican Church pockets tithes from 47 million. In sum, the annual receipts of the Gallican Church have deprived the kings of France of 3,060,000,000 *écus* (or 9,180,000,000 *livres tournois*); the narrator drily notes that 'par ainsi ne faut s'esmerveiller si trois millions de personnes vivent aux depens du Crucifix [thus one should not wonder that three million people earn a living from the Cross]'.[22]

It is not so much the receipts, however, as the expenses that bear the brunt of Barnaud's scrutiny. It is one thing that the Gallican Church rakes in fantastical proceeds, to which – the account implies – it has dubious claim; how it expends those proceeds is quite another. Attention shifts to the facing page of the ledger, to an itemised account of corporate outlay. As might be expected, the pursuit of terrestrial pleasures – antithetical to the Church's celestial mission – is the big ticket item: whores and adulteresses, and their numerous bastard progeny, even the bastard offspring of bastards, sodomites and catamites (presented as a Jesuit weakness), and the human and animal retinue necessary to maintain them. The narrator provides statistical 'proof' of obscene Church wealth immorally squandered on scandalous commodities, both sexual and sensual. Here begins the *satyre violente* proper: the discrediting of the Gallican Church, which is the goal of *Le Cabinet*, is effected by means of a corrosive representation of a literal act of *déboursement*, the emptying of a *bourse* – which has the pointed advantage of meaning 'purse' and 'testicles' – that is both public (French patrimony) and private (illegitimate clerical paternity). These are the 'lignes de compte', the ledger items with which the fiscal hawk concerns himself, and endeavours to concern the presumably scandalised reader. The meticulously measured outflow is one of substance and semen, the stuff of earthly kingdoms and earthy men.

Le Secret des finances is likewise a tripartite ledger of meticulous, if equally inflated accounts. It opens on an overt exhortation to Henri III to put the royal house in order. France was once the enviable 'miroir & principal regard de la Chrestienté [reflection and principal representation of Christianity]':

> Toutes ses Provinces sont bien & proprement marquees de villes & citez, si bien traversees de fleuves & rivieres, qu'outre la douce & plaisante navigation d'icelles, le seul regard contente l'homme: arrousent d'autre costé les prez & her[b]ages, qui produisent en leur saison fertilité de fruicts, si grande & si heureuse, qu'il y a bien peu de pays estrangers, prochains & lointains, qui ne participent de son abondance.[23]

22 [Barnaud], *Le Cabinet du roy*, I, 16.

23 Froumenteau, Nicolas, *Le Secret des finances de France*, 3 vols ([Geneva]: [Berjon], 1581), I, ii.

> All of [France's] provinces are amply and neatly dotted with towns and cities traversed by so many rivers and streams that, aside from the gentle and pleasant navigation of them, the mere view of them delights the human eye. They irrigate on either side meadows and pastures that produce in season such a great and happy abundance of fruits that few foreign countries, near and far, do not profit from it.

Civil war and disastrous fiscal mismanagement ('desordre & mauvais mesnagement') have sadly reduced it, and the obsessive author-*cum*-statistician reproduces the tarnished mirror that remains, the better to stir the king to action that, if successful, will see 'ce Royaume en peu de temps reprendre sa premiere splendeur'.[24]

The first of the three books covers receipts from the royal domain, various forms of national taxation (salt, wine, ban & arrière-ban), and royal and government expenses from the reign of Henri II through December 1580. The second and third volumes, taking up 911 of the work's 1063 pages, extend to a comprehensive, itemised assessment of the fiscal health of the entire realm, following a relatively simple, repetitive formula. The realm is split into north/south along an east-west axis running south of the forty-sixth parallel, so that the Midi and l'Occitanie feature in Book 3, and the northern two-thirds in Book 2, reflecting the perception that the Midi and the southwest were disproportionately affected by the combat. The three books inventory in thoroughly disturbing detail, diocese by diocese, the price of war: first, the multiple taxes and other forms of official exaction ('gabelles'; 'tailles'; 'aydes'; 'dons gratuits'; 'subsides & imposts'); second, the increase in the number of fees ('espices') for grasping royal functionaries ('sergens'; 'notaires'; 'advocats'; 'procureurs'); finally, the violent deaths of men of both cloths, nobles, soldiers of both confessions, natives and foreigners, the number of women and girls raped, of homes destroyed and of villages burned. A total of 765,200 dead, according to Froumenteau's *Estat final*, among whom 32,900 nobles, which rises to 1,244,078 if one tallies up the actual itemisation – roughly 6% of a population of ± 20 million in 1580.[25] The funds levied (and lost) to support this war are calculated (as of 1580) at 4,750,000,000 *livres tournois*, at a time when the king's annual revenue from all taxes was around 15 million *lt*, and government debt just over 40 million.[26] Froumenteau claims to keep the books for writing down – but not

24 Froumenteau, *Le Secret des finances*, I, vii[v].

25 Froumenteau, *Le Secret des finances*, III, 377–80. For population figures, see Jacques Dupâquier, ed., *Histoire de la population française*, vol. 2 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), 151.

26 Georges Picot, *Histoire des États Généraux, considérés au point de vue de leur influence sur le gouvernement de la France de 1355 à 1614*, 4 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1872), III, 3; 20.

off – the intolerably high cost of property seized, damaged and destroyed during France's seemingly unending religious and civil troubles.

As if only too aware of the incendiary nature of the astonishingly detailed statistics, Froumenteau near the close is careful to offer up thirty-four pages of what he, like Barnaud, calls 'preuves', such as the 'rooles & contrerolles', the 'contes ès Chambre des contes', and the 'cahiers de doléances' that he claims to have consulted. Froumenteau's claims allow him to produce what cultural historian Mary Poovey terms 'the appearance of accuracy'.[27] This enables him to create a persuasive statistical map – an early, discursive form of cadastral survey – of the degraded state of the realm that is explicitly charted for the king, and ostensibly drawn from unprecedented measurements recorded by the king's men, in order to assist the monarch in (re)claiming his own, and restoring the realm to the peaceful and prosperous glory it knew under Louis XII (reigned 1498–1515), the yardstick by which all the numbers in *Le Secret* are measured. It was evidently designed to make Henri III and his advisors *ébahis* [abashed/astonished] – one of Froumenteau's preferred terms – by the scale and the scope of a seemingly endless national, regional and local calamity; as proof of, according to Froumenteau's dire concluding warning, 'le danger eminent de [l']estat, qui ne tient qu'à un filet [the imminent danger to the state, which hangs by a thread]'.[28]

Unlike *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, *Le Miroir des François* only sporadically respects the format of a formal book of accounts,[29] and is dedicated not to Henri III, but to Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont, the king's consort of the preceding half-decade. It plays nimbly – if tritely – on the suitability of a princely mirror as a gift to 'la plus belle creature & rare en lineations de visage qu'on ait peu rencontrer aux quatre coins du monde'.[30] Such attractions perfectly position her to influence

According to Picot (III, 20n2), these figures feature in unpublished papers belonging to the Venetian ambassador.

27 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 56; on the 'epistemological effect' of the spread of double-entry bookkeeping, see 30–2.

28 Froumenteau, *Le Secret des finances*, III, 415.

29 In contrast to *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, *Le Miroir* was taken relatively seriously as an exercise in economic reporting by at least one near-contemporary, Antoine de Montchrestien, who excerpted whole sections of it – neglecting attribution – in his widely known *Traicté de l'œconomie politique* ([Paris]: [n. pub.], 1615). The basic tenets of seventeenth-century mercantilism are thus in many ways due to Montand's – somewhat scattershot – notions of political economy, though Montand lifted a sizeable portion of material from Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République* – also neglecting attribution.

30 Nicolas de Montand, *Le Miroir des Francois*, 3 vols ([Geneva]: [Laimarie], 1581), I, iiii^{r-v}.

her husband; if she succeeds, the rewards will be real, quantifiable and commensurate with those recovered in *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, including 'environ deux cens millions que ces arpyes ont volé peculativement, tant sur le Roy que sur son peuple'.[31] Like the other two works, *Le Miroir* is something of a hodgepodge: over two of three books, seven improbably populated colloquies – Étienne Marcel, the martyred fourteenth-century Prévôt des Marchands de Paris and Third-Estate fiscal hawk at the Estates-General of Paris in 1355, is placed in dialogue with Pierre de Versoris, the late sixteenth-century Parisian parliamentarian, Third-Estate delegate, speaker and editor of *cahiers de doléances* – are peppered with Rabelaisian lists, cost of living indices, and so forth. The third book is devoted to a rambling first-person harangue by Montand, a heteroclite assemblage of gripes from which a pattern of nascent political economy emerges. In his severe, meandering critique of social ills connected by their perceived lack of self or public control – sumptuary abuses; alcoholism; gluttony; gambling; dancing; sorcery; aristocratic hunting practices and horse-feeding (both of which have a negative impact on commoners) –, there is something of a Calvinist blueprint for an obsessively, puritanically controlled economy, maniacally mindful of waste. Montand goes as far as proposing price controls, a comprehensive inventory of production, the supervised distribution of goods (primarily wine and wheat) – a system of tight control for an environment that has, to return to White Jr's terms, 'no reason for existence save to serve man'.[32]

Like *Le Cabinet* and *Le Secret*, all 'proof' is forcefully assembled to shore up Valois legitimacy by offering a multi-pronged approach to reclaiming royal dominion. If such measures, Montand claims, are judiciously reflected upon and applied, and if existing edicts of toleration – themselves management of the confessional environment – are enforced, a utopian period of peace and prosperity will ensue:

> Voici qui adviendra, le marchant qui s'adonne trop à l'avarice, & à courrir iour & nuict par mer & par terre, pour avoir des biens, les trouvera tout prests à sa porte, le laboureur verra paistre son troupeau parmy les valees & montagnes, sans avoir peur du felon soldat, ny des voleur & brigands, car le pays en sera despetré, le gentilhomme verra ses suiets cultiver & labourer la terre, qui luy payeront librement ses rentes & censives: les prestres travailleront de leurs mains, les sages mesnagers nourriront abondamment la volaille, & autres animaux qui serviront à l'usage & nourriture des hommes: les uns feront valoir les terres infertiles, les autres feront des vergers nouveaux, qui produiront fruits plantureux & divers, d'autres nettoyeront les prez qui sont desers & en buissons, & feront courir l'eau au moulin d'iceux d'un autre artifice qu'on n'avoit pas encores accoustumé, aucuns

31 Montand, *Le Miroir*, I, iiii^{v}.

32 White Jr, 'Historical Roots', 1207.

> semeront de luyserne pour avoir quantité de foin, d'autres feront de petits garennes pour la sauvagine, l'un plantera force muriers pour nourrir les vers d'Indie, l'autre force saules: qui semera des pepins, qui des meilleurs fruits, qui des fossez autour des her[b]ages. Et finalement on verra produire plus de biens s'il plaist à Dieu dans une annee que l'on n'en recueilloit en cinq ou six precedentes.[33]
>
> [Here is what will happen: the merchant who is too prone to avarice and to scurrying day and night by sea and by land to amass goods, will find them ready at his door. The husbandman will see his flock graze among the valleys and mountains, with no fear of marauding solider, thief or brigand, for the country will be free of them. The gentleman will see his tenants cultivate and work the earth, and they will freely pay his rents and charges. The priests will work with their hands. The prudent householders will feed their poultry generously, together with other animals who serve the needs and nourishment of men. Some will make infertile lands produce, others will plant new orchards that will produce abundant and diverse fruits. Others will clear abandoned and overgrown meadows and channel water to mills, using techniques to which we are not yet accustomed. Some will sow clover to produce much fodder, others will make warrens for wild game. One will plant many mulberry trees to nourish silk worms, another many willows. Yet another will sow fruit seeds, another [will plant] the best fruit trees, one [will dig] ditches around pastures. And finally we will see produced more goods, if it please God, in one year than we harvested in the five or six preceding ones.]

This beatific vision pointedly recalls the opening of the third book, an eloquent rendering of the principal promises of biblical dominion drawn word-for-word from Leviticus 26.3–6 in Pierre Robert Olivétan's translation (1535), which was the basis for the later Genevan Bible:

> *Si vous cheminez en mes ordonnances, & gardez mes commandemens, & les faites*, ie vous donneray la pluye en son temps, & la terre donnera son fruit, & les arbres des champs donneront leur fruict, la bature des grains entre vous rencontrera la vendange, & la vendange rencontrera les semailes, & mangerez vostre pain en santé, & dormirez seurement en vostre terre, & donneray paix en la terre, vous dormirez sans que nul vous espouvante. Ie feray cesser les mauvaises bestes de la terre, & le glaive ne passera point par vostre terre.[34]
>
> [If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.]

33 Montand, *Le Miroir*, III, 483.

34 Montand, *Le Miroir*, III, 446 [my emphasis]. The English rendering is from the King James version of the Bible (1611).

As with Chavigny and Cyprian/Morel's formulations, Barnaud, Froumenteau and Montand make a concerted effort to 'prove' that an environment conducive to human prosperity – which is the unquestionable goal and good – is *contingent* on competent stewardship. The Wars of Religion, characterised as a consequence of Valois misrule, serve as a catastrophic counter-example. In the estimation of these authors, God-given dominion and its concomitant responsibilities have been alarmingly compromised, and the duty of a good and just Christian king – be he Valois or Bourbon, and capable of being rehabilitated for the task – is to reassert the first and live up to the second, even if he has to confront powerful, corrupt institutions, such as the Gallican Church (*Le Cabinet*) or the king's own ministers and favourites (*Le Miroir*), among many examples of failed stewardship.

The three polemical works offer evidence ('preuves') that the quality of the environment is increasingly perceived as quantifiable in the early modern period; degradation due to human mismanagement must be measured, if solely to correct negative effects on *human* welfare. In this, we can locate early expressions of an ecocritical sensibility; of, returning to Bate's terms, 'reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth'.[35] All the aforementioned authors of *principum specula* engage seriously with the biblical notion of dominion – both reflecting and reflecting *upon* contemporary notions of it. Understanding the evolution of that engagement, as White Jr pointed out for the medieval period so many decades ago, is an indispensable preliminary to ecocritiquing French history.

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35 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 266.

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The Vanity of Ecology: Expenditure in Montaigne's Vision of the New World

Abstract: Ecocriticism can acquire important insights from interrogating Renaissance, humanist texts and contexts. The humanist authors who seem to be at odds with ecocriticism's professed turn to the natural world – in this study, Michel de Montaigne – exhibit, in fact, a certain form of environmental awareness in their work. They index humanism's shifting relationship to the environment in ways that have shaped our own ecological consciousness. Building on Louisa Mackenzie's development of a queer, early modern French practice of ecocriticism, this chapter goes beyond merely thematic understandings of ecology to question how the human being confronts environmental change. Montaigne's 'Des coches' ['On Coaches'] and 'Des cannibales' ['On Cannibals'], often read as economic and ideological critiques of colonisation, contain the depiction of an environmental crisis in Renaissance France, in terms of the notion of a global world, and insofar as the Wars of Religion turn the French territory into a barren wasteland. Juxtaposed with Georges Bataille's *La Part maudite* [*The Accursed Share*], particularly the notion of *dépense* [expenditure], Montaigne's essays appear to pre-formulate a paradoxical concern for sustainability. This chapter begins by examining the overlooked backdrop of 'On Cannibals' as one of environmental troubles, or trembling, based on moveable ground and the considerations of floods. This unsettling sense of humans' insufficient control over the nonhuman environment carries into an analysis of the setting of 'On Coaches' at the other end of the *Essais*, focussing on the (perhaps metaphorical) sea-sickness of Montaigne. Is his discussion of an anxiety about travel the symptom of a larger, more global concern for a world in which imperialistic views are overtaking human beings? Montaigne's arguments regarding luxury and commerce take on the depth of an environmental critique if we compare them to the postmodern environmental economy of Bataille that is founded on a paradoxical relationship to expenditure. The tone of vanity frequently adopted by Montaigne coincides with Bataille's arguably vain ecology. In the early modern period, as in 2016, is ecological thought an inherently absurd endeavour?

A great paradox courses through sixteenth-century literature in France. Despite being a century of abundance and economic prosperity after many decades of war and famine, and notwithstanding the glorious Renaissance of Loire Valley châteaux and Francis I's colonial endeavours in the New World, scholars such

as Rebecca Zorach argue that abundance and excess were far from unanimous.[1] Many of the most influential writers of the period dwell on the wastefulness of the century: Michel de Montaigne deplored a 'siècle desbordé [an overwhelmed century],'[2] a 'saison si gastée [a wasted season]' (*E* 649). In the second chapter of the first book of the *Essais* (1580), Montaigne congratulates himself on 'se sentir preservé de la contagion d'un siecle si gasté [feeling unspoiled by the contagion of such a wasted century]' (*E* 22).[3] Despite Montaigne advocating a philosophy of moderation, images of overflow and excess suffuse the *Essais*. These versions of waste amount to a *dépense* [spending] of energy, money or natural resources. What led Montaigne to maintain such a negative opinion of spending and expenditure? I shall argue that Montaigne is an environmental writer by way of his definition of *dépense*. In my reading, 'environmental' is a term that can be applied to texts and authors who demonstrate a tropological relationship to the nonhuman environment as a structural dimension of their thought.[4] In his chapters about the New World, 'Des cannibales' and 'Des coches', Montaigne develops a strangely modern care for the environment, yet scholars have not often drawn conclusions that combine Montaigne's economic and ecological insight.[5] An environmental and economic reading of expenditure in the wake of Bataille helps us to rethink environmental crisis in our own era as much as Montaigne's, and might begin to explain why the long sixteenth century began with the Columbian Exchange and concluded with the Wars of Religion. How was the promise of a new world with new resources ultimately wasted?

The environmental aspects of 'Des cannibales', one of the most studied chapters of Montaigne's work, are somewhat dissimulated under the author's humanist commentary, but the environment is structurally significant to Montaigne's

1 Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

2 Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. by J. Balsamo, M. Magnien, C. Magnien-Simonin and A. Legros (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 923 [hereafter *E*; unreferenced translations are mine].

3 Note the etymological relationship between the Middle French *gaster* and the modern environmental issue of waste. For more details on the significant etymology of *gaster*, see Pauline Goul, '"Et voylà l'ouvrage gasté": The Poetics of Plenitude and Scarcity in Rabelais's Gaster', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50.3 (2014), 332–40.

4 With this definition, I distance myself from a more thematic understanding of the word that would limit what is environmental to what is green or natural.

5 For an economic analysis of 'Des coches', see Koji Takenaka, 'Montaigne et l'économie royale dans l'essai "Des coches"', *Le Verger* 2 (2012), 19 pages, <http://cornucopia16.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Verger2_TAKENAKA.pdf> [accessed 3 February 2016].

argument. From the beginning, 'Des cannibales' grapples with questions of space and scale. Montaigne first identifies the New World as 'cet autre monde [this other world]', introducing the eyewitness account of a man who was in his service, and who lived a decade in 'la France Antartique'.[6] Immediately after announcing this continent as irremediably other, Montaigne narrows the scope from world to 'païs': 'cette descouverte d'un païs infiny, semble de grande consideration (*E* 208) [the discovery of a boundless country seems worthy of consideration]'.[7] In Middle French, *pays* refers to a 'région géographique habitée, plus ou moins nettement délimitée [a geographical region that is inhabited, more or less neatly delimited]'.[8] It is likely that the 'less neatly delimited' dimension interests Montaigne: 'Infiny' points to the idea of the New World having no limits – neither material nor conceptual, since its boundaries are still being defined as a site of speculation. The figurative limits of the world are at stake in the discussion that follows: 'j'ay peur que nous ayons les yeux plus grands que le ventre, et plus de curiosité, que nous n'avons de capacité: nous embrassons tout, mais nous n'estreignons que du vent [I am afraid we have eyes bigger than our stomachs, and more curiosity than capacity. We embrace everything, but we clasp only wind] (*E* 208; *W* 182). Montaigne moves from a mere consideration to a declared fear, revealing his scepticism about colonial endeavours in the New World. It is significant that the chosen idiom usually refers to appetite or greed; Montaigne relates the infiniteness that defines the New World to the finiteness of human capacities and the human body. In Montaigne's analogy, it is as if humanity will bodily absorb the New World in some way. From the very beginning of 'Des cannibales', colonisation is a problem of consumption that is a vain movement: 'nous n'estreignons que du vent'.

The human body is never far from the nonhuman environment in Montaigne's work, and both entities are closely related, if not, I would argue, porously bound. The aforementioned reference to wind is not uncharacteristic, and the text soon turns to another meteorological element. Surrounded by images of water and floods, we come across Atlantis: 'jadis et avant le deluge, il y avoit une grande Isle nommée Atlantide, droict à la bouche du destroit de Gibraltar, qui tenoit plus de païs que l'Afrique et l'Asie toutes deux ensemble [in days of old, before the

6 For more details on the significance of testimonial narratives, see Andrea Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 2004).

7 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. by D. M. Frame (New York, NY: Knopf, 2003), 182 [hereafter *W*].

8 All notes on lexicology or etymology are sourced from the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales.

Flood, there was a great island named Atlantis, right at the mouth of the Strait of Gibraltar, which contained more land than Africa and Asia put together]' (*E* 208; *W* 182).[9] After retelling the tale of Atlantis, Montaigne concludes by describing the simultaneous, common end of the island, its inhabitants, and some Athenians who 'furent engloutis par le deluge [were swallowed up by the Flood]' (*E* 209; *W* 182). This is the first of many instances of *engloutissement* – another form of consumption – in relation to the New World, and it sets up a motif of conflict between earth and water that resurfaces in 'Des coches'. The biblical flood prompts an environmental thought: 'il est bien vraysemblable, que cet extrême ravage d'eau ait faict des changements estranges aux habitations de la terre: comme on tient que la mer a retranché la Sicile d'avec l'Italie [it is quite likely that that extreme devastation of waters made amazing changes in the habitations of the earth, as people maintain that the sea cut off Sicily from Italy]' (*E* 209; *W* 183). Montaigne's environment is nonhuman; the only human element is the 'habitations de la terre'. It is the nonhuman that acts: the sea cuts off the land between Sicily and Italy. The images invoke water wasting away the land, as the exceptional dimensions of the water conjure associations with a disaster: the 'extrême ravage d'eau' and the 'effect incroyable d'inundation' are followed, a few lines later, by the erosion of the Dordogne, as the discussion of Atlantis prompts Montaigne to consider his *païs* alongside the Dordogne.

Without concluding the reflection on Atlantis, or introducing the discussion of erosion, Montaigne proceeds: 'il semble qu'il y aye des mouvemens naturels les uns, les autres fievreux en ces grands corps, comme aux nostres [it seems that there are movements, some natural, others feverish, in these great bodies, just as in our own]' (*E* 209; *W* 183). The chiasmus opposes two types of movements with adjectives that do not seem to contradict one another, although their position in the chiasmus suggests that they do. In this context, *naturel* appears to be synonymous with normal, and to stand in opposition to *fievreux*, which denotes a disease, an infection, or an abnormal event in the body.[10] Montaigne situates his observation in the realm of medicine, since the other parallelism of the sentence – the simile – links human bodies and the somewhat vague concept of 'ces grands

9 Here, *païs* signifies a quality, something solid that one holds, such as a stretch of land.

10 Montaigne seems to consider diseases as accidents (the word is repeatedly used), instead of natural phenomena, which they obviously are; nature appears to be a habit, whereas disease is a rare occurrence. For further details of the intricacies of nature and the natural in Montaigne's *Essais*, see Yvonne Bellenger, '"Nature" et "Naturel" dans quatre chapitres des *Essais*', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* V.25–6 (1978), 37–49.

corps'. This description finds meaning somewhere between the various islands under discussion, 'ce monde nouveau [this new world]' (*E* 209; *W* 183), and 'les terres [the lands]' (*E* 209; *W* 183). The result of the observation is a merging of lands and human beings as 'corps' [bodies] encompassing normal and abnormal movements. In 'Des cannibales', environmental disasters appear as floods or figures of imminent, ongoing erosion, and are compared to diseases of the human body in a condemnatory mode informed by Montaigne's negative views on medicine.

The surprising appearance of an environmental discussion is little more than a pretext for another anecdote on a legendary transatlantic voyage. The consideration of the erosion of the Dordogne comes just before the chapter reaches its announced topic, cannibals, by way of the Aristotelian anecdote of Carthaginians who found a fertile land in the West: 'cette narration d'Aristote a non plus d'accord avec nos terres neufves [this story of Aristotle does not fit our new lands any better than the other]' (*E* 210; *W* 184). As he approaches the topic, Montaigne considers all of these islands and lands in order to trace the relation of possession between a land and its inhabitants. The first mention of the key term *païs* is bound with a possessive 'leur', and the Atlantis anecdote concludes with another determiner: 'et eux et leur Isle furent engloutis [both the Athenians and themselves and their island were swallowed]' (*E* 209; *W* 182). Once the Dordogne comes under discussion, Montaigne moves toward his own possession of the land:

> Quand je considere l'impression que *ma* riviere de Dordoigne faict de mon temps, vers la rive droicte de sa descente; et qu'en vingt ans elle a tant gaigné, et desrobé le fondement à plusieurs bastimens, je vois bien que c'est une agitation extraordinaire: car si elle fust tousjours allée ce train, ou deust aller à l'advenir, la figure du monde seroit renversée. (*E* 210)
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> [When I consider the inroads that my river, the Dordogne, is making in my lifetime into the right bank in its descent, and that in twenty years it has gained so much ground and stolen away the foundations of several buildings, I clearly see that this is an extraordinary disturbance; for if it had always gone at this rate, or was to do so in the future, the face of the world would be turned topsy-turvy.] (W 183)

In Middle French, the word 'impression', which one annotation translates as *érosion*, signifies a trace left by one body on another;[11] to take an example from the *Essais* that features in the *Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*: 'action d'un

11 According to *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (2016), it is an 'empreinte laissée par un corps pressé sur une surface', <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=4010862615;r=1;nat=;sol=0> [accessed 3 February 2016].

corps sur un autre [the action of one body on another]'.[12] Montaigne's comments about the 'agitation extraordinaire' evoke the feverish movements of human and nonhuman bodies, as the author accounts for the impact of changes in great bodies on the human realm. The scale is also quite striking, since the mere erosion of a riverside prompts Montaigne to foresee its global impact: 'la figure du monde seroit renversée'. The verbs such as 'desrobé' and 'renversée' convey the instability of the environment that surrounds the human being, and a lack of control over these surroundings is perceptible: 'mais il leur prend des changements: tantost elles s'espandent d'un costé, tantost d'un autre, tantost elles se contiennent. Je ne parle pas des soudaines inondations dequoy nous manions les causes [but rivers are subject to changes: now they overflow in one direction, now in another, now they keep to their course. I am not speaking of the sudden inundations whose causes are manifest]' (*E* 210; *W* 183).[13] Montaigne mentions environmental movements whose causes human beings understand, such as floods, but erosion is not one of these; in that regard, he depicts a frightening view of the seaside in his vicinity: 'en Medoc, le long de la mer, mon frere Sieur d'Arsac, voit une sienne terre, ensevelie soubs les sables, que la mer vomit devant elle [in Médoc, along the seashore, my brother, the sieur d'Arsac, can see an estate of his buried under the sands that the sea spews forth]' (*E* 210; *W* 183). Similar devices of environmental unrest appear, as the possessed land, 'sienne terre', is immediately threatened by another version of *engloutissement*, 'ensevelie soubs les sables.' The text becomes violent, with sand being generated by the sea throwing up.[14] The link between human and nonhuman bodies on the basis of movement comes full circle through the motif of sickness: the personified sand morphs into monstrous invaders, and the *païs infiny* gives way to a more universal environment: 'ces sables sont des fourriers. Et voyons de grandes montjoies d'arenes mouvantes, qui marchent une demie lieue devant elle, et gaignent païs [these sands are its harbingers; and we see great

12 *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (2016), <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=4010862615;r=1;nat=;sol=0> [accessed 3 February 2016]. The quotation comes from the very next chapter, I.31.

13 Montaigne could be suggesting that humans manipulate the causes of floods, perhaps provoking them (I thank Stephanie Posthumus for drawing my attention to this matter). While the context of the remark seems to hint simply at 'understanding', the twofold meaning is interesting, particularly in light of the subsequent discussion of human engineering in the Roman circus.

14 It is perhaps significant that the sea is feminine, and that the masculine 'grands corps' and 'mouvements fievreux' quite suddenly turn into a feminine river, as the Dordogne suddenly becomes plural ('tantost elles s'espandent').

dunes of moving sand that march half a league ahead of it and keep conquering land]' (*E* 210; *W* 183). With 'fourriers', derived from *fourrer* [to stuff], Montaigne provides another image of *engloutissement*. At the beginning of a chapter about American natives consuming each other and the bodies of European colonisers, Montaigne piles up, like dunes, visions of a nonhuman environment consuming itself and human constructions.

In counterpoint to such unstable ground, Montaigne foregrounds anecdotes of conquered lands, and 'Des cannibales' comes to represent settling in an unsettled environment. The Carthaginians of Aristotle's anecdote discovered 'une grande isle fertile [a great fertile island]', prompting them to settle there: 'eux, et autres depuis, attirez par la bonté et fertilité du terroir, s'y en allerent avec leurs femmes et enfans, et commencerent à s'y habituer [they, and others since, attracted by the goodness and fertility of the soil, went there with their wives and children, and began to settle there]' (*E* 210; *W* 184). From inhabitation to accustomisation, 's'y habituer' embodies a range of circumstances: the personal pronoun denotes a relationship to the land; the adverbial pronoun refers to a place; the verb signifies 'accoutumer [to grow accustomed]' and 's'établir', the active movement of settling. The digressive anecdotes that inaugurate the chapter are fundamental to the core argument in 'Des cannibales'. Montaigne argues that cannibalism is a matter of accustomisation: 'or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté: sinon que chacun appelle barbarie, *ce qui n'est pas de son usage* [now, to return to my subject, I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice]' (*E* 211; *W* 195 [my emphasis]).

In the other chapter that Montaigne dedicates to critiquing the colonisation of the New World, we find a similar representation of humanity's precarious position in an unstable environment. After evoking the landslides and the crumbling buildings of the Médoc during the Renaissance, 'Des coches' stages the ruin of the Inca and Aztec Empires, and evokes environmental upsets. The idea of transportation spans the chapter, from Montaigne's *coche* to the mode of conveyance for of the last king of Peru, Atahualpa, who died while being transported on a golden chair. The chapter begins with Montaigne describing his motion sickness, following a more general sense of sickness in the narrative that depicts sneezing and various types of bodily waste: 'me demandez-vous d'où vient cette coustume, de benire ceux qui esternuent? Nous produisons trois sortes de vent [do you ask me whence comes this custom of blessing those who sneeze? We produce three sorts of wind]'

(*E* 942; *W* 832).[15] The text then abruptly turns to the main topic, reflecting on 'la cause du souslevement d'estomach, qui advient à ceux qui voyagent en mer [the reason for the heaving of the stomach that afflicts those who travel by sea]' (*E* 942; *W* 832). The conceptual conjunction of sickness and the sea recalls the *vomissement* of the sea on the shores of the Médoc in 'Des cannibales'.

After mentioning the 'heaving of the stomach' in 'Des coches', Montaigne distances his symptoms from that which is usually thought to cause seasickness, namely fear: 'moy qui y suis fort subject, sçay bien, que cette cause ne me touche pas [I, who am very subject to seasickness, know very well that this cause does not affect me]' (*E* 942; *W* 832). The discussion continues on the subject of fear before returning to a more general sense of motion sickness: 'or je ne puis souffrir long temps (et les souffrois plus difficilement en jeunesse) ny coche, ny littiere, ny bateau, et hay toute autre voiture que de cheval, et en la ville, et aux champs [now I cannot long endure (and I could endure them less easily in my youth) either coach, or litter, or boat; and I hate any other transportation than horseback, both in town and in the country]' (*E* 944; *W* 833). The verb *souffrir* – with the Middle-French meaning of 'to bear or to endure something' – recalls 's'y habituer' in 'Des cannibales'. Is it *un mal des transports* that Montaigne is describing, or a more general nausea resulting from the instability of his grounding, from environmental unrest? At first, the sickness is directed at the sea, implying perhaps that transatlantic voyaging is the disease of the wasted century, yet the unease is by turns more general and more personal: 'par cette legere secousse, que les avirons donnent, desrobant le vaisseau soubs nous, je me sens brouiller, je ne sçay comment, la teste et l'estomach: comme je ne puis souffrir soubs moy un siege tremblant [by that slight jolt given by the oars, stealing the vessel from under us, I somehow feel my head and stomach troubled, as I cannot bear a shaky seat under me]' (*E* 944; *W* 834). The unrest is powerfully represented by the 'secousse', the verb 'brouiller', and the vivid image of a 'siege tremblant'. Given that *siege* in Middle French signifies 'la place que l'on occupe [the place one occupies]' or even 'un lieu où est établie une autorité [the place where an authority is established]' (the Latin *sedes* is another word for *habitation* or *domicile*), Montaigne's evocation of his 'siege tremblant' in the company of images of consumption and *engloutissement*, as well as the repetition of *desrober*, hints at environmental risk. Moreover, the key verb *habituer,* close to *souffrir*, expresses a concern for something akin to the modern notion of sustainability. How should one endure such crumbling buildings, such a moveable terrain?

15 There are echoes of 'Des cannibales', which starts with 'nous n'embrassons que du vent'.

The environmental implications of motion sickness set the stage for an exploration of the human consequences of the colonisation of the Americas. By way of various examples of coaches and transportation, the chapter comes to focus on issues of luxury and *dépense*. Motion sickness gives way to seemingly whimsical anecdotes about eccentric coaches: 'l'Empereur Firmus fit mener son coche, à des Autruches de merveilleuses grandeur, de maniere qu'il sembloit plus voler que rouler [Emperor Firmus had his chariot drawn by ostriches of marvelous size, so that it seemed rather to fly than to roll]' (*E* 945; *W* 835). The topics of coaches and expenditure diverge here, leading to a digression on the obsessive taste for luxury among sovereigns:

> L'estrangeté de ces inventions, me met en teste cett'autre fantasie: Que c'est une espece de pusillanimité, aux monarques, et un tesmoignage de ne sentir point assez, ce qu'ils sont, de travailler à se faire valloir et paroistre, par *despences excessives*. (*E* 945 [my emphasis])
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> [The strangeness of these inventions puts into my head this other notion: that it is a sort of pusillanimity in monarchs, and evidence of not sufficiently feeling what they are, to labor at showing off and making a display by excessive expense.] (*W* 835)

Montaigne contemplates the notion of *dépense* in an explicit critique of the excessive spending of kings, yet he does not condemn spending as such: 'l'emploitte me sembleroit bien plus royale, comme plus utile, juste et durable, en ports, en havres, fortifications et murs: en bastiments sumptueux, en Eglises, hospitaux, colleges, reformation de rues et de chemins [the outlay would seem to me much more royal as well as more useful, just, and durable, if it were spent on ports, harbors, fortifications, and walls, on sumptuous buildings, churches, hospitals, colleges, and the improvement of streets and roads]' (*E* 946; *W* 835). Montaigne's account of the difference between excessive and acceptable spending in terms of the common good is perfectly in line with discussions of spending at the time.[16] For a modern reader, the terms 'useful', 'fair' and 'durable' evoke ecological considerations. Is Montaigne formulating an early concern for sustainability? The United Nations definition of sustainability uses precisely such concepts: 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.[17] The French translation of

16 Daniel Ménager, 'Montaigne et la magnificence', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* VII.29–32 (1993), 63–71.

17 World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43.

sustainability – *développement durable* – chimes with Montaigne's vocabulary.[18] From 'Des cannibales' onwards, Montaigne's writing expresses environmental concerns in a mode that can be perceived as a kind of advocacy for a reasoned consumption of resources. A discordant element is, however, present in the list of useful and durable constructions: how pragmatic are the 'bastiments sumptueux'?

The notion of 'bastiments sumptueux' counters the utilitarianism of the other edifices, especially since 'sumptueux' fundamentally refers to pure consumption (since Roman times, sumptuary laws had served to control luxurious consumption). Montaigne's appreciation for 'la belle structure du Pont Neuf' seems more aesthetic and pleasure-oriented than utilitarian. This account strongly contradicts the more conservationist and reductionist one in the earlier passage that hints at a care for some kind of sustainability. After criticising excessive spending, Montaigne surprisingly announces his admiration for luxurious buildings.[19] How does an obsession with excessive spending sit alongside a concern for sustainability in an era without a definition for capitalism or ecology?[20] In his study of Georges Bataille's work, Allan Stoekl coined the term 'postsustainability' to refer to Bataille's theory of *dépense* or expenditure; that is to say, 'la notion de dépense' and 'la part maudite'.[21] It could be argued that Montaigne is a presustainable writer because the *Essais* announce not only a series of concerns that will nourish modern ecological

18 I propose to treat Montaigne's environmental representation of the New World, and the subsequent shift to the rest of the world, as a register of ecological issues, in addition to the common perception of 'Des coches' as a chapter focussing on economic matters.

19 The adjective 'somptueux' is defined as 'qui représente de fortes dépenses; qui impressionne fortement par sa grandeur ou sa beauté'. *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé* (2016), <http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=1353711105> [accessed 3 February 2016].

20 It could be argued that Montaigne's aesthetic admiration for luxury, even more blatant in the rest of 'Des coches' does not necessarily contradict his original condemnation of excessive spending. The ideas are, however, conflicting, and this contradiction is the basis of many modern concerns about adopting an ecological lifestyle. Efficiency and sustainability do not necessarily go hand-in-hand with beauty, and it is precisely the role of green consumerism to change this assumption.

21 Allan Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion and Postsustainability* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). Stoekl does not clearly define what he means by postsustainability, but it can be understood as what comes after sustainability, a state 'in which we labor in order to expend, not conserve' (xvii). Presustainability would thus be what came before sustainability: the contradictory movements of conserving and expending. As such, Montaigne in 'Des coches' strikingly prefigures Bataille and ecological concerns.

thought, but also because they coincide with several of Bataille's key arguments. Bataille argues that societies are defined by how they put into use the surplus that they produce.[22] Reversing common and moral ways of thinking about consumption, the core of Bataille's argument is that human societies might gain something from considerable wastefulness. For Bataille, human activity is divided into two parts: one that is concerned with the 'minimum nécessaire', and the other that is a series of 'dépenses improductives', which he calls simply *dépense*. His definition of *dépense* aligns with the topics that Montaigne covers in 'Des coches': 'le luxe, les deuils, les guerres, les cultes, les constructions de monuments somptuaires, les jeux, les spectacles, les arts, l'activité sexuelle perverse (c'est-à-dire détournée de la finalité génitale) représentent autant d'activités qui, tout au moins dans les conditions primitives, ont leur fin en elles-mêmes [luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality) – all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves]'.[23] Leaving aside unproductive sex – which is very much a focus of the *Essais*, although not in 'Des coches' – the list accurately describes Montaigne's train of thought. The difference in vocabulary – Bataille uses 'monuments somptuaires' while Montaigne writes about 'bastiments sumptueux' – is significant, though the etymological root has to do with consuming: the only two occurrences of the adjective 'somptueux' in all of the *Essais* qualify buildings and a meal; 'somptuaire' is quite another concern, since it figures in the title of 'Des loix somptuaires', one of the chapters in the first book of the *Essais*. Bataille, on the other hand, uses 'somptuaire' in his theory of expenditure as a central adjective that is essentially defined as a superfluous, luxury *dépense*. Both words subsume Montaigne and Bataille's obsession with useless expenditure.[24]

In terms of war, the first coaches of 'Des coches' are 'ces coches guerriers', and luxury is broached with the turn to 'despences excessives' (*E* 945).[25] The root of 'somptuaire' is focalised in relation to the rites of mourning for the death of the

22 In the words of Jean Piel in his introduction to *La Part maudite*, 'tout le problème est de savoir comment, au sein de cette économie générale, est utilisé le surplus'. Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite; La Notion de dépense*, ed. by J. Piel (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 16.

23 Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 24; Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, trans. by A. Stoekl, C. R. Lovitt and D. M. Leslie Jr (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 118.

24 In the chapter on sumptuary laws, Montaigne refers to useless expenditure as 'choses vaines et inutiles'. This description is key to the rest of my analysis.

25 In contrast to Bataille, who advocates for the necessity of military expenditure, Montaigne criticises extravagant spending related to wars.

king of Peru: 'et puis, pour endormir les peuples estonnez et transis de chose si estrange, on contrefit un grand deuil de sa mort, et luy ordonna on des *somptueuses funerailles* [and then, to lull the people, stunned and dazed by such a strange thing, they counterfeited great mourning over his death and ordered a sumptous funeral for him]' (*E* 957; *W* 845). Montaigne even evokes art in the sense of ornament when distinguishing European and American civilisations according to their use of gold: kings in the New World use gold 'pour faire ce grand monceau de vases et statues, à l'ornement de leur palais, et de leurs temples: au lieu que nostre or est tout en emploite et en commerce [to make that great heap of vases and statues for the adornment of their palaces and their temples; whereas our gold is all in circulation and in trade]' (*E* 958; *W* 847). As for *jeux* and spectacles, these constitute the pivotal point of the *essai*, as the transition through which the discussions of excess and the New World merge. Environmental concerns resurface at a point of convergence between 'Des coches' and 'Des cannibales', where Montaigne stages human mastery over nature:

> Et la place du fons, où les jeux se jouoyent, la faire premierement par art, entr'ouvrir et fendre en crevasses, representant des antres qui vomissoient les bestes destinées au spectacle: et puis secondement, l'inonder d'une mer profonde, qui charioit force monstres marins, chargée de vaisseaux armez à representer une bataille navalle: et tiercement, l'applanir et assecher de nouveau, pour le combat des gladiateurs. (*E* 950)
>
> [Also, first of all, to have the place at the bottom, where the games were played, open artificially and split into crevasses representing caverns that vomited forth the beasts destined for the spectacle; and then, second, to flood it with a deep sea, full of sea monsters and laden with armed vessels to represent a naval battle; and third, to level it and dry it off again for the combat of the gladiators.] (*W* 839)

The redundancy of the phrase 'les jeux se joueyent', and the violence of 'vomissaient les bestes' (recalling the vomiting sea of 'Des cannibales'), points to the circus-like characteristics of the New World, and the verb *vomir* recalls the nausea described by Montaigne at the beginning of the chapter. The deep sea with vessels and sea monsters in the centre of the arena – later deemed 'ce grand vuide' –refers to the motion sickness of the beginning, and to the great sea change of the sixteenth century, namely the advent of transatlantic commerce and moral anxieties resulting from the exploitation of the resources of the New World. Montaigne's concerns about early consumerist behaviour and the environment converge on the notion of a Roman circus, prefiguring the cruelty and the wastefulness of the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru.

Does the formulation of a concern for something akin to sustainability in Montaigne's critique of colonial endeavours mean that colonisation is a 'despence

excessive'? For Bataille, the development of luxury is the dominant event of human history: 'l'histoire de la vie sur la terre est principalement l'effet d'une folle exubérance: l'événement dominant est le développement du luxe, la production de formes de vie de plus en plus onéreuses [the history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life]'.[26] Montaigne expresses a similar view: 'tant de villes rasées, tant de nations exterminées, tant de millions de peuples, passez au fil de l'espée, et la plus riche et belle partie du monde bouleversée, pour la negotiation des perles et du poivre: Mechaniques victoires [so many cities razed, so many nations exterminated, so many millions of people put to the sword, and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down, for the traffic in pearls and pepper! Base and mechanical victories!]' (*E* 955; *W* 844). Montaigne spatially and temporally expands the scope of the essay beyond the New World by referring to 'tant de nations exterminées', yet the last part of the exclamation returns to a narrow focus on the New World. Behind Montaigne's methodical critique of colonisation, there appears to be a critique (more universal than local, and more environmental than economic) of the waste of human and nonhuman resources due to societal progress. The quick and radical decay of societies such as the Roman Empire and the Incan Empire results in a feeling of wasted energy: 'comme vainement nous concluons aujourd'hui l'inclination et la decrepitude du monde par les arguments que nous tirons de nostre propre foiblesse et decadence […]; ainsi vainement concluoit cettuy-là sa naissance et jeunesse, par la vigueur qu'il voyoit aux espris de son temps, abondans en nouvelletez et inventions de divers arts ['as vainly as we today infer the decline and decrepitude of the world from the arguments we draw from our own weakness and decay […]; so vainly did this poet infer the world's birth and youth from the vigor he saw in the minds of his time, abounding in novelties and inventions in various arts]' (*E* 952; *W* 841). A term appears here that subsequently gains in importance: *vainement*, the same *vanité* that will title two of Montaigne's other essays. Montaigne acknowledges that his position is a vain one, as a writer and human living in a 'wasted century'. Bataille, too, focusses on the importance of vanity: vanity is a key term of the accursed share linked to the 'vain gaspillage des profits'.[27] If the *dépense improductive* is vain, is it wasteful, or is it necessary and meaningful?

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26 Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 59; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. by R. Hurley, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Zone, 1988), 33.

27 Bataille, *La Part maudite*, 50; with Hurley's translation of 'the squandering of profits' (22), the adjective 'vain' is lost.

There is a redundancy to vanity that is embodied in the Roman circus as Montaigne describes it: 'Tous les costez de ce grand vuide remplis et *environnez* depuis le fons jusques au comble, de soixante ou quatre vingts rangs d'echelons, aussi de marbre couvers de carreaux [all the sides of this vast emptiness filled and surrounded from top to bottom with sixty or eighty rows of seats, also made of marble, covered with cushions]' (*E* 949 [my translation]). The etymology of the central verb in this description, 'environnez', is traced by Karen Pinkus to the verb 'virer', a maritime term signifying a turn, a change.[28] As Pinkus argues, the Latin root of *veering* leads to *vibrating*, recalling Montaigne's shaky seat, and the crumbling shores of the Médoc. This notion, reminiscent of Montaigne's nausea, prompts several questions: insofar as we humans are surrounded by the environment, are we all on a shaky seat? What if the role of the human in the environment is all about movement? A movement that produces enduring nausea, and that perseveres despite a perceived lack of utility. Montaigne, using a compound of 'virer' once more in the context of vanity, writes: 'nous n'allons point, nous rodons plustost, et nous tournevirons çà et là: nous nous promenons sur nos pas. Je crains que nostre cognoissance soit foible en tous sens. Nous ne voyons ny gueres loin, ny guere arriere. Elle embrasse peu et vit peu: courte et en estandue de temps, et en estandue de matiere [we do not go in a straight line; we rather ramble, and turn this way and that. We retrace our steps. I fear that our knowledge is weak in every direction; we do not see very far ahead or very far behind. It embraces little and has a short life, short in both extent of time and extent of matter]' (*E* 951; *W* 840).

'Des coches' ultimately subsumes the abundance and the fertility of the New World into something like a wasteland, where humans err and are redundant. Their excess results in too little of everything, too little knowledge, too little life, too little sensuality, too little time, and too little matter. Montaigne evokes the necessity of turning away from such a course. If Bataille offers a post-sustainable alternative, as Allan Stoekl argues,[29] Montaigne provides a pre-sustainable one. The sixteenth-century writer's precocious grasp of sustainability strikes a middle way between commerce and ornament, between utility and durability, between the sumptuous and sumptuary dimensions of things.[30]

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28 Karen Pinkus, 'The Risks of Sustainability', in *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative: Textual Horizons in an Age of Global Risk*, ed. by P. Crosthwaite (London: Routledge, 2011), 62–80.

29 Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak*, 144.

30 I thank Daniel Finch-Race and Stephanie Posthumus for giving me the opportunity to share this chapter, and for their excellent feedback in the editing process. At an earlier

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Part II
Romanticism and Nature; Naturalism and Animality

Karen F. Quandt

Victor Hugo and the Politics of Ecopoetics

Abstract: This chapter argues that Victor Hugo's interactions with the natural landscapes of the Channel Islands throughout his exile in the 1850s form an ecopoetics in *Les Contemplations* (1856) that influences the theorising of an eco-conscious society in *Les Misérables* (1862). I trace an evolution from the poet's pre-exilic, fraught relationship with nature in a cycle of poems from 1846 to explicitly environmental poems from 1855 that inspire a pragmatic call for conservation in *Les Misérables*. By examining a highly charged chapter of the novel in which a damaged but healing landscape is featured, I propose that Hugo's tale represents a vast, but united, ecopoem in prose that envisions a rehabilitated human relationship to nature.

Although Hugo repeatedly insisted in his correspondence that *Les Contemplations* [*The Contemplations*] (1856) exemplified 'pure poetry',[1] certain poems resonate with a recent French essay that defines 'l'écopoétique [ecopoetics]' as the lyric incitation to act on a collective scale: 'cette esthétique concerne donc la pratique politique au sens où elle met en exercice non plus simplement l'idée d'un vivre ensemble, mais d'un faire ensemble, ou d'un faire par le vivre [this aesthetic thus concerns political practice in the sense that it enacts not merely the idea of living together, but of a doing together, or of a doing through living]'.[2] It is through a burgeoning love for what Michel Serres calls 'le lien qui unit la terre et la Terre [the bond that unites earth and Earth]',[3] the link between the local/land and the global/Earth, that Hugo's navigation and expression of the Channel Islands into poetic form incites environmental

1 Hugo made a slight, but unapologetic, caution to his publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel that even his intimate lyric poetry reflected his socialist convictions: '*Les Contemplations* sont poésie pure; tous mes précédents recueils, *Feuilles d'automne*, *Ch[ants] du crépuscule*, *Voix intérieures*, *Les Rayons et les ombres*, tout en étant aussi de la poésie pure, sont un reflet de mon esprit et ont par conséquent, tous, une certaine couleur socialiste [*The Contemplations* are pure poetry; all of my preceding volumes, *Leaves of Autumn*, *Songs of Twilight*, *Interior Voices*, *Rays and Shadows*, all being pure poetry as well, are a reflection of my soul and therefore all have a certain socialist colour]'. Victor M. Hugo and Pierre-Jules Hetzel, *Correspondance*, ed. by S. Gaudon, vol. 2 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), 88 [unreferenced translations are mine].

2 Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe, 'Littérature & écologie: vers une écopoétique', *Écologie & Politique* 36 (2008), 17–28 (19).

3 Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 84.

awareness, and becomes a means of revitalising modern society. Hugo's continual explorations of the Channel Islands inspired his ecologist's eye, and as such, *Les Contemplations* narrate the poet's growing understanding of nature as an ecosystem, and serve as an immediate conduit to a politics of the environment that surfaces within the utopian framework of *Les Misérables*.[4]

Hugo's natural habitat: Jersey

Hugo's arrival in Jersey in the aftermath of Napoléon III's coup provoked a profound change in how he examined natural phenomena, and transposed them into his poems. Shortly after landing on the island in 1852, he wrote with excitement to Belgian poet André Van Hasselt – 'je suis en pleine poésie, cher poëte, au milieu des rochers, des prairies, des roses, des nuées et de la mer [I am full of poetry, dear poet, in the middle of rocks, prairies, roses, clouds and the sea]' –, remarking how the new landscape allowed his dormant lyric[5] to gush forth: 'les vers sortent en quelque sorte d'eux-mêmes de toute cette splendide nature [the lines somehow emerge on their own from all of this splendid nature' (18 August 1852).[6] Nature on its own, freed from subservience to human interference, becomes enough for his lyric: 'au lieu de la tempête des idées, nous aurons la tempête du vent et de l'eau. Cela est grand aussi [instead of the storming of ideas, we will have a storming of wind and water. That is grand, too]' (to Adèle Hugo [his daughter], 25 July 1852).[7] Within a few months, Hugo went from casual musing about finding a house with a garden – 'pourquoi pas? [why not?]' (to Adèle Hugo [his wife], 19 April 1852) –[8] to enraptured immersion in the landscape of Jersey: 'c'est ma joie dans l'exil. Je me promène au bord de la mer. Je regarde les goëlands. Je lis quelques chers livres

4 The term 'ecology', which the German biologist Ernst Haeckel coined in 1866 to designate the scientific study of the relationship between the habitat of organisms and their larger environment, is anachronistic with regard to the timeframe under discussion (1846–62), yet Jean-Marc Drouin's history of ecology shows how this area of study was established in natural history discourses dating to antiquity. Jean-Marc Drouin, *L'Écologie et son histoire: réinventer la nature* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), chapter 2 ('Tableaux de la nature').

5 A thirteen-year gap separates *Les Rayons et les ombres* (1840) from *Les Châtiments* (1853).

6 Victor M. Hugo, *Correspondance*, ed. by P. Ollendorff and A. Michel, vol. 2 (Paris: Michel, 1950), 126–7.

7 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 119.

8 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 93. Hugo sent this letter shortly before departing from Brussels for Jersey.

[…]. Je suis profondément calme [it is a joy to be in exile. I walk along the shore. I look at the seagulls. I read some treasured books […]. I am profoundly calm]' (to Alphonse Karr, 2 September 1852).[9] The newly arrived 'proscrit [exile]' considered the entire island to be his natural domain.[10]

For Jean-Bertrand Barrère, Hugo's immersion 'dans la nature au sens propre [in nature in the true sense of the word]' led to a 'rééducation réaliste de l'imagination [realist re-education of the imagination]', in which the landscape directly impacts his poetic imagination: 'disons que son fantaisisme se fait pastoral pour une large part, qu'il s'inspire de la nature [let's say that his fantasising becomes substantially pastoral, inspired by nature]'.[11] I would add that Hugo, as he settled into his habitat, did not exemplify a parasitic relationship to nature (by merely drawing inspiration from it), but established a symbiotic dialogue with his surroundings:

> L'équinoxe souffle énergiquement ici, mais c'est égal, nous vivons dans un calme profond, le ciel pleure, la mer gueule dans les rochers, le vent rugit comme une bête, les arbres se tordent sur les collines, la nature se met en fureur autour de moi, je la regarde dans le blanc des yeux et je lui dis: – De quel droit te plains-tu, nature, toi qui es chez toi, tandis que moi qui suis chassé de mon pays et de ma maison, je souris? – Voilà mes dialogues avec la bise et la pluie. (to Noël Parfait, 29 October 1853)[12]
>
> [The wind is blowing energetically here, but it doesn't matter, we live in a profound calm, the sky cries, the sea bellows in the rocks, the wind roars like a beast, the trees twist on the hills, nature works itself into a frenzy around me, I look at it in the eyes and I say to it: – What right do you have to complain, nature, you who are at home, while I, who am driven out of my country and out my house, smile? – Those are my conversations with the breeze and the rain.]

'Unité [Unity]' (I.XXV), a short poem from *Les Contemplations* that was written a few months before this letter, encapsulates the establishment of the poet's mutedly bold voice as he enacts a conversation between the 'infinite splendour' of the sun and the 'humble' daisy: '– Et moi, j'ai des rayons aussi! – lui disait-elle ["And I, too, have rays!", she said to the sun]' (10).[13] In tandem with the natural forces at work on Jersey, Hugo evokes a communicative lyric that bridges the divide between

9 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 129.

10 Hugo referred to Jersey as 'notre île jardin [our garden island]' in a letter to Hetzel (3 May 1855). Hugo and Hetzel, *Correspondance*, 127.

11 Jean-Bertrand Barrère, *La Fantaisie de Victor Hugo*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), 407.

12 Hugo, *Correspondance*, 173.

13 Victor M. Hugo, *Œuvres complètes*, 15 vols, ed. by J. Seebacher and G. Rosa (Paris: Laffont, 1985–90), V (1985), 290. For a chronology of *Les Contemplations*, which Hugo masked by adding false dates to the poems, see *OC*, V, 1075–8.

local and universal, between the human self and the cosmos.[14] Graham Robb, quoting from Hugo's letter to Paul Meurice of 8 April 1856, suggests that the role of the human in Hugo's new world-view diminishes the poet into an inert object, and notes the impact of this reversal as one of the most indelible influences on the poet's language and form:

> This unpicking of the mind induced a state which sounds like the result of self-hypnosis: the sense of turning into an inanimate object while things and even concepts become sentient creatures. The English Channel should be counted as one of the main influences on Hugo's style: the characteristic phrase in which physical qualities are attributed to abstractions, and the grammatical oddity known as the 'métaphore maxima' – the direct juxtaposition of two nouns ('the Hydra Universe', 'the Sphinx Human Mind', 'the monstrous Sperm Ocean'), which dissolves the distinction between image and reality. 'Each stanza or page that I [Hugo] write always has something in it of the shadow of the cloud or the saliva of the sea.'[15]

Instead of retreating from nature's 'monstrous' forces, Hugo becomes a living part of his 'île jardin [garden island]' to the extent that he considers the ink-blots on the page to be sprays of sea-foam and droplets from clouds. Ludmila Charles-Wurtz remarks that 'il fait corps avec les "vents" et les "flots". La frontière entre le dedans et le dehors s'estompe' [he becomes one with the "winds" and the "waves". The distinction between inside and outside blurs],[16] positing that the saxifrage – a flower that roots itself in clefts of rock ('fleur du gouffre [chasm flower]') – is a metaphor for the exiled Hugo clinging to nature, and becoming enmeshed in the robust landscape.

The ecosystem of an archipelago: the Channel Islands

Hugo did not reside merely on an island, but on an archipelago, a geographical formation whose indeterminacy had infinitely stimulating, effects on body and imagination, as Frank Lestringant emphasises: 'l'errance dans l'archipel, où l'intérieur ne se distingue guère de l'extérieur, se prolonge-t-elle sans fin [the wandering in

14 Claude Gély examines how the flower, traditionally appropriated as an ornamentation in art, morphs into a luminous signature of Hugo's poetry in *Les Contemplations* through its rooting in the earth (mortality) and its reaching to the sky (the infinite). Claude Gély, 'Le Signe floral dans la poésie hugolienne des *Odes* aux *Contemplations*', *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 38 (1986), 241–56.

15 Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo* (London: Picador, 1997), 330–1.

16 Ludmila Charles-Wurtz, 'La Poésie saxifrage', in *Victor Hugo 6: l'écriture poétique*, ed. by L. Charles-Wurtz (Caen: Minard, 2006), 95–122 (104). Saxifrage, also known as 'gale-of-the-wind', derives from the Latin for 'stone-breaker'.

the archipelago, where interior can hardly be distinguished from exterior, continues without end]'.[17] Having no defined limits, the archipelago reflects the physical and psychological (non-)place of the poet, and his continually metamorphosing aesthetic: 'l'insulaire exalte la bigarrure; il est éloge de la variété [the insular exalts diversity; it is the praise of variety]'.[18] While Lestringant focuses on 'L'Archipel de la Manche [The Archipelago of the English Channel]', a preface destined for Hugo's novel *Les Travailleurs de la mer* [*The Toilers of the Sea*] (1866), the staggering variety of poems written for *Les Contemplations* suggest that Hugo's experience of the insulated, yet infinite, archipelago established an ecopoetics of hybridity and metamorphosis related to a dialectical dynamic of destruction and creation. The preface suggests the idea of a contained tumult:

> Ce sont, en effet, toutes les impressions, tous les souvenirs, toutes les réalités, tous les fantômes vagues, riants ou funèbres, que peut contenir une conscience, revenus et rappelés, rayon à rayon, soupir à soupir, et mêlés dans la même nuée sombre. (*OC*, V, 249)
>
> [They are, in effect, all of the impressions, all of the memories, all of the realities, all of the vague phantoms, cheerful or morbid, that a consciousness can contain, returned and brought to mind again, ray to ray, sigh to sigh, and blended together in the same sombre cloud.]

The linear, bookended narratives of Hugo's previous collections of poems disperse into a loose network of poems that maintain a fragile harmony.[19] The multitude of forms and continually shifting perspectives in *Les Contemplations* work together as a macrocosm of poetry that reflects the dynamics of the physical environment.[20]

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17 Frank Lestringant, '"L'Archipel de la Manche" ou l'insulaire de Hugo', *Studi francesi* 47.2 (2003), 267–74 (268).

18 Lestringant, '"L'Archipel"', 269.

19 Michel Serres observes that 'we have made politics or economics into their own disciplines so as to define power: how are we to think of *fragility*?'. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. by E. MacArthur and W. Paulson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 41.

20 Jean Gaudon notes how *Les Contemplations* make a crucial transformation from the poem to poetry: 'le poème envisagé comme un objet fini, destiné à prendre place dans un recueil constitué de façon factice, perd sa suprématie absolue. […] La poésie elle-même devienne océan, flux et reflux [the poem envisaged as a finished object, destined to be placed in a factitiously-put-together volume, loses its absolute supremacy. […] Poetry itself becomes the flux and reflux of the sea]'. Jean Gaudon, *Le Temps de la contemplation: l'œuvre poétique de Victor Hugo des 'Misères' au 'Seuil du gouffre' (1845–1856)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), 202–5.

Les Contemplations are not romanticised nature poems that evoke solipsistic transcendence or facile harmony between subject and object.[21] Far from seamlessly merging into natural landscapes, Hugo flaunts the mediating processes of language and the imagination as he directly confronts the evocative (non-)landscape of his archipelago. The dark, apocalyptic metaphors of Hugo's visionary and unpublished poems of exile indicate that nature represents an intense and harrowing struggle, instead of a peaceful retreat. Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe suggests that Hugo's early use of metaphor shows him alternating between the traditional models of nature as nurturer (Christianity), and nature as passive, inert material (seventeenth-century mechanism), before evolving into more complex rhetorical ambiguity as he negotiates a secularised, Hegelian model of spiritual growth linked to a dialectic of progress and death in which 'nature's powers are harnessed': 'Hugo uses metaphors which portray progress simultaneously as a biological life-cycle and as a kind of secular transcendence, while using the vocabulary of war to indicate that progress is driven by conflict'.[22] At the cusp of the seismic appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), *Les Contemplations* demonstrate the vicious and destructive forces at work behind the scenes of procreation.[23] Hugo makes clear his definitive departure from 'rosy' nature: '*Les Contemplations* commencent rose et finissent noir. C'est le raccourci de ce spectre qu'on appelle la vie [*Les Contemplations* begin pink and finish black. It is the abridged version of this spectre that we call life]' (to Noël Parfait, 18 October 1855).[24] It is only through confronting the 'dark' underside of nature's workings that the poet can envision progress: 'la poésie saxifrage, fidèle à l'étymologie, croît dans les fissures de la

21 According to Lawrence Buell, 'the environment-poetic concept starts to become exclusionary when the ecopoem moves either a certain distance in the direction of self-conscious distancing of persona from world or a certain distance toward isolating objectification'. Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 53.

22 Katherine Lunn-Rockliffe, 'Humanity's Struggle with Nature in Victor Hugo's Poetry of Progress', *Modern Language Review* 107.1 (2012), 143–61 (144–5; 156). Lunn-Rockliffe refers to 'L'Ange [The Angel]', a section from *Dieu* [*God*] that Hugo drafted in 1855 as he was working in earnest on *Les Contemplations*.

23 Donald Worster demonstrates how another archipelago, the Galápagos Islands, prompted an 'ideological shift away from Thoreau's relation to nature to a more pessimistic view […] taken especially to heart by Darwin and Herman Melville'; he explains that 'a nature capable of making such landscapes was a force not to be altogether trusted anywhere'. David Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 114; 121.

24 Hugo and Hetzel, *Correspondance*, 181.

roche jusqu'à faire éclater celle-ci, force destructrice qui préserve la possibilité même d'un renouveau dans un monde en voie de pétrification [saxifrage poetry, true to its etymology, grows in the fissures of the rock until the rock is sundered, a destructive force that preserves the possibility of renewal in a world on its way to petrifaction]'.[25] A humble and hidden flower represents a vital and indomitable force of regeneration and change.

'Les Contemplations': evolution

Two sets of poems from *Les Contemplations* highlight a decade-long evolution in Hugo's eco-understanding of nature: one dates from 1846 – before the self-imposed exile – with the poet's fraught awareness of nature emerging as he finally musters the courage to make a pilgrimage to his daughter Léopoldine's grave in Villequier;[26] the other is from 1855, after the exiled Hugo had completed the seminal 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre [What the Shadow's Mouth Says]' (VI.XXVI), in which his experiencing and contemplation of nature morphs into an articulation of social progress.[27] Hugo's sacrifice of the myth of human dominion over nature, as well as of the facile construct of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, gradually formed a utopian vision that yielded pragmatic conservation practices for a morally and physically polluted France.

After a hiatus of several years, Hugo returned to writing poems with a flourish in 1846, three years after Léopoldine's death. These poems, though they frequently feature a backdrop of idyllic and calm landscapes, are undercut with a melancholy that results from evoked memories and a looming presence of absence, regret and death. 'La Vie aux champs [Life in the Fields]' (I.VI), though it describes a peaceful countryside retreat, and seems to feature a poet at one with nature ('le poëte en tout lieu | Se sent chez lui, sentant qu'il est partout chez Dieu [the poet in every place | Feels at home, feeling that everywhere he is in God's home]' (3–4; *OC*, V, 261), recounts the poet's recognition of an unbridgeable gap between himself and the flocks of children who yearn to hear his stories: 'Je leur souris encor, bien

25 Charles-Wurtz, 'La Poésie saxifrage', 104.

26 Hugo's beloved daughter Léopoldine accidentally drowned at Villequier in 1843; *Les Contemplations*, forming a diptych of 'Autrefois [Formerly]' and 'Aujourd'hui [Today]', hinge upon this wrenching event.

27 Hugo noted the distinction between these two years when he supplemented 'Écrit en 1846', which was actually written in 1854, with 'Écrit en 1855 [Written in 1855]' (V.III); the brazen poet of the past becomes satisfied – 'Je suis content [I am happy]' (28; *OC*, V, 433) – with existing alone on 'un rocher [a rock]' (6; *OC*, V, 433).

que je sois plus triste [I still smile at them, even though I am sadder now]' (26; *OC*, V, 261). The poem makes an abrupt shift in the last stanza from serene, naïve musings to a disturbing meditation, as the narrator describes what history has left in its wake; the children disappear, and the tranquil title of the poem becomes unsettling, even ironic, as the poet envisions ruins: 'Lieux effrayants! tout meurt; le bruit humain finit [Dreadful places! everything dies; human noise is finished]' (79; *OC*, V, 263). 'Églogue [Eclogue]' (II.XII), which at first appears to be an idyll in the manner of Theocritus – 'Que de fleurs aux buissons, que de baisers aux bouches, | Quand on est dans l'ombre des bois! [What flowers on the bushes, what kisses on the mouths | When one is in the shade of the woods!]' (5–6; *OC*, V, 309) –, leads to the threat of a monstrous abyss that serves as a metaphor for the shame and the jealousy spooking a pair of carefree lovers: '"J'ai peur qu'on ne nous voie!" ["I'm afraid that someone will see us!"]' (18; *OC*, V, 309).

The figure of the romanticising poet, who used to readily scrutinise and become one with nature, takes on a distinctly humbled role.[28] 'À Villequier [To Villequier]' (IV.XV) is the famous enactment of the crucial gesture of sacrifice by way of the tragic event of his daughter's death.[29] Hugo's shattering experience prompts him to temper the trademark voraciousness of his eye with the calm, but no less painful, admission that 'L'homme n'est qu'un atome en cette ombre infini [Man is but an atom in this infinite shadow]' (59; *OC*, V, 412). Through this acquiescence to humility, the landscape is not scrutinised, nor seized for its beauty or bounty, but left alone. Out of loss, the poet arrives at a profound moment of reckoning that markedly changes his treatment of nature:

> Maintenant qu'attendri par ces divins spectacles,
> Plaines, forêts, rochers, vallons, fleuve argenté,
> Voyant ma petitesse et voyant vos miracles,
> Je reprends ma raison devant l'immensité. (17–20; *OC*, V, 411)
>
> [Now that I am moved by these divine spectacles,
> Plains, forests, rocks, valleys, silvery river,

28 Barrère cites the influences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Charles Nodier (all botanists) during Hugo's travels in the 1830s and 1840s, as the poet 'commence de se pencher sur la petite nature, pour y saisir cette vie microscopique qui l'agite [begins to lean towards little nature, in order to seize therein the microscopic life that moves it]' (*La Fantaisie* [*Fantasy*], 185–6); nature is 'seized', more than contemplated.

29 Hugo underscores sacrifice early in the preface: 'Traverser le tumulte, la douleur, le silence; se reposer dans le sacrifice, et, là, contempler Dieu [Pass through tumult, sadness, silence; rest in sacrifice, and, there, contemplate God]' (*OC*, V, 250).

Seeing my smallness and seeing your miracles,
I regain my reason standing in front of the immensity.]

'Aujourd'hui [today]', he emphatically insists, 'Je me sens éclairé dans ma douleur amère | Par un meilleur regard jeté sur l'univers [I feel enlightened in my bitter sadness | By a better glance thrown at the universe]' (115–6; *OC*, V, 413). Adopting this 'regard [glance]' is a paradoxical move on the poet's part in favour of *not* looking – 'l'œil qui pleure trop finit par s'aveugler [the eye that cries too much ends up blinding itself]' (106; *OC*, V, 309) –, thereby assuming a conscientiously hands-off role that lightens the burden of human interference in nature:

Je sais que le fruit tombe au vent qui le secoue,
Que l'oiseau perd sa plume et la fleur son parfum;
Que la création est une grande roue
Qui ne peut se mouvoir sans écraser quelqu'un;

Les mois, les jours, les flots des mers, les yeux qui pleurent,
Passent sous le ciel bleu;
Il faut que l'herbe pousse et que les enfants meurent;
Je le sais, ô mon Dieu! (65–72; *OC*, V, 412)

[I know that the fruit falls to the wind that shakes it,
That the bird loses its feather and the flower its scent;
That creation is a big wheel
That cannot move without crushing someone;

Months, days, waves of the seas, eyes that cry,
Pass under the blue sky;
The order of things dictates that grass should grow and that children should die;
I know that, oh my God!]

Through sacrifice, Hugo comes to a fuller understanding of the less lofty role of humans within nature's network.

Later in exile, as Hugo's eyes were opened to the forces at work under the surface of nature, the impact of the (non-)landscape of an archipelago gradually inspired the author to lament the depravation of French society. 'La Nature [Nature]' (III.XXIX), one of the first poems drafted by Hugo when he entered an intensely productive phase of lyric output in 1854, can be read as a new branch of his evolving poetry that indicates how he has re-examined nature since his self-imposed 'blindness' in the Villequier cycle of poems from 1846. Hugo's new confrontations with nature on the Channel Islands not only sharpen his acute sense that nature has a voice (a well established motif), but also inspire his conviction

that forces at work in nature are in conflict with those of society.[30] 'La Nature' – featured in the particularly agitated third book of *Les Contemplations*, 'Les Luttes et les Rêves [Struggles and Dreams]' – dramatically features the seemingly irreparable divide between civilisation and the natural world. A tree – happy to give humans its wood to be burned for warmth, to till the soil, to provide frames for houses, or to serve as masts for ships – is scandalised when asked to be used to construct gallows. Humanity's alienation from nature has led to such widespread moral barrenness that the tree is more reasonable and charitable than man: 'Allez-vous-en! laissez l'arbre dans les déserts [Go away! leave the tree in the deserts]' (43; *OC*, V, 368). Nature stands apart, more for humanity's benefit than its own.

The paradox of Hugo's great visionary poetry of exile, prominently featured in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', is its rooting in the poet's awareness of the role that nature must still somehow play in a century of progress. Everything that spills from the poet's 'bouche [mouth]' is emitted from his perch in Jersey: 'J'errais près du dolmen qui domine Rozel, | À l'endroit où le cap se prolonge en presqu'île [I was wandering near the dolmen that towers over Rozel, | At the place where the cape stretches into a peninsula]' (2–3; *OC*, V, 534). Written not long after 'La Nature', 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' suggests a newfound sense of energy, as the poet not only contemplates nature, but experiences it. Hugo draws on Romantic motifs – nature has a voice that the poet must interpret; man's fall from grace causes his alienation from nature –, but grounds any kind of abstraction or vision in an intense, reciprocal consciousness between all elements of the earth and the atmosphere: 'tout a conscience dans la création [everything in creation has consciousness]' (9; *OC*, V, 534). Though his newfound attentiveness to nature allows him to advance in poetry, the trade-off for this 'progress' is the realisation that not everything in nature is good – 'tout, même le mal, est la création [everything, even evil, is creation]' (9; *OC*, V, 536) –, and that humans – small in the vast scheme of things – will eventually be superseded by something else:

> Crois-tu que cette vie énorme, remplissant
> De souffles le feuillage et de lueurs la tête,
> […]
> S'arrête sur l'abîme à l'homme, escarpement?

30 In 1840, Hugo's growing engagement with politics, particularly with the socialist-inspired democratic utopia theorised by Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, led him to emphasise an ordered and fecund nature that informed his call in 'Fonction du poète [Function of the poet]' – the opening poem of *Les Rayons et les ombres* – for a harmonious society free of vice and competition: 'La création est sans haine [creation is without hate]'. (5; *OC*, IV (1985), 922).

Non, elle continue, invincible, admirable,
Entre dans l'invisible et dans l'impondérable. (152–8; *OC*, V, 537)

[Do you think that this enormous life, filling
the leaves with breaths and the head with light,
[…]
Stops at the abyss with man, escarpment?
No, it continues, invincible, admirable,
It enters into the invisible and the imponderable.]

Humans are just an intermediary in the entangled web that exists between nature and a divine force. Confronting this recognition produces a dark vision of the cosmos – 'Ténèbres! l'univers est hagard [Shadows! the universe is haggard]' (668; *OC*, V, 549) – that pity floods with light: 'La pitié fait sortir des rayons de la pierre [Pity makes rays emanate from stone]' (638; *OC*, V, 548). From darkness emerges a topsy-turvy, yet functional and sustainable, environment: 'Le chat lèche l'oiseau, l'oiseau baise la mouche; | Le vautour dit dans l'ombre au passereau: Pardon! [The cat licks the bird, the bird kisses the fly | The vulture says in the dark to the passerine: "I'm sorry!"]' (690–1; *OC*, V, 550). The enduring power of this epic, environmentally aware poem derives from how the poet takes us to the extreme limit of human fragility and ignorance while safeguarding a resilient ecosystem.

'Melancholia' and the 'saxifrage' poet

'Thinking fragility' is a prominent motif in the poems of *Les Contemplations* from 1855, in which society is directly pitted against nature. On his 'garden' island, plucked or cut flowers frequently become the target of Hugo's chastisement of human greed, as in 'Je lisais. Que lisais-je? [I was reading. What was I reading?]' (III.VIII):

Les fleurs chastes, d'où sort une invisible flamme,
Sont les conseils que Dieu sème sur le chemin;
C'est l'âme qui doit les cueillir, et non la main. (54–6; *OC*, V, 343)

[Chaste flowers, from which shoots an invisible flame,
Are the signs that God sows on His path;
It is the soul that must harvest them, not the hand.]

Fashionable gardens, the bourgeois strolling-grounds of new public parks, and decorative flowers are the luxurious and gaudy confections of the affluent that evoke a phony Garden of Eden constructed with glass and trompe-l'œil in 'Melancholia' (III.II):

Ils ne regardent pas dans les ombres moroses.
Ils n'admettent que l'air tout parfumé de roses,

La volupté, l'orgueil, l'ivresse, et le laquais,
Ce spectre galonné du pauvre, à leurs banquets.
Les fleurs couvrent les seins et débordent des vases. (295–9; *OC*, V, 336)

[They do not look in the morose shadows,
They only let in air all scented with roses,
Voluptuousness, pride, drunkenness, and the lackey,
This dressed-up spectre of a poor man, to their banquets.
Flowers cover breasts and spill from vases.]

The image of a ballroom dance appears once more in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre', indicating Hugo's willingness to incorporate cultural trends into his universal ecosystem:[31]

Tout est douleur.
Les fleurs souffrent sous le ciseau,
Et se ferment ainsi que des paupières closes;
Toutes les femmes sont teintes du sang des roses;
La vierge au bal, qui danse, ange aux fraîches couleurs,
Et qui porte en sa main une touffe de fleurs,
Respire en souriant un bouquet d'agonies. (616–21; *OC*, V, 548)

[All is sadness.
Flowers suffer under scissors,
And shut themselves like closed eyelids;
All of the women are stained with the blood of roses;
The virgin at the ball, who dances, an angel of fresh colours,
And who carries in her hand a clutch of flowers,
Breathes in while smiling a bouquet of agonies.]

In 'Melancholia', Hugo produces a stream of tableaux – moving from prostitute to crook, to suffering poet, to animal abuser, to adulterers, to stone breakers, to parasitic rich bankers, to heedless ball attendees – that display the ghastly result of society's alienation from nature: 'Et le fond est horreur, et la surface est joie [What lies beneath is horrific, while the surface is joy]' (292; *OC*, V, 335). The poem displays an eerie, Hieronymus Bosch-esque apocalypse, in which nature is rendered unrecognizable:

Le bal, tout frissonnant de souffles et d'extases,
Rayonne, étourdissant ce qui s'évanouit;

31 Hugo's ecosystem thus anticipates current environmental theories that incorporate the city and culture in general as part and parcel of an eco-space: 'a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethics, or politics – must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns'. Buell, *Environmental Criticism*, 22–3.

Éden étrange fait de lumière et de nuit.
Les lustres au plafond laissent pendre leurs flammes
Et semblent la racine ardente et pleine d'âmes
De quelque arbre céleste épanoui plus haut. (300–5; *OC*, V, 336)

[The dance, all quivering with breaths and ecstasies,
Shines, stunning that which faints;
Strange Eden made of light and night.
The chandeliers on the ceiling let hang their flames
And seem to be the ardent root, full of souls,
Of some celestial tree blooming above.]

Urban distraction from nature and rampant materialism crystallise vegetation into a chandelier.

Like the stonebreaker, the 'saxifrage' poet is a 'Frère sombre et pensif des arbres frissonnants [Sombre and pensive brother of trembling trees]' (218; *OC*, V, 334). Hugo's panorama of social miseries shows that the poet entangles culture and the physical environment in order to find his way back into the woods. The last line is a cry of despair mixed with relief, since he can still recognise natural forms: 'Ô forêts! bois profonds! solitude! asiles! [Oh forests! profound woods! solitude! sanctuaries!]' (336; *OC*, V, 337). While the frenzied multitude in 'Melancholia' fears the hidden seed that lies latently potent, the 'saxifrage' poet does not. Hugo roots the cause of Paris's predilection for fleeting and material pleasures in a ravaged field that calls for healing:

Les carrefours sont pleins de choc et de combats.
Les multitudes vont et viennent dans les rues.
Foules! sillons creusés par ces mornes charrues:
Nuit, douleur, deuil! champ triste où souvent a germé
Un épi qui fait peur à ceux qui l'ont semé! (254–8; *OC*, V, 335)

[The crossroads are full of shock and fights.
The multitudes come and go in the streets.
Crowds! furrows dug by these doleful ploughs:
Night, sadness, grief! sad field where often has germinated
A seed that frightens those who sowed it!]

'Melancholia' shows how the poet's contemplation of nature has evolved into a call for social change beyond a point of impasse in 'La Nature'. Both poems feature a menacing image of trees (nature) morphing into gallows (society), but the poet comes to recognise that the processes of nature signal the way to a healthier, stronger collective. The 'miracle' force of nature, to which Hugo refers in a never-finished preface for *Les Misérables*, is one that modern society can emulate in order to evolve: 'rendez-vous compte, entre autres miracles, de la force de la végétation.

Un brin d'herbe soulève un bloc d'argile; au mois d'août 1860, un champignon, pour se faire passage, a bossué et brisé le pavé d'asphalte sur la place de la Bastille, à Paris. Toute la terre est un creuset [take into account, among other miracles, the force of vegetation. A blade of grass lifts up a block of clay; in August 1860, a mushroom, in order to make room for its growth, dented and broke the asphalt pavement on Bastille Square in Paris]' (*OC*, XIII (1990), 471).[32] The work of natural forces, even in Paris, inspires a vision in which France's 'misérables', downtrodden but tenacious, will spread, toppling the corrupt and the greedy along the way.

'Les Misérables': a field of poppies

A rallying cry in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' makes it clear that *Les Contemplations* flow into *Les Misérables*: 'Espérez! espérez! espérez, misérables! [Hope! hope! hope, ye wretched!]' (701; *OC*, V, 550). Hugo raises an explicit polemic against artificial flowers in the 'Préface philosophique [Philosophical Preface]', where a warped 'besoin d'idéal [need for the ideal]' corrupts the flower's beauty, and condemns it to serve the deeds of prostitutes and criminals: 'Allez-vous-en! Votre éden m'épouvante. Je frémis [Get out! Your Eden terrifies me. I shudder]' (*OC*, XIII, 527). The poems of *Les Contemplations* are microcosms that open into the universal macrocosm of the novel, perceived by Rimbaud as 'un vrai *poème* [a true *poem*]'.[33]

In an echo of 'Melancholia', the motif of a damaged field – symbolising a fractured relationship between nature and society – develops to a dramatic degree in the fourth book of *Les Misérables*.[34] 'La Cadène [The Chain-Gang]' (IV.3.viii),[35] whose setting is a poorly ploughed field in the amorphous periphery of Paris, presents a hybrid landscape in which the conflict between nature and culture comes to a head as the metropolis experiences the growing pains of urban expansion and moves into the surrounding countryside:

32 From the posthumously published 'Préface philosophique'.

33 Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies; Une saison en enfer; Illuminations*, ed. by L. Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 92 [letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871]. Victor Brombert notes the unconventionality and hybrid quality of Hugo's novels, and how they must be approached as new epic poems that sing 'the moral adventure of man'. Victor Brombert, *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 7.

34 This book vaunts the appropriately antithetical and global title 'L'Idylle rue Plumet et l'épopée rue Saint-Denis [The Idyll of Plumet Street and the Epic of Saint-Denis Street]'.

35 This chapter was added in exile in 1860 during Hugo's full immersion in the Channel Islands.

> Il y avait alors aux environs des barrières de Paris des espèces de champs pauvres, presque mêlés à la ville, où il poussait, l'été, un blé maigre, et qui, l'automne, après la récolte faite, n'avaient pas l'air moissonnés, mais pelés. Jean Valjean les hantait avec prédilection. (*OC*, II (1985), 716)
>
> [There were at that time in the surroundings of the barriers of Paris some kinds of shoddy fields, almost mixed in with the city, where there grew, in summer, puny wheat, and which, in autumn, after the harvest was completed, did not look reaped, but stripped. Jean Valjean had a predilection for haunting these fields.]

Though scarred by the encroaching city and inexpert agricultural practices, the abused land persistently yields healthy flowers that attract bees and butterflies. While Jean Valjean is happy to cling to the hybrid landscape (like the saxifrage in rock fissures), young Cosette is a modern nymph who represents the infinite possibilities of nature's healing and rebirth as she flits through the field. In this unassuming, ugly terrain, local meets global as the delicate poppies 'blaze' in the sun's heat:

> Cosette ne s'y ennuyait pas. […] Elle tressait en guirlandes des coquelicots qu'elle mettait sur sa tête, et qui, traversés et pénétrés de soleil, empourprés jusqu'au flamboiement, faisaient à ce frais visage rose une couronne de braises. (*OC*, II, 716)
>
> [Cosette did not become bored there. […] From poppies she fashioned garlands that she put on her head, and that, having become a flaming violet colour due to being traversed and penetrated by the sun, used to make a crown of embers around her fresh pink face.]

The answer to society's fallen ways is to re-establish an ecosystem, no matter how fragile or seemingly out of place, on the fringes of Paris. Hugo, by planting a field of poppies and butterflies at the heart of *Les Misérables*, evolves from poetics to praxis.

A humble poem can help us read Hugo's chapter as a piece motivated by an ecopoetics that lets native and wild flowers flourish in order to heal scars inflicted by human materialism. Jonathan Bate, underscoring the connections between words and the world, 'the capacity for the writer to restore us to the earth',[36] reads John Keats's ode 'To Autumn' (1820)[37] as a 'well-regulated ecosystem' of 'biodiversity' in which the poet 'celebrates the stubble' of the autumn harvest: 'the ecosystem of "To Autumn" is something larger than an image of agribusiness'.[38] Bate demonstrates how the poet's accurately meteorological account of the autumnal day

36 Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), vii.

37 John Keats, 'To Autumn', in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*: *1250–1900*, ed. by A. Quiller-Couch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 733–4.

38 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 106.

exemplifies an ecopoetic consciousness. Showcasing the therapeutic and holistic benefits of nature in spite of the consumerist spirit of the 'age of ecocide',[39] Keats grounds the dynamics of his poem in the temporal and intermeshed workings of the earth, its atmosphere and its inhabitants. The ploughed field in the poem yields a sensuous and abundantly fertile network, in which the hum of bees and the 'winnowing wind' meld with 'fumes of poppies', but the ultimate harvest is the one enacted by the poet through the medium of tactile language as he cultivates a vital, 'oozing' potency on the basis of the particularly mild autumn of 1819.

In common with Keats, Hugo stresses meteorological specificities – the narrator refers to 'la sérénité parfaite de l'automne 1831[the perfect serenity of autumn 1831]', and the crepuscular 'minute' of dawn (*OC*, II, 716) –, takes note of the multitude of poppies (flowers which, as Bate points out, are not only associated with goddess Diana and pre-agrarian myth, but with physical medicinal properties),[40] and composes what the narrator calls a 'hymne de la petitesse à l'infini [hymn of smallness to the infinite]' (*OC*, II, 716), in which a whole universe responds to minute changes prompted by human activity. The recently bloomed Cosette, enamoured of Marius, knows better than to catch butterflies, and the crucial human sentiment of pity that spares flora and fauna in 'Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre' resurfaces: 'les mansuétudes et les attendrissements naissent avec l'amour, et la jeune fille, qui a en elle un idéal tremblant et fragile, a pitié de l'aile du papillon [indulgence and tenderness are born with love, and the young woman, who has within her a trembling and fragile ideal, takes pity on the butterfly's wing]' (*OC*, II, 716). The damaged, but fertile, landscape of La Barrière du Maine [The Maine Barrier] is a natural habitat for a duo victimised by a perverse society (Jean Valjean as a convict; Cosette as an orphan), and become more resilient because of it. In both instances, the soporific poppies, not merely present for aesthetic pleasure, call out: to the consumptive Keats in 'To Autumn'; to the oppressed of France in *Les Misérables*.

Hugo, dramatically diverging from Keats, merges his modern eclogue with the harrowing intrusion of a chain gang. Beaten like the scarred field alongside which they pass, the wretched prisoners are living spectres of society's vices; they might as well be trees or rocks in the eyes of those who consider this event to be a spectacle on a par with a ball, and they become inert objects in the eyes of the crowd of bystanders: 'il était impossible de ne pas frémir en voyant ces créatures humaines liées ainsi et passives sous les froides nuées d'automne, et livrées à la pluie, à la bise, à toutes les furies de l'air, comme des arbres et comme des pierres [it was impossible

39 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 102.
40 Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 106.

not to shudder when seeing these human creatures thus chained together and passive under the cold clouds of autumn, exposed to the rain, the wind, and all the furies of the air, like trees and stones]' (*OC*, II, 719). As in 'Melancholia', those who suffer do so because nature suffers, yet the horror of such a landscape gives a full picture of nature's destructive and healing processes. 'Le mal [Evil]', Hugo explains, 'étant de l'ombre, est derrière la matière. Tourner la matière, c'est le devoir de l'intelligence [being of the shadows, is behind matter. Turning over matter is the duty of intelligence]' (*OC*, XIII, 554 ['Préface philosophique']). The 'mal' represented by the chain gang (to which Jean Valjean was once tethered) is redeemed by the fact that poppies can grow amid such distress. Flowers, bees and butterflies appear once the stubbled field is 'turned over' by Jean Valjean's awareness of the workings of the environment, from soil to sun: 'se promener de grand matin, pour qui aime la solitude, équivaut à se promener la nuit, avec la gaîté de la nature de plus. […] La pente de Jean Valjean était, on le sait, d'aller aux endroits peu fréquentés, aux recoins solitaires, aux lieux d'oubli [walking at the height of morning, for someone who likes solitude, is like walking at night, with the gaiety of nature in addition. […] Jean Valjean's penchant was, as we know, to go to out-of-the-way places, to solitary recesses, to forgotten places]' (*OC*, II, 716). In the same era as Hugo's writings, Charles Darwin adopts his own kind of ecopoetic prose to describe the aggressive, but beautiful, persistence of nature that Jean Valjean incarnates:

> As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever-branching and beautiful ramifications.[41]

Though the human scissors snip the rose, poppies and saxifrage compensate for the mutilation.

Conclusion

Hugo's eco-awareness starts with poetry, as *Les Contemplations* represent a growing understanding of poetry as a network that responds to the global and invisible dynamics of nature's forces. Hugo, by way of evolving characters and a focus on the rubble of history in *Les Misérables*, systematically turns over 'broken branches' to let flourish a universal Tree of Life rooted in love that nourishes and holds the promise of regeneration for a decrepit society. It is not only through words, but

41 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by J. Huxley (New York, NY: Signet, 2003), 132.

through action, that *Les Misérables* reflects a proto-environmentalist literary text that anticipates ecogardens, recycling of waste, and the usefulness of disregarded or marginal spaces.[42] Hugo's environmental consciousness theorises a nature that gains strength in the face of humanity's destructive impulses.

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Claire Nettleton

Fauves in the *Faubourg*: Animal Aesthetics in Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*

Abstract: In the second preface to *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), Émile Zola expresses his novelistic mission to observe the 'beastly' characters of Thérèse and Laurent, and to 'chercher en eux la bête'. While this section of the preface is traditionally read as a degradation of the characters as subhuman, I inquire whether presenting Thérèse and Laurent as animals could be the basis of an empowering and revolutionary non-anthropocentric aesthetic. On one hand, Zola's deterministic and singular view of animals reduces behaviour to the primal drives of bestial lust and bloodthirsty wrath. On the other, this set of supposedly negative characteristics shocks traditional artistic sensibilities and humanist claims to superiority over other creatures. In this regard, Zola's Naturalism, which considers characters' milieu, heredity and animal instincts, brings together contemporary scholarly concerns that redirect our focus beyond a uniquely human experience. In my analysis of *Thérèse Raquin*, I integrate the work of Michel Serres, who expands our approach to literary criticism by shifting our attention beyond human-centred readings of texts, and the work of Gilles Deleuze, who affirms animals as a creative rupture from the *status quo*. I argue that Zola creates a radical aesthetic that erodes the thin façade of civilisation by focussing on non-human forces lingering alongside and within mankind, yet the limitations of the time period mean that such non-human forces are very much a humanist construction. Taking account of negative depictions of animals and nature in the novel, I assert that an examination of *Thérèse Raquin* in its own eco-historical context allows us to discover the seeds of an artistic revolution that is, in many ways, non-anthropocentric.

Beyond factory smokestacks, past the ramparts of the bustling capital, a woman and two men lie on the banks of the Seine basking in the sun. What could be a tranquil scene akin to Gustave Courbet's *Les Demoiselles des bords de la Seine* (1857) or Édouard Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) erupts in deadly violence as one man, overcome with passion, drowns the other. Such is the story of Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), in which Thérèse and her lover Laurent, a brutish artist, conspire to kill Camille, a pale bureaucrat who fears the natural world, and who comes to haunt the adulterers. This early tale of murder and desire, Zola's third novel, and a precursor to his twenty-part Rougon-Macquart series, is a classic that has inspired numerous critiques. According to John Lapp, the Seine is a

theatrical backdrop and a symbol of death.[1] Could the river actually be read as a river, though, an essential part of the ecosystem, which becomes tainted once it flows into the city? Zola presents the outskirts of Saint-Ouen, annexed to Paris in 1860, as a space of untrammelled nature that unleashes supposedly 'animal instincts'.

In the second preface to *Thérese Raquin*, which addresses outraged critics, Zola declares that his mission as a novelist was to examine the loutish characters of Thérèse and Laurent; to 'chercher en eux la bête, ne voir même que la bête, les jeter dans un drame violent et noter scrupuleusement les sensations et les actes de ces êtres [seek within them the animal, even to see in them only the animal, to plunge them together in a violent drama and then take scrupulous note of their sensations and actions]'.[2] Zola explains that the lovers are 'des brutes humaines, rien de plus [Thérèse and Laurent are human animals, nothing more]' (*Z* 8; *R* 1–2) because they are guided by their passions and instincts. This section of the preface is traditionally read as a degradation of the characters into a subhuman, and thus inferior, condition. My chapter, by contrast, poses the question of whether presenting Thérèse and Laurent as animals could be empowering and the basis of a radical, non-anthropocentric aesthetic. Zola's impressionistic novel undermines human emotions, values and achievements, and underscores animal functioning. In this regard, Zola's writing mirrors the concerns of contemporary animal studies, which destabilise humanist claims to superiority over other creatures. I argue that Zola creates a revolutionary aesthetic, which erodes the thin façade of civilisation, by focussing on non-human forces that linger alongside and within mankind – such forces nonetheless remain a human construction due to the limitations of the period.

Zola's determinist argument essentialises animal nature as a fixed set of primitive drives. Such a reductionist perspective neither encapsulates the infinite variety of a multitude of species and individual beings (as famously theorised by Jacques Derrida),[3] nor does it suggest the harmonious possibilities of cross-species companionship (as suggested by Susan McHugh).[4] Zola's view – that beyond the

1 John C. Lapp, *Zola before the Rougon-Macquart* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 95.

2 Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, ed. by E. Fasquelle (Paris: Fasquelle, 1953), 9 [hereafter *Z*]; *Thérèse Raquin*, trans. by A. Rothwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2 [hereafter *R*].

3 Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, ed. by M.-L. Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006).

4 Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating across Species Lines* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

surface of refined humans dwells an 'inner animal' waiting to claw itself free – arose, in part, from physiological theory that was circulating at the time.[5] Zola had read Clémence Royer's translation of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*,[6] and it can be argued, as Ross Shideler does, that Zola's particularly Darwinian view of animal nature, which 'narrativized humans within a physically determined universe', is biocentric because he 'was the first modern novelist to treat his characters *as* and not *like* animals'.[7]

Animals in French ecocriticism

How can our examination of theriomorphs in Zola's œuvre enrich our understanding of French ecocriticism? The interest in animals during the nineteenth century in scientific and literary texts did not appear in a vacuum; rather, it occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The loss of wildlife, coupled with the advent of theories of evolution, caused nineteenth-century citizens to re-evaluate their connection with other species of life. Lawrence Buell has highlighted the lack of attention given to animals in ecocritical discourse,[8] yet the two disciplines should be considered synergic due to their focus on a shared life amongst a multitude of species. The battle between Laurent and Camille mirrors the conflict between wildlife and civilisation in Haussmannian Paris. The men's struggle brings to mind Michel Serres's analysis of Goya's *Men Fighting with Sticks* (1823), in which two men fight in quicksand. Although we concentrate on the two opponents, the focus should be the marsh into which they are plunging. Serres's notion, when applied to literary theory, shifts the emphasis away from human-centred readings of texts – allowing us to take notice of characters' interactions with each other and the earth. 'Quicksand is swallowing the duelists, the river is threatening the fighter: earth, waters, and climate, the mute world, the voiceless things once placed as a décor

5 Predating Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles, et morales de l'espèce humaine* (1857) considers the possession of atavistic traits to be an inherited pathological deviance. Bénédict A. Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (Paris: Baillière, 1857).

6 *Steven McLean*, '"*The Golden Fly*": *Darwinism and Degeneration in Émile Zola's Nana*', *College Literature* 39.3 (2012), 61–83 (67).

7 Ross Shideler, *Questioning the Father: From Darwin to Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hardy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

8 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 7–8.

surrounding the usual spectacles, all those things that never interested anyone, from now on thrust themselves brutally and without warning into our schemes and maneuvers'.[9] The forces of nature are more than a mere setting of a plot; they are an integral part of the story.

In Haussmannian Paris, however, wilderness was difficult to find. In Zola's story, the characters are confined to move between the city and its outskirts. Jennifer Forrest has noted that, in Decadent fiction, the suburbs – or what she calls 'faux-bourgs', wooded ramparts that are not quite dense forests – were marginal spaces between city and country that gave the illusion of nature.[10] Given that *Thérèse Raquin* takes place in Parisian environs, and it presents the human animal as deadly, carnal and base, should the novel be considered within the framework of animal studies and, more broadly, the discipline of ecocriticism? Daniel Finch-Race and Julian Weber argue that the nineteenth century produced particularly fruitful works of literature due to the newfound awareness of environmental encroachment.[11] This crisis regarding humans' relationship to their ecological milieu is the source of a revolutionary aesthetic that sought to unveil the human animal. Zola writes in the preface to the second edition that *Thérèse Raquin* is 'l'étude du tempérament et des modifications profondes de l'organisme sous la pression des milieux et des circonstances [the study of the temperaments and the profound modifications brought about in the human organism by the pressure of surroundings and circumstances]' (*Z* 12; *R* 5). Zola's view parallels the perspective of German biologist Ernst Haeckel, who in 1866 introduced the term 'ecology' to mean 'the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment, including, in the broad sense, all the conditions of existence'.[12] Zola's naturalism, which considers characters' milieu, heredity and animal instincts brings together contemporary scholarly concerns, which redirect our focus beyond a uniquely human experience.

Zola's literary aesthetic attempted to bridge the chasm between man and nature by examining humans within a complex web of life, and by revealing animal instincts within man. Zola claims to apply an experimental methodology to

9 Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. by E. MacArthur and W. Paulson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.

10 Jennifer Forrest, 'Paris *à Rebours*: Where Huysmans Put the *Faux* in *Faubourg*', *South Atlantic Review* 62.2 (1997), 10–28 (12).

11 Daniel A. Finch-Race and Julien Weber, 'Editorial: The Ecocritical Stakes of French Poetry from the Industrial Era', *Dix-Neuf* 19.3 (2015), 159–66 (160).

12 Ernst Haeckel, translated in Robert C. Stauffer, 'Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology', *Quarterly Review of Biology* 32.2 (1957), 138–44 (140–1).

literature, just as Claude Bernard did with medicine,[13] recording the supposedly observable and objective physical functioning of a subject in relation to its 'intra-organic' milieu.[14] Influenced by Hippolyte Taine, Darwin and Honoré de Balzac's concept that humans are animals shaped by environmental conditioning, Zola claims that Man is 'une bête pensante, qui fait partie de la grande nature qui est soumise aux multiples influences du sol où elle vit [a thinking animal that takes part in the great nature that is subject to the multiple influences of the ground where one lives]'.[15] I will elucidate the ways in which Zola's work reveals the point of intersection between animal and man.

Contemporary animal theorists have argued that theriomorphic imagery is not a mere metaphor for human existence.[16] Although critics tend to focus on contemporary anglophone literature, I wish to examine animal concerns within a nineteenth-century French literary context. In the introduction to *French Thinking about Animals*, Stephanie Posthumus and Louisa Mackenzie dispel the belief that French intellectuals have been disinterested in animals due to post-Cartesian biases.[17] Since the nineteenth century, animals have played a central role in French art by destabilising dominant perspectives: Courbet placed an angora cat at the heart of his masterpiece *L'Atelier du peintre* (1855), which reflects the unpredictable spirit of the avant-garde.

I propose that we look to the ways in which French vanguard aesthetic theories blur the divide between human and non-human life. The parallels between the novel and paintings of the nineteenth century avant-garde have been noted by scholars such as Lapp, who proposes that Laurent is an amalgam of Claude Monet and Zola's childhood friend Paul Cézanne. I expand upon Susan Harrow's interpretation of *Thérèse Raquin* as a 'conflict between cultural norms and instinctual behaviour'[18] by proposing a reading that focusses on dichotomies between

13 Claude Bernard, *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Paris: Baillière, 1865).

14 Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental* (Paris: Charpentier, 1880), 27.

15 Zola, *Le Roman*, 122 [unreferenced translations are mine].

16 McHugh, *Animal Stories*, 8.

17 Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus, 'Introduction', in *French Thinking about Animals*, ed. by L. Mackenzie and S. Posthumus (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), xv–xxii (xvii).

18 Susan Harrow, '*Thérèse Raquin*: Animal Passion and the Brutality of Reading,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, ed. by B. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105–20 (111).

urban/rural environments and human/animal subjects, and their relationship to the creative process.

Thérèse Raquin can be read alongside works by Deleuze and Guattari that affirm animals as a creative rupture from the *status quo*. It is useful to discuss the similarities and differences between Zola's avant-garde aesthetic, manifested in Laurent's works of art, and the notion of 'becoming-animal'[19] within the context of Francis Bacon's paintings from the mid-twentieth century. According to Deleuze, the painter's violent images of cuts of meat are examples of a painting of sensation that induce horror and pity. Deleuze also notes that Bacon's work operates a system that encloses a figure in a particular space. The relationship between figure and field is not metaphorical; it illustrates the subject's interdependence with its environment. 'If the fields function as a background, they do so by virtue of their strict correlation with the Figures. *It is the correlation of two sectors on a single plane, equally close*'.[20] I assert that Zola creates a literary 'painting of sensation' that shocks bourgeois sensibilities and undermines aesthetic principles. It is difficult to designate the fictional character of Laurent as a vanguard radical whose art overturns traditional human(ist) values. I nonetheless assert that by examining *Thérèse Raquin* with its own eco-historical context in mind, we will discover the seeds of an artistic revolution that is, in many ways, non-anthropocentric.

Urban Paris

The year of 1867, four years after Manet's *Olympia* and five years after the French translation of *The Origin of Species*, witnessed a wealth of societal and cultural transitions: Haussmann's urban reconfigurations were redefining the concept of nature as something distant and removed from daily life; the city doubled in size, devouring fields in its wake; urbanites experienced a longing to reconnect with wildlife because they felt detached from nature; jaunts to the outskirts of Paris for picnicking and play became a popular literary and artistic subject.[21] Zola's texts, and their visual counterpart in Realist and proto-Impressionist paintings, sought to reveal a primal communion with the environment that was lost in daily life.

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19 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by D. Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 35.

20 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by D. W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003), 5 [original emphasis].

21 Forrest, 'Paris *à Rebours*', 11.

Thérèse Raquin transitions from a bucolic tale to a horrific gothic novel after Madame Raquin, Camille and Thérèse move from quaint Vernon to the centre of Paris. The story's dark and sinister backdrop is rooted in historical accounts of pollution: by 1845, over three hundred French industries were categorised as unsanitary, inconvenient or dangerous facilities; pollution from steam engines and factories was causing paint to chip, and materials to fade.[22] The Raquins' boutique apotheosises this urban hell: 'par les beaux jours d'été, quand un lourd soleil brûle les rues, une clarté blanchâtre tombe des vitres très sales et traine misérablement dans le passage [on fine summer days when the sun beats oppressively down on the streets outside, a pallid light filters in through the filthy panes and lingers miserably in the passage]' (*Z* 9; *R* 7). The shop is a battleground between lightness and darkness; sunshine struggles to penetrate the sullied interior. This contrast is not merely a symbolic war between good and evil, or a well-crafted chiaroscuro for purely aesthetic reasons. I propose that the darkness illustrates the genuine threat of pollution and urban filth ('sales').

Thérèse's nature

For Zola, the non-human is a space of temporary liberation from societal and creative constraints. Thérèse embodies the frustrated condition of the nineteenth-century citizen who yearns to return to nature, but cannot escape the stifling confines of the social order. The product of an affair between Madame Raquin's brother and the beautiful daughter of an Algerian tribal chieftain, Thérèse emblematises the stereotype of being wild and close to nature. This description of Thérèse reveals naturalism's problematic determinism. Zola suggests that the native Algerian possesses a singular and fixed 'natural essence', largely repressed by the conventions of Western civilisation, but occasionally resurfacing. For Deleuze and Guattari, 'becoming-animal' is never a 'natural state' but rather a continual process of transformation that has no origin.[23] Zola's novel, by contrast, idealises a so-called 'primitive' state akin to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *bon sauvage* [good savage]: 'j'avais des besoins de grand air; toute petite, je rêvais de courir les chemins, les pieds nus dans la poussière, demandant l'aumône,

22 Ilja Mieck, 'Reflections on a Typology of Historical Pollution: Complementary Conceptions', in *The Silent Countdown: Essays in European Environmental History*, ed. by P. Brimblecombe and C. Pfister (Berlin: Springer, 1990), 73–80 (77).

23 Audronė Žukauskaitė, 'Ethics between Particularity and Universality', in *Deleuze and Ethics*, ed. by N. Jun and D. W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 188–206 (193).

vivant en bohémienne [I had a desperate need for wide-open spaces; as a little girl, I dreamt of roaming barefoot along dusty roads, begging alms and living the life of a gypsy]' (*Z* 59; *R* 37). Thérèse expresses nostalgia for a pre-industrial era that manifests itself as memories of Algeria or the town of Vernon.

Thérèse also experiences a kinship with Saint-Ouen: 'Saint-Ouen, avec ces îles vertes, lui rappelait Vernon; elle y sentait se réveiller toutes les amitiés sauvages qu'elle avait eues pour la Seine, étant jeune fille [Saint-Ouen and its green islands reminded her of Vernon; when she was there, all the wild affection she had felt for the Seine as a young girl was reawakened within her]' (*Z* 86; *R* 57–8). Zola presents a fantasy of the outskirts as wild forests, in which a non-Parisian may feel in harmony with the pulse of life. The Seine is wild in Vernon, vicious in Saint-Ouen, and tame in Paris, where it flows by the Raquins' boutique. Thérèse, like the river, is tamed in Paris, and ordered to be silent and docile:

> Je ne pouvais bouger, ma tante grondait que je fais trop de bruit… plus tard, j'ai goûté des joies profondes dans la petite maison du bord de l'eau; mais j'étais déjà abêtie, je ne savais à peine marcher, je tombais lorsque je courais. Puis, on m'a enterrée toute vive dans cette ignoble boutique.
>
> [I couldn't even move around; my aunt used to scold me whenever I made a noise… Later on, I did have a taste of real joy, in the little house by the river, but by then I had already been too much repressed; I could hardly walk and I fell whenever I tried to run. Then they buried me alive in this awful shop.] (*Z* 59; *R* 38)

Thérèse is like a caged animal that, if briefly freed, no longer has the skills or the bodily strength to function in the wild, and is rendered non-functional by being deprived of her environment.

Zola's scalpel-pen supposedly unveils Thérèse's 'natural instincts', temporarily suppressed by Madame Raquin's conditioning, when Thérèse experiences the garden at Vernon:

> Quand elle était seule, dans l'herbe, au bord de l'eau, elle se couchait à plat ventre comme une bête, les yeux noirs et agrandis, le corps tordu, près de bondir. Et elle restait là, pendant des heures, ne pensant à rien, mordue par le soleil, heureuse d'enfoncer ses doigts dans la terre.
>
> [When she was down by the water's edge on her own she would lie full-length in the grass like an animal, her black eyes wide open, her body twisted in readiness to pounce. And there she would stay for hours, thinking about nothing in particular, feeling the bite of the sun's rays on her body, happy just to dig her fingers into the earth.] (*Z* 33; *R* 14)

Sprinkling a series of prepositions alongside natural elements ('Dans l'herbe'; 'au bord de l'eau'; 'par le soleil'; 'dans la terre'), Zola emphasises the importance of the character's environment to her physical being ('les yeux noirs et grandis, le corps

tordu'; 'enfoncer ses doigts'). By interacting with the river, the grass, the earth and the sun, Thérèse returns to a so-called 'animal' state.

It can be argued that Thérèse and Laurent temporarily experience freedom from cultural constraints in their animal-like metamorphoses. When Camille provokes Thérèse, 'la jeune fille se releva d'un bond avec une sauvagerie de bête, et la face ardente, les yeux rouges, elle se précipita sur lui, les deux bras levés [she leapt up at once like a wild animal, with her cheeks red and eyes blazing with anger, and threw herself on him with both fists raised]' (*Z* 27; *R* 16). The novel portrays Thérèse as a foreign creature, whose instinct to hunt is never fully sublimated. Darwin writes in *The Origin of Species* that 'all wolves, foxes, jackals and species of the cat genus, when kept tame, are most eager to attack poultry, sheep and pigs; and this tendency has been found incurable in dogs which have been brought home as puppies from countries such as Tierra del Fuego and Australia'.[24] Zola depicts Thérèse as a species of feline whose lethal impulses resist domestication.

When Thérèse and Laurent engage in a sexual liaison in front of the Raquins' tabby François, Thérèse imagines the cat's account of the event:

> 'Monsieur et Madame s'embrassent très-fort dans la chambre; ils ne sont pas méfiés de moi, mais comme leurs amours criminels me dégoûtent, je vous prie de les faire mettre en prison tous les deux; ils ne troubleront plus ma sieste.'
>
> Thérèse plaisantait comme un enfant, elle mimait le chat, elle allongeait les mains en façon de griffes, elle donnait à ses épaules des ondulations félines.
>
> ['Monsieur and Madame get up to all sorts of naughty things together in the bedroom; they take no notice of me, but since their illicit affair makes me sick, please put them both in prison so they won't disturb my nap in the future.'
>
> Thérèse joked about like a child, imitating the cat by stretching out her fingers into claws and rolling her shoulders in feline undulations.] (*Z* 53; *R* 41)

Lethbridge argues that a contemporaneous reader of the novel would have associated François with the black cat in *Olympia*, a symbol of sexual perversity and vanguard rebellion, as the Raquins' feline 'assumes the status of a character in his own right'.[25] In his 1866 study of *Olympia*, Zola comments on the cat's subversive presence: 'un chat, vous imaginiez-vous cela? [a cat, can you imagine that?]'.[26] The

24 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. by J. Wallace (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998), 165.

25 Robert Lethbridge, 'Zola, Manet and *Thérèse Raquin*', *French Studies* 34.3 (1980), 278–99 (291).

26 Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by H. Mitterand, vol. 12 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1969), 804.

Raquins' cat – the namesake of François I, who standardised the French language – undermines the supposedly rigid distinction between humans and animals that is based on the ability to speak. Thérèse imagines the cat to be the spokesperson of morality and institutional preservation, in contrast to the bodily desires that drive the behaviour of Thérèse and Laurent. Just as Thérèse's hands slide into a claw-like pose, Laurent slips into the animal realm.

Artist of the earth

By placing animals at the very centre of his aesthetic process, Zola denies the traditional association between art and human exceptionalism. Anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake proposes that art, which she calls 'making special', 'refers to the fact that humans, unlike other animals, intentionally shape, embellish, and otherwise fashion aspects of their world to make these more than ordinary'.[27] By contrast, art historian Giovanni Aloi critiques the notion that animals cannot produce art, and disavows the received idea that animals' abilities – programmed and unconscious – are inferior to those of humans, which are supposedly conscious and inspired.[28] When Thérèse encounters Laurent, the artist's bull-like physique inspires a visceral reaction in the young woman:

> On sentait sous ses vêtements des muscles ronds et développés, tout un corps avec une chair épaisse et ferme. Et Thérèse l'examinait avec curiosité, allant de ses poings à sa face, éprouvant de petit frissons lorsque ses yeux rencontraient son cou de taureau.
>
> [Beneath his clothes, one could make out the well-developed and bulging muscles and the firm, solid flesh of his body. Thérèse looked him up and down with great curiosity, from his fists to his face, and a little shiver ran through her when her glance settled on his bull's neck.] (*Z* 42–3; *R* 26).

Laurent, who produces crudely modern art, possesses an 'animal-like' constitution that is symbolised by the abandonment of the fields of his father's farm in pursuit of an artistic lifestyle supposedly leading to food, women and leisure (44). Lethbridge argues that Laurent's character is a parody of scathing portrayals of modern painters such as Manet,[29] and Matthew Josephson's description of Zola's childhood friend Paul Cézanne is reminiscent of Laurent: 'he was a "bear",

27 Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 30.

28 Giovanni Aloi, *Art & Animals* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), xix.

29 Lethbridge. 'Zola', 291.

a character, with a rude crust'.[30] Similarly, as an animal-artist, Laurent paints only to satisfy his basic needs of eating, sleeping and copulating. To what extent, then, does he represent Zola's revolutionarily naturalist aesthetic?

> Ses premiers essais étaient restés au-dessous de la médiocrité; son œil de paysan voyait gauchement et salement la nature; ses toiles, boueuse, mal bâties, grimaçantes, défiaient toute critique.
>
> [His first attempts had never even reached the level of mediocrity; with his farmer's eye, he had a clumsy and messy view of nature, and his canvases, muddy-looking, ill-composed, and grimacing, defied all critical appreciation.] (*Z* 45; *R* 28).

Laurent's upbringing in the countryside causes his eye to be physiologically different from that of artists trained in the city, producing awkward and defiant landscapes. Zola's portrayal of Laurent echoes the author's description of the writing process, which outraged critics for being 'obscene':

> L'humanité des modèles disparaissait comme elle disparaît aux yeux de l'artiste qui a une femme nue vautrée devant lui, et qui songe uniquement à mettre cette femme sur sa toile dans la vérité de ses formes et de ses colorations. Aussi ma surprise a-t-elle été grande quand j'ai entendu traiter mon œuvre de flaque de boue et de sang, d'égout, d'immondice, que sais-je?
>
> [The humanity of the models disappeared for me as it does for the artist who has a naked women stretched before him, and whose only thought is to put down on his canvas the truth of her form and coloration. Great, therefore, was my surprise when I heard my work called a cesspit of blood and filth, a stinking sewer, an abomination, and I forget what else.] (*Z* 9; *R* 3)

The references to mud and filth in Laurent's and Zola's depictions create an aesthetic that is rooted in the earth. For Zola, writing is a process of dissolving a subject's humanity: he observes characters in the same way that a painter intensely focusses on the detailed lines and shades of his model's physique; he abandons sentimental narrative or identity as a human subject. In that sense, the Naturalist is similar to Bacon, whose project is '*to dismantle the face*',[31] the traits that make up an individual human being. Deleuze writes that the abandonment of figuration is a fundamental characteristic of modern painting: in Bacon's case,

> It is the confrontation of the Figure and the field, their solitary wrestling in a *shallow depth*, that rips the painting away from all narrative but also from all symbolization. When

30 Matthew Josephson, *Zola and His Time* (New York, NY: Macaulay, 1928), 115.

31 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 20 [original emphasis].

> narrative or symbolic, figuration obtains only the bogus violence of the represented or the signified; it expresses nothing of the violence of sensation.[32]

For Deleuze, the painting of sensation is a violent explosion that occurs on a physical level; it undermines artistic convention, and creates the possibility of new forms and dimensions. Bacon creates a 'zone of objective indecision between man and animal',[33] and 'this objective zone of indiscernibility is the entire body, but the body insofar as it is flesh or meat'.[34] In Zola's work, there is little indecision about human nature as 'beast-like'. Instead of unsettling the notion of the animal and the human, Zola solidifies a notion of the human animal, constructed in terms of lust or horror. On one hand, Zola's deterministic and singular view of animals reduces all behaviour to a set of primal drives; on the other, this set of supposedly negative characteristics shocks conventional aesthetic sensibilities and value systems. Laurent foreshadows Camille's drowning by painting him as a cadaver in a portrait: 'il avait, malgré lui, exagéré les teintes blafardes de son modèle, et le visage de Camille ressemblait à la face verdâtre d'un noyé [he had unwittingly exaggerated the pallid skin-tones of his model, and Camille's face had the greenish hue of drowned man]' (*Z* 53; *R* 34). By depicting this civil servant as a puddle of ghastly colours and unwieldy lines, Laurent slays Camille's elite standing, and reduces him to flesh. In a similar fashion, the morgue becomes a modern museum, in which nudes decompose into multicoloured blotches.

Impressionistic slaughter

Chapter eleven, the murder scene, can be read as a series of textual tableaux that strip away the thin veil of humanity. During the year in which *Thérèse Raquin* was written, Zola used to fish by boat at Bennecourt, a village on the right bank of the Seine, seventy kilometres west of Saint-Ouen; his friends Cézanne, Manet and Camille Pissarro often used to join him. Zola's eleventh chapter is often compared to Courbet's *Les Demoiselles des bords de la Seine* and Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. This raises the question of whether the conflict between urban society and the animal world lies at the very heart of those proto-Impressionist paintings. T. J. Clark writes that the Parisian environs were an important mode of escape from the urban centre for nineteenth-century life; they created the illusion that

32 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, xiv.
33 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 25.
34 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 22.

the city was distant.[35] In Zola's novel, Saint-Ouen is portrayed as a gateway to a primal forest, in which the rules of civilisation are temporarily suspended, and the aesthetic landscape is completely transformed. Thérèse, Laurent and Camille leave their coach at the fortifications, and complete the journey on foot. The dusty road, burned by the blinding sun leads to the shaded shelter of Saint-Ouen, where the trio rests under a bouquet of trees upon a blanket of shaded grass (89). An uncountable number of trees, which appear like gothic columns, surround the group: 'les branches descendaient jusque sur le front des promeneurs, qui avaient ainsi pour tout horizon la voûte cuivrée des feuillages mourants […]. Tout autour d'eux, ils entendaient la Seine gronder [the branches came down to head-height, so that the strollers' horizon was hemmed in by a copper-coloured vault of dying leaves […] All around them they could hear the rumbling of the Seine]' (*Z* 90; *R* 59). The tree-trunks and foliage create a frame enclosing the characters in a melancholic tableau that foreshadows the untamed nature of the organic world. The flora of Saint-Ouen, along with the sound of its moaning river, completely dominates this scene, and envelops all traces of human existence. The three protagonists are cloistered and isolated in their specific milieu. For outcasts like Thérèse and Laurent, whose passions have no place in an urban centre, their animal instincts are nurtured by the outskirts.

If animal impulses are tied to creative breakthroughs, how should we interpret the tortured hallucinations of Camille that drive Laurent and Thérèse to suicide? The failure of the beastly lovers to ward off the bourgeois individual's spectre indicates the impossibility of escaping the confines of the metropolis. The novel concludes with two dead bodies slumped under Madame Raquin's paralyzed gaze: 'les cadavres restèrent toute la nuit sur le carreau de la salle à manger, tordus, vautrés, éclairés de lueurs jaunâtres par les clartés de la lampe que l'abat-jour jetait sur eux [the two bodies remained on the dining room floor all night long, twisted and slumped in death, lit by the flickering yellow glow of the shaded lamp]' (*Z* 285; *R* 205). The play of colours illuminates the cold reality of the physical body stripped of its humanity.

Given that we encounter such a grim view of the human condition in the environs of Paris, can *Thérèse Raquin* be considered within the discipline of animal studies? Moments of pastoral fantasy are fleeting, and tinged with violence; the characters briefly escape the stifling metropolis to commit murder in the neighbouring suburbs. Anne Simon observes that the French do not share the North-American tradition of environmental literature, marked by wide-open

35 Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 152.

spaces.[36] As the novel is primarily confined to the city and its outskirts, Zola's vision of nature seems to be an aesthetic construction. *Thérèse Raquin* does not cast animal instincts in a positive light – they are reduced to bestial lust or bloodthirsty wrath. These ferocious impulses, these examples of 'sensation' are, however, a visceral revolt against societal oppression that manifests itself in a groundbreaking aesthetic. Zola's penchant for rage and disgust can be seen as an essential component of nineteenth-century avant-garde art that resonates in the present day.

Today, along the banks of the murky Seine, Parisians bask in the sun, as pieces of rubbish float past them: bottles and cigarettes fuse in piles of brown slime, under which swim fish that are sick and inconsumable due to poisoning. The forests along the river in Saint-Ouen, the site of Camille's murder, are surrounded by high-rise buildings.[37] Perhaps the true enemy, and murderer of so many forms of life, is the false notion that we are distinct from our environment, and separated from the world of animals.

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36 Anne Simon, 'Animality and Contemporary French Literary Studies: Overview and Perspectives', in *French Thinking about Animals*, ed. by L. Mackenzie and S. Posthumus (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 75–88 (79).

37 Emporis, 'High-Rise Buildings in Saint-Ouen', *Emporis Building Directory* (2016), <http://www.emporis.com/city/162401/saint-ouen-france/type/high-rise-buildings> [accessed 20 May 2016].

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Part III
Nineteenth-Century Ecopoetics

Daniel A. Finch-Race

Ecopoetic Adventures in Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème'

Abstract: The profusion of ecological matters in Arthur Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' of 1870 draws attention to the peculiar relationship between mankind and its surroundings in the later years of the nineteenth century. The feeling of fulfilment ensuing from the teenage poet's communion with nature in a space beyond the confines of urban industry is associated with versificatory particularities that are suggestive of personal and stylistic evolution based on a distinctive mode of enmeshment in the non-human world. Rimbaud's rendering of a world on the cusp of the metropolis entails a quest for personal independence outside traditional constraints. The visual and tactile evocations of the narrator's surroundings and corporeal circumstances are complemented by auditory metaphors that emblematise a transition beyond Hugolian lyricism. The present chapter contends that the ecological framework of the poems provides an insight into the peculiar identity of the countryside in the era of industrialisation and Haussmannisation. It is conjectured that the distinctive versification of the poems (several caesurae are overridden; there are multiple instances of enjambement and unsettled rhythms; rhyming richness markedly varies from stanza to stanza) embodies increasingly significant correspondences between environmental circumstances and cultural production at a moment of accelerated change in ecological and sociocultural conditions in France.

The attentiveness to environmental elements in Arthur Rimbaud's 'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' of 1870 contrasts with mid-century accounts lauding the scientific and technological wonders of urban society. The fantastical pieces of verse evoke personal and poetic satisfaction resulting from communion with a kind of nature that is characterised as a grand counterpoint to the narrator's impoverished circumstances. The emphasis on sensorial experience of a peri-urban space signals the complex relationship of humanity to its environment in the industrial era, and develops the Hugolian Romanticism of the first half of the century. Rimbaud's rendering of experiences on the cusp of the metropolis bears the traits of a quest for personal independence outside traditional constraints, with auditory, tactile and visual evocations of the world and the narrator's circumstances emblematising a new breed of lyricism. The ecological framework of the narratives ultimately provides an insight into the peculiar identity of a tensioned borderland between the city and the countryside. This chapter conjectures that structural particularities convey ecosystemic qualities at a moment of accelerated change in environmental

and sociocultural conditions: several caesurae are overridden; there are multiple instances of unsettled rhythms and enjambements; rhyming richness undergoes sizeable shifts; acoustic patterns create surprising resonances. The guiding proposition of the analysis is that Rimbaud's verse articulates correspondences between ecological circumstances and shifts in cultural production.

'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' depict contact with extra-urban nature in an ecopoetic mode: the earlier poem conveys wonder with reference to tactile and visual phenomena in open fields on summer evenings; the later poem expresses thoughtfulness ensuing from the experience of sitting alongside rural tracks on September evenings after wandering through the countryside. In both poems, the absence of dealings between a human society and the solitary narrator suggests a division between a municipal sphere and the environment through which the protagonist rambles. The narrator's distanciation from a space of commercial and sociocultural activity opens up the possibility of unalloyed communion with the world in places that are valorised for lacking artifice and the accelerated rhythms of urban life. The two poems point to sixteen-year-old Rimbaud as an ecopoet because they draw attention to the importance of the non-human world amid the escalating metrocentrism of France in the era of Haussmannisation. According to Scott Bryson,

> Ecopoets offer a vision of the world that values the interaction between two interdependent and seemingly paradoxical desires, both of which are attempts to respond to the modern divorce between humanity and the rest of nature: (1) to *create place*, making a conscious and concerted effort to know the more-than-human world around us; and (2) to *value space*, recognising the extent to which that very world is ultimately unknowable.[1]

Both poems from 1870 revolve around the narrator's efforts to determine his position in the world by concertedly interfacing with his surroundings, and Rimbaud focusses on the importance of affording a place to the numinousness of the non-human world as a counterpoint to contemporaneous portrayals of the marvels of urban development. The two evocations of a personal attempt to come to terms with physical nature develop traditional referents for comprehending experience and poetry: the narrator of both poems is an ecopoetic subject making (*ποιεῖν*) a dwelling (*οἶκος*) beyond the institutions and the modes of existence shaping the outlook of his increasingly urbanised contemporaries. Rimbaud's tales of world-making provide an insight into the capacity of versified forms to articulate the poeticity of physical environments. For Jacques Rancière,

1 J. Scott Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 8.

> La poésie […] est […] une manifestation particulière de la poéticité d'un monde, c'est-à-dire de la manière dont une vérité se donne à une conscience collective sous forme d'œuvres et d'institutions. […] [E]lle est un organon privilégié pour l'intelligence de cette vérité. Elle est un morceau du poème du monde.[2]
>
> [Poetry is a peculiar manifestation of the poeticity of a world, that is to say the manner in which a truth presents itself to a collective consciousness in the form of works and institutions. It is a privileged organ for the understanding of this truth. It is a piece of the poem of the world.]

The thought-provoking content and form of Rimbaud's ecosensitive poems convey an avant-garde vision of the place of humanity in a rapidly altering world. The narrator's status as a figure outside the strictly delineated order of metropolitan society gives rise to an unconventional perspective on the changing nature of nineteenth-century France, as importance is accorded to the poeticity of places differing from the artificial composition of Haussmannian Paris.

Rimbaud's poems referring to the non-human world demonstrate a fascination with adventuring beyond the cosseted sphere of civilised society into a space that allows the narrator to undertake a liberatory endeavour of attunement to the cosmos. In both depictions, the protagonist is on an excursion from a municipal sphere to which he is destined to return on account of his need for lodging and nourishment. The two poems – marked by an aspiration to make the most of the freedom gained from the abandonment of a municipal life in favour of the openness of bohemian wandering – draw attention to the extraordinary nature of sites possessing an organic type of place identity that starkly contrasts with the increasingly systematised makeup of industrial Paris and its environs. The absence of a manmade shelter in both poems signifies the appeal of ecosensitive dwelling in an open space that inspires the narrator to become acutely responsive to environmental phenomena. Yi-Fu Tuan proposes that 'human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. In open space, one can become intensely aware of place'.[3] The two poems express the alterity of the protagonist's position in a rural setting crisscrossed by trails that underscore the transitionality of his contact with the non-human world. Rimbaud's adventures beyond the anaesthetising artifice of an urban agglomeration indicate a fascination with surveying environmental minutiae that are the primary constituents of a system connected to the numinous cosmos. Both poems accentuate

2 Jacques Rancière, *La Parole muette: essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1998), 40 [unless indicated, translations are mine].

3 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 54.

the sensorial immediacy of the narrator's engagement with unembellished elements of nature. Michel Collot observes that 'au lieu d'en maquiller le visage, le poète cherche à dévoiler la face nue de la terre [instead of concealing its face, the poet seeks to unveil the naked appearance of the earth]'.[4] Rimbaud's two poems designate an effort to comprehend the realities of nature by way of a grounded perspective in the wake of Romantic eulogies of bucolically verdant spaces and grandiose phenomena. The unorthodox suppleness of Rimbaud's verse in 1870 amplifies the attitude of openness signalled by the insistence on imaginative and sensorial stimulation in an environment beyond the confines of human culture.

'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' are the work of a sixteen-year-old whose studious and tranquil existence in Charleville amid the rustic climes of the Ardennes was transformed due to the conflagration of the Franco-Prussian War that inspired the young poet's precipitous journey to Paris via Belgium in August 1870. The poems from the initial stages of Rimbaud's creative development appear quite conventional in the light of his revolutionary poetics of 1871 and 1872, yet there are several instances of versificatory particularities that herald an evolution in the identity of poetry at the dawn of the Third Republic. Shifts in rhythm, rhyming richness, medial accentuation, acoustic patterns, and the dynamics of the *e caduc* demonstrate an escalating incidence of structural diversity that parallels the progressive outlook of post-Romantic narratives. Robert St Clair notes that in Rimbaud's innovative verse 'il s'agit d'une poétique […] qui préserve une trace du *différent* dans le même – la forme métrique de l'alexandrin, par exemple [it is a question of a poetics that conserves a trace of the *different* in the same – the metrical form of the alexandrine, for example]'.[5] Structural quirks in both poems underscore the novelty of Rimbaud's approach to long-established referents in a world undergoing substantial reconfiguration due to scientific advancements and new forms of urban construction. The signs of stylistic and sociocultural metamorphosis in the two poems herald a new concept of poetry that responds to the intensification of industrialisation and urban modernity as driving forces in French society. The dynamic contours of the Rimbaldian alexandrine emblematise a more open relationship to the non-human world, as a groundbreaking breed of textual environment begins to emerge in tandem with the proliferation of new kinds of spatiality in the physical world. Daryl Lee contends that 'Rimbaud makes it possible […] to imagine a different poetic

4 Michel Collot, *Paysage et poésie: du romantisme à nos jours* (Paris: Corti, 2005), 93.

5 Robert A. St Clair, 'Le Moderne absolu? Rimbaud et la contre-modernité', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 40.3–4 (2012), 307–26 (318).

construction, a different *verse* spatiality'.[6] Rimbaud's verse points to uncharted territories beyond the scope of ideas about poetics and the world that prevailed for the majority of the nineteenth century. The two evocations of ecopoetic adventures from 1870 afford an opportunity for analysis of the dynamics of nature from a rural perspective in the industrial era. The potency of the tactile and visual interaction with non-human elements in 'Sensation' particularly stimulates conjectures about modes of ecological attunement in verse.

The opening quatrain of the eight lines in 'Sensation [Sensation]'[7] presages an intimate experience of rural nature giving rise to far-reaching reflections on the human condition:

Par les soirs bleus d'été, j'irai dans les sentiers,
Picoté par les blés, fouler l'herbe menue:
Rêveur, j'en sentirai la fraîcheur à mes pieds.
Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue. (1–4)

[On blue evenings in summer, down paths,
Spiked by sharp corn, I'll trample new grass.
Dreaming, I'll feel the cool on my feet,
The wind will bathe my bare head.]

The arrangement of the *rimes croisées* (M-F-M-F) sets up the projected entwinement of the narrator and his feminised environment by means of a rhyme scheme that encompasses regular alternation in the wake of the femininely inflected line at the outset. The unequivocal caesurae in the first and second lines ('d'été,// j'irai' (1); 'blés,// fouler' (2)), which emphasise the generative season and the abundant plants in the foreseen countryside, contrast with the syntactic overriding in the third and fourth lines ('sentirai/ la fraîcheur' (3); 'le vent/ baigner' (4)) that accentuates the projected journey through the soft grass and the gentle breeze. The attenuations of medial accentuation at the end of the quatrain suggest an opening of the storyteller's disposition in response to environmental stimuli because the traditional configuration of the caesura-demarcated alexandrine is imbued with fluidity. The narrator's rapt interest in finding a place of fulfilment in nature is communicated in an ecosensitive mode that expresses burgeoning attunement to climatic and geographic conditions. Bryson asserts that 'ecopoets encourage us to discover and

6 Daryl P. Lee, 'Rimbaud's Ruin of French Verse: Verse Spatiality and the Paris Commune Ruins', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 32.1–2 (2003), 69–82 (70).

7 Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies; Une saison en enfer; Illuminations*, ed. by L. Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 50; *Collected Poems*, trans. by M. Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

nurture a topophiliac devotion to the places we inhabit'.[8] The three instances of a first-person singular subject pronoun ('j'irai' (1); 'j'en sentirai' (3); 'Je laisserai' (4)) and two instances of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('mes pieds' (3); 'ma tête' (4)) highlight a longing to construct a sense of self in relation to the habitat beyond the influence of a metropolitan civilisation. The three occurrences of the future tense ('j'irai' (1); 'j'en sentirai' (3); 'Je laisserai' (4)) underscore an ecopoetic aspiration to become more involved in the non-human world, and the elevenfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('Par […] soirs […] j'irai' (1); 'par […] l'herbe' (2); 'Rêveur […] sentirai […] fraîcheur' (3); 'laisserai' (4)) conveys affection for the envisioned environment. The fourfold plosive alliterations in [p] ('Par' (1); 'Picoté par' (2); 'pieds' (3)) and [b] ('bleus' (1); 'blés […] l'herbe' (2); 'baigner' (4)) throw into relief the profusion of tactile and visual phenomena anticipated by the protagonist in his yearning for ecstatic immersion. According to Renaud Lejosne-Guigon,

> Les cinq sens sont au cœur du lyrisme rimbaldien dès les poèmes de 1870. Déjà dans 'Sensation' […] se dessine un entremêlement du sujet lyrique et du monde où le *je*, dans une promenade érotique, pénètre la nature tout en étant pénétré par elle.[9]
>
> [The five senses are at the heart of Rimbaldian lyricism, starting from the poems of 1870. As early as 'Sensation', an enmeshment of the lyric subject and the world is depicted, with the *I*, on an erotic stroll, penetrating nature at the same time as being penetrated by her.]

The fourfold sibilance ('soirs […] sentiers' (1); 'sentirai' (3); 'laisserai' (4)) and the twofold alliteration in [f] ('fouler' (2); 'fraîcheur' (3)) draw attention to the mellowness associated with the plan to stroll beyond the confines of the neighbouring society into a non-human world of airiness and limpidity. The two manifestations of an *e caduc* ('l'herbe menue' (2); 'tête nue' (4)) emphasise the significance of points of contact between humanity and the non-human world because the grass and the storyteller's head gain prominence from the presence of the femininely inflected vowel that differentiates the rhythmic identity of metrical verse from everyday speech (in which it tends to be left unpronounced). The rising cadence of the third line (3+9), together with the masculine *rime suffisante* in [je] between 'sentiers' (1) and 'pieds' (3), starkly sets up the feminine *rime léonine* in [ə.ny] between 'menue' (2) and 'tête nue' (4) that expresses the spirited expectation of immersion in nature leading to abundant delight. The enrichment of the textual environment due to the lavishness of the feminine rhyme signals the import of the rural landscape as a source of ecopoetic energy for the versifier's art.

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8 Bryson, *The West Side of Any Mountain*, 12.

9 Renaud Lejosne-Guigon, 'Consommer le réel: les poèmes de 1872 d'Arthur Rimbaud', *Dix-Neuf* 18.3 (2014), 247–58 (247).

The replication of the first-person-singular-subject-pronoun structure from the beginning of the fourth line ('Je laisserai' (4)) at the beginning of the fifth line ('Je ne parlerai pas' (5)) highlights a shift into reverent quietude in the concluding quatrain:

Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien:
Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme,
Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
Par la Nature, – heureux comme avec une femme. (5–8)

[I shan't speak, I'll clear out all my thoughts.
But love without end shall fill my soul,
And I'll travel far, very far, Nature's
Vagabond – happy as with a woman.]

The anaphora and the unequivocal caesura in the fifth line ('Je ne parlerai pas,// je ne penserai rien' (5)) point to the serene mood and the absence of utterances in the latter stages of the poem. The manifestation of the traditional rhythm of a caesura-demarcated alexandrine, suggestive of calm and moderation, evokes a restoration of primal creativity resulting from communion with nature. The identical syllabification in each hemistich (1+1+3+1) underscores the prospective opening of the narrator's quietened consciousness to the world, and the accretion of monosyllabic terms highlights the idea of a soothing retreat from the complexities of everyday existence in an industrial society. The three occurrences of a first-person singular subject pronoun ('Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien' (5); 'j'irai loin' (7)) and the occurrence of a first-person singular indirect object ('l'amour infini me montera' (6)) bring into focus the concept of the storyteller intimately interfacing with nature to the point of quasi-sexual communion. The four instances of the future tense ('Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien: | Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme, | Et j'irai loin' (5–7)), the only conjugated form in the poem, throw into relief the intention to diverge from tradition through an ecopoetic adventure. The tenfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('parlerai […] penserai rien' (5); 'l'amour […] montera' (6); 'j'irai' (7); 'Par […] Nature, – heureux' (8)) creates a network of acoustic correspondences between human and non-human elements that amplifies the impact of the scenario of compenetration. The attenuation of medial accentuation in the sixth line ('l'amour infini/ me montera' (6)) exemplifies the joy inundating the narrator's being, since the traditional rhythm of the caesura-demarcated alexandrine is overridden due to the syntactic association between subject and verb. The overflow of rhythmic energy across the midpoint of the line is suggestive of burgeoning organicity in the textual environment, whereby ecopoetic forces in the physical world trigger growth in the body of the poem. For Pierre Brunel, 'la montée de "l'amour infini" (*Sensation*, v. 6) [est]

comme celle de la sève dans l'arbre [the rise of "l'amour infini" (*Sensation*, l. 6) is like that of sap in a tree]'.[10] The adverbial repetition on the cusp of the unequivocal caesura in the seventh line ('j'irai loin, bien loin,// comme' (7)) points up the arboreal nature of verse, which is based on lines with different rhythms woven into a harmonious unit, amid a moment of generativeness associated with the soaring pursuit of a mystical ideal. The eightfold alliteration in [m] towards the end of the poem ('Mais l'amour […] me montera' (6); 'comme […] bohémien' (7); 'comme […] femme' (8)) adds to the recurrence of the comparative structure of the seventh line in the eighth line ('comme un bohémien' (7); 'comme avec une femme' (8)) that underscores the protagonist's position between humanity and the non-human world. The masculine *rime pauvre* in [ɛ̃] between the syneresis of 'rien' (5) and the dieresis of 'bohémien' (7) throws into relief the adjective at the end of the seventh line ('bohémien' (7)) that plosively heralds the ecosensitive poet's continuing adventures in 'Ma Bohème'. The prepositional structure focalising the non-human world at the beginning of the final line ('Par la Nature' (8)), which replicates the ecocentric composition of the opening line ('Par les soirs bleus d'été' (1)), signals the apogee of the journey in the rural world. The sole dash of the poem ('Par la Nature, – heureux' (8)), together with the rising cadence of the line (4+8), highlights the link between the storyteller's happiness and his immersion in the non-human world. The association between the proper noun and the adjective is particularly forceful on account of the elision (one of only three occurrences in the poem) that causes the rhythmic energy of the line to be channelled without interruption between the protagonist and the source of his happiness. The proximity of 'Nature […] femme' (8) reinforces the impression of feminised nature as an idealised source of bounteous nourishment, and the feminine *rime suffisante* in [am] between 'l'âme' (6) and 'femme' (8) puts a spotlight on the intimation of Gaian inspiration. The overall depiction of the narrator of 'Sensation' deriving ecopoetic and personal vigour from a vision of female-inflected nature is perpetuated in 'Ma Bohème' through the address to the Muse at the outset of the sonnet.

A pioneering mode of ecopoetic adventurousness is called to mind in the quatrain with which the fourteen lines of 'Ma Bohème [My Bohemia]'[11] open:

> Je m'en allais, les poings dans mes poches crevées;
> Mon paletot aussi devenait idéal;
> J'allais sous le ciel, Muse! et j'étais ton féal;
> Oh! là là! que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées! (1–4)

10 Pierre Brunel, *Rimbaud: projets et réalisations* (Paris: Champion, 1983), 53.

11 Rimbaud, *Poésies*, 74–5; *Poems*, 63–5.

[And so I went, hands thrust in torn pockets.
My coat was more idea than fact.
Beneath the sky – my Muse, my liege – I went;
Oh my! what dreams of splendid loves I had!]

The rising cadence of the first line (4+8) in the sonnet emphasises the aspirational quality of the narrator's frequent wanderings beyond the world of time-honoured referents to which the conventionality of the *rimes embrassées* (F-M-M-F) alludes. The four instances of the first-person singular subject pronoun ('Je m'en allais' (1); 'J'allais […] j'étais' (3); 'j'ai rêvées' (4)) couple with the two instances of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('mes poches' (1); 'Mon paletot' (2)) to underscore the activity generated from the protagonist's communion with a celestial ideal. The four occurrences of the imperfect tense ('allais' (1); 'devenait' (2); 'J'allais […] j'étais' (3)) invoke a sense of frequent wanderings that is perpetuated by the seven instances of the imperfect tense in the later stanzas ('avait' (5); 'égrenais' (6); 'était' (7); 'avaient' (8); 'écoutais' (9); 'sentais' (10); 'tirais' (13)). Brunel suggests that '"Je m'en allais" conjugue à l'imparfait le "j'irai" de *Sensation* ["Je m'en allais" transforms the "j'irai" of *Sensation* into the imperfect tense]'.[12] The repetition of the first-person-singular form of the imperfect tense from the first line at the beginning of the third line ('Je m'en allais' (1); 'J'allais' (3)) amplifies the feeling of an evolution in outlook and style centred around a deeper and more brooding appreciation of nature than was the case with the rapturous experience of 'Sensation'. The sole instance of the perfect tense in the sonnet ('que d'amours splendides j'ai rêvées!' (4)) hints at a transition beyond outlandish adulations of nature, and the remaining verbs – a past participle ('assis' (9)) and a present participle ('rimant' (12)) – draw attention to the lowly versifier deriving ecopoetic inspiration from the cosmos. The attenuation of medial accentuation due to a syntactic linkage in the first, second and fourth lines ('poings/ dans' (1); 'paletot/ aussi' (2); 'd'amours/ splendides' (4)), and due to the elision – the sole instance in the quatrain – at the heart of the third line ('Muse!/ et' (3)), highlights the overflow of ecopoetic invigoration ensuing from the protagonist's attunement to the non-human world, since the traditional structure of the caesura-demarcated alexandrine is overridden as part of an ebullient rhythm. The fourfold plosive alliteration in [p] ('poings […] poches' (1); 'paletot' (2); 'splendides' (4)), together with the fivefold sibilance ('aussi' (2); 'sous […] ciel, Muse!' (3); 'splendides' (4)), throws into relief the storyteller's lowliness as a contrast to the sidereal backdrop. The second-person singular possessive determiner in the third line ('ton féal' (3))

12 Brunel, *Rimbaud*, 56–7.

evokes a movement towards intimacy with the classical spirit of creativity that is accentuated by the masculine *rime léonine* in [e.al] between 'idéal' (2) and 'féal' (3). The lavishness of the rhyme points to the fruitfulness of heeding a celestial ideal because the borders of the textual environment are potently enriched by the masculine coupling. The dramatic interjection at the beginning of the fourth line ('Oh! là là!' (4)), which communicates wonderment in the face of nature, becomes more striking due to the feminine *rime suffisante* in [ve] between 'crevées' (1) and 'rêvées' (4) that bears the tinge of a *rime léonine* due to the reinforcing [ʁ]. The intimation of a particularly rich rhyme underscores the stimulatory quality of the ecopoetic adventure, since the supplemented harmony of the feminine coupling draws attention to the narrator transcending an impoverished existence through dreams of love inspired by his wanderings in the countryside.

The latter quatrain of the sonnet markedly contrasts with the opening quatrain because the phonemic patterns of the second set of *rimes embrassées*, which unexpectedly entail a masculine rhyme enclosing a feminine rhyme, are new:

> Mon unique culotte avait un large trou.
> – Petit-Poucet rêveur, j'égrenais dans ma course
> Des rimes. Mon auberge était à la Grande-Ourse.
> – Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou (5–8)
>
> [My one and only trousers were hugely holed.
> – Starry-eyed Tom Thumb, I strewed my path
> With verse. I laid my head at Great Bear Inn.
> – My stars swished softly in the sky]

The masculine *rime suffisante* in [ʁu] between 'trou' (5) and 'frou-frou' (8) incarnates a weakening of rhyming richness that emphasises the meagreness of the storyteller's frayed trousers in comparison with the majesty of the sidereal presences. The limited resonance of the masculine coupling, which goes against the opulence of the masculine rhyme in the opening quatrain, constitutes a divergent strain in the textual environment that hints at an ecopoetically energised system emerging from the heavily codified form of traditional verse thanks to non-human inspiration. The four instances of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('Mon unique culotte' (5); 'ma course' (6); 'Mon auberge' (7); 'Mes étoiles' (8)), along with the sole instance of the first-person singular subject pronoun ('j'égrenais' (6)), convey the protagonist's increasing attunement to his surroundings. The grandly creative echoes of the elevenfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('trou' (5); 'rêveur, j'égrenais […] course' (6); 'rimes […] auberge […] Grande-Ourse' (7); 'frou-frou' (8)) frame the unequivocal caesura in the sixth line ('rêveur,// j'égrenais' (6)) that contrasts with the attenuation of medial accentuation in the fifth, seventh and eighth lines

due to elisions ('culotte/ avait' (5); 'auberge/ était' (7)) and a syntactic linkage ('ciel/ avaient' (8)). The ecopoetic energies overflowing the traditional structure of the alexandrine in three-quarters of the quatrain vividly counterpoise the caesura-demarcated line with its focus on lyrical dreaming. The sevenfold assonance in [u] ('trou' (5); 'Petit-Poucet […] course' (6); 'Grande-Ourse' (7); 'doux frou-frou' (8)) points up the idea of the young wanderer becoming acutely beholden to feminised nature on a creative ramble through a space characterised by rural openness that counterpoises the built world of the versifier's origins. According to Michel Murat,

> À l'univers artificiel et dégradé de la vie parisienne [Rimbaud] substitue une rêverie d'intimité cosmique, et il unifie ce *mundus muliebris* en reprenant la même voyelle /u/ dans les deux rimes du quatrain.[13]
>
> [In place of the artificial and degraded universe of Parisian life, Rimbaud substitutes a reverie of cosmic intimacy, and he unifies this *mundus muliebris* by reusing the /u/ vowel in the two rhymes of the quatrain.]

The two proper nouns – the last of the three in the sonnet – framing the female-inflected coupling at the core of the quatrain ('Petit-Poucet' (6); 'Grande-Ourse' (7)) give prominence to the mythological and cosmological interests of an agrarian culture in harmony with nature. The enjambement of the sixth line runs into a trisyllabic *rejet* ('j'égrenais dans ma course | Des rimes' (6–7)) that culminates in the unusual incidence of a full-stop in the midst of the first hemistich of the seventh line ('rimes. Mon' (7)). The *coupe lyrique* of 'rimes' (7) combines with the syntactic overrun and the rising cadence of the line (3+9) to foreground versificatory practices inspired by the wanderings in a rural space. The two occurrences of a dash – the only occurrences in the sonnet – at the beginning of the sixth and eighth lines ('– Petit-Poucet' (6); '– Mes étoiles' (8)) glaringly frame the feminine *rime riche* in [uʁs] between 'course' (6) and 'Grande-Ourse' (7) that underscores the importance of liberatory contact with feminised nature at the heart of the quatrain. The enjambement of the eighth line ('frou-frou | Et je' (8–9)) highlights the creative impetus of the protagonist communing with the non-human world because the space of the *volta* is overridden. The blurring of the conventional contours of the textual environment augments the aura of generativeness surrounding the open-field experience on nights replete with climatic and artistic luminosity.

The wave of ecosensitive creativity in the quatrains surges into the first tercet at the beginning of a meditative and witty *envoi*:

13 Michel Murat, *L'Art de Rimbaud* (Paris: Corti, 2002), 182.

– Mes étoiles au ciel avaient un doux frou-frou

Et je les écoutais, assis au bord des routes,
Ces bons soirs de septembre où je sentais des gouttes
De rosée à mon front, comme un vin de vigueur; (8–11)

[– My stars swished softly in the sky

And, seated on roadsides, I heard them
On lovely evenings in September, feeling dew
Drop on my face, like invigorating wine;]

The two instances of the first-person singular subject pronoun ('je les écoutais' (9); 'je sentais' (10)) combine with the sole instance of a first-person singular possessive determiner ('mon front' (11)) to highlight the storyteller's tactile and synaesthetically auditory (hearing triggered by vision) immersion in his surroundings. The attenuation of medial accentuation due to a syntactic linkage in the ninth line ('écoutais,/ assis' (9)), and due to the elision in the tenth line ('septembre/ où' (10)), contrasts with the unequivocal caesura of the eleventh line ('front,// comme' (11)) that re-establishes the traditional contours of the textual environment after the rhythmic inundation of the initial alexandrines. The flow of ecopoetic energy through the first two-thirds of the tercet, corresponding to a crescendo in the narrator's attunement to his environment, conveys the great worth of nature for the young versifier's creative efforts. Steve Murphy proposes that 'le troubadour est à la recherche de la nature, de l'amour et de la créativité, trois aspirations dont les *figures* du poète inscriraient l'association intime [the troubadour is in search of nature, love and creativity, three aspirations whose intimate association is inscribed in the poet's *figures*]'.[14] The enjambement of the tenth line ('des gouttes | De rosée' (10–11)) embodies the dew trickling down the protagonist's forehead in an overwhelmingly sensual interaction with non-human matter, as the intoxicating experience of nature provokes an upsurge of generativeness that reshapes the conventional contours of the body of verse. The construction of the tercet according to a pattern of feminine *rimes plates* plus a masculine line (F-F-M) emphasises female-inflected identities in the closing stages of the sonnet. The feminine *rime suffisante* in [ut] between 'routes' (9) and 'gouttes' (10), enmeshed in the fourfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('routes' (9); 'soirs […] septembre' (10); 'rosée' (11)), points up the refreshing conditions of the rustic environment crisscrossed by manmade tracks that emblematise the activities of a progress-oriented populace intervening in nature. The limited resonance of the

14 Steve Murphy, *Stratégies de Rimbaud* (Paris: Champion, 2004), 123.

feminine coupling incarnates a diminution in the textual environment that hints at the peculiarity of the moment of confluence between humanity and nature. The threefold plosive alliteration in [b] ('bord' (9); 'bons […] septembre' (10)) and the fourfold sibilance ('assis' (9); 'soirs […] septembre […] sentais' (10)) foreground the storyteller's gratifying familiarity with tranquil evenings towards the end of summer in a space beyond an industrial culture.

The final tercet humorously expresses an outpouring of versificatory activity in the midst of the non-human world at dusk:

> Où, rimant au milieu des ombres fantastiques,
> Comme des lyres, je tirais les élastiques
> De mes souliers blessés, un pied près de mon cœur! (12–14)
>
> And rhyming verse among the phantom shadows,
> I harped on the laces of my wounded boots,
> One foot by my heart.]

The locative relative pronoun at the beginning of the twelfth line ('Où' (12)), which appends a clause to the temporal expression in the tenth line ('Ces bons soirs de septembre/ où' (10)), embodies a syntactic amalgamation that draws attention to a correspondence between lyrical creativity and experience of the non-human world. The rising cadence of the line (1+11) heralds a rush of ecopoetic energy, propelled by the storyteller's concentrated communion with nature, that effervesces through the sixfold alliteration in [ʁ] ('rimant […] ombres' (12); 'lyres […] tirais' (13); 'près […] cœur' (14)), the fivefold assonance in [i] ('rimant […] fantastiques' (12); 'lyres […] tirais […] élastiques' (13)), the sixfold alliteration in [l] ('milieu' (12); 'lyres […] les élastiques' (13); 'souliers blessés' (14)), the threefold assonance in [j] ('milieu' (12); 'souliers […] pied' (14)), and the fourfold sibilance ('fantastiques' (12); 'élastiques' (13); 'souliers blessés' (14)). The attenuation of medial accentuation due to a syntactic linkage in the twelfth and fourteenth lines ('au milieu/ des' (12); 'blessés,/ un' (14)) contrasts with the *césure lyrique* in the thirteenth line ('lyres,// je' (13)) that underscores the witty comparison of the narrator's shoelaces to the strings of the instrument symbolising poetry from antiquity. The mottled constitution of the alexandrines surrounding the evocation of ecopoetic inspiration denotes a case of hybridisation in the textual environment that is the result of humanity intermingling with the non-human world. The lavishness of the feminine *rime léonine* in [a.stik] between 'fantastiques' (12) and 'élastiques' (13) foregrounds the wondrous creativity inspired by the fantastical experience of the non-human world, as the body of verse is bountifully enriched in the wake of the protagonist's communion with the cosmos. Benoît de Cornulier remarks that 'au second tercet, comme une conséquence naturelle de l'influence

du ciel, succède […] l'expression d'une activité poétique de l'enfant inspiré [in the second tercet, the expression of poetic activity by the inspired child ensues as a natural consequence of the influence of the sky]'.[15] The enjambement of the thirteenth line ('les élastiques | De mes souliers' (13–14)), which amplifies the humorous presentation of the narrator's relationship to lyrical conventions, embodies a rhythmic and syntactic surfeit that demonstrates the far-reaching effects of such an ecosensitive event. The versificatory polysemy of the noun at the beginning of the final hemistich of the sonnet ('un pied' (14)) points up the particularities of form linked to the open-field pastime, as the masculine *rime suffisante* in [œʁ] between 'vigueur' (11) and 'cœur' (14) draws attention to the unusual kind of invigoration reaching from the rural world to the storyteller's viscera and essence. The limited resonance of the final rhyme in the sonnet heralds a transition beyond a conventional understanding of verse because the harmony of the textual environment is blurred in the wake of the ecopoetic adventure.

'Sensation' and 'Ma Bohème' ultimately represent the initial stages of Rimbaud's crafting of a modern identity for verse. The early compositions by the young poet from the eastern reaches of France express a pioneering sensitivity to nature and worldly experience that is highlighted by versificatory particularities. The textual environments of the two poems evince an ecopoetic evolution based on an increasingly profound attunement to climatic and geographical elements, as ecosensitive moments in the narratives correspond to modulations in the structure of verse. The dynamics of the *e caduc* articulate the complex relationship between feminised nature and the male protagonist because the manifestation or the attenuation of the major differentiator of verse evokes the fluctuating importance of a female-inflected construct in the poet's consciousness. Shifts in the intensity of caesurae disclose a transformation of long-established referents ensuing from invigorating contact with nature because the variable authoritativeness of the marker of medial accentuation hints at a redrawing of environmental contours. Rhythmic fluctuations suggest the emergence of new currents of energy in a world marked by accelerating progress because the altering cadences of the body of verse allude to reconfigurations in the life-cycles around which an ecosystem is synchronised. Multiple enjambements reveal the generativeness of the journey towards nature on the limits of society because the rhythmic and syntactic overflow of the alexandrine surpasses the confines of conventional modes of being. Oscillations in rhyming richness divulge the elementally diverse constitution of

15 Benoît de Cornulier, *De la métrique à l'interprétation: essais sur Rimbaud* (Paris: Garnier, 2009), 53.

the storyteller's non-human surroundings because the euphony or the scantiness of the accord between phonemes illustrates the interplay of abundance and dearth in natural systems. Acoustic resonances foreground the subtle links in the ecosystemic mesh encompassing the protagonist because the repetition of assorted consonants and vowels in close succession exposes deep correspondences in the body of verse that add to individual materialities. Rimbaud's ecopoetic adventures of 1870 narratively and structurally create places of communion with the non-human world, and valorise spaces that are creatively and ecologically fruitful beyond the precincts of metropolitan industry. The youthful poems evoke the worldliness of poetry, and the poeticity of the world, at a key moment in the environmental and sociocultural evolution of modern France.

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Towards an Ecopoetics of French Free Verse: Marie Krysinska's *Rythmes pittoresques*

Abstract: This chapter examines the potential of *vers libre*, a radical new departure for French poetry in the 1880s, to provide a model for ecopoetic reading that allows the poetic text and its representations of nature to resist conventional, familiar modes of interpretation. While the natural world is a constant presence in French poetry throughout the nineteenth century, until the 1880s it is subsumed within an artificial, regular and highly codified metrical structure. The authority of such a restrictive form gradually wanes in the face of social, political and artistic factors specific to France, namely the crisis of absolute authority that befalls the country after revolution. Poems in free verse reflect this instability, since they come with no pre-existing, distorting metrical lens. They require the reader to construct patterns of meaning while reading – each of which is unstable, none of which is able to claim absolute authority. Nature features prominently in these texts, and my examination of the representation of nature in key works by Marie Krysinska (1857–1908) posits that the poetics of French free verse makes nature and the text itself into a site of resistance to measurement and commoditisation. Such resistance is a recurrent theme of recent ecocriticism, and poetic strategies particular to the French context have a significant contribution to make to ecocritical modes of reading.

In a recent essay on the practice of poetry readings since the 1950s, Abigail Lang highlights the stark contrast between the approaches taken in France and the USA. The North American tradition, she argues, has its roots firmly in beatnik counter-culture, with an emphasis on sociopolitical engagement, whereas poets in 1970s France, such as Jacques Roubaud and Claude Royet-Journoud, strove in their readings to present the poem as independent of context. While their transatlantic cousins railed against inequalities and injustices, notably the Vietnam war, French poets were trying to distance language from blunt messages and explicit reference, or as Lang puts it, attempting to 'dire sans vouloir dire [to speak, not to say]'.[1] In the same volume, Roubaud rails against 'la domination du narratif, de l'exclamation éthique, limitée aux thèmes reconnus par CNN [the dominance

1 Abigail Lang, 'De la *poetry reading* à la lecture publique', in *Dire la poésie? À propos des lectures publiques de poésie*, ed. by J.-F. Puff (Nantes: Defaut, 2015), 205–35 (226) [unreferenced translations are mine].

of narrative, of ethical exclamation, limited to themes recognised by CNN]' in readings at international poetry festivals:

> Vous pouvez dire tout ce que vous voulez de féministe, de multiculturel, d'antiraciste, d'anti-bombes anti-personnel, vous pouvez tchernobyler à qui mieux mieux, bêler sur la paix et votre grand-mère, pourvu que vous ne puissiez pas être soupçonné de pratiquer des 'jeux formels', ou de parler 'difficile', ce qui serait 'élitiste', non 'démocratique' et vraisemblablement une atteinte aux droits de l'homme et une insulte aux ONGs.[2]
>
> [You can say anything you please as long as it's feminist, multicultural, anti-racist, anti-bomb, you can Chernobylise all you like, bleat about peace and your grandmother, as long as you can't be suspected of playing "formal games", or of talking "difficult", which would be "elitist", not "democratic" and probably a contravention of human rights and an insult to NGOs.]

In this light, it is little wonder that a certain brand of French theory was identified by early anglophone ecocritics as inimical to their cause. Since, according to the caricatural portrait of structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction, there is nothing outside the text, this mode of French criticism might appear to deny the existence of a world beyond the page on which language might be able to have an effect – hardly a propitious starting point for an environmental-critical movement concerned with responding to an urgent sense of measurable, and very real, ecological catastrophe.[3] Instead of articulating a political message expressed by a subject locatable in time, space and culture, French poetry in the grand tradition of Mallarmé and Valéry appears incompatible with subjectivities and individualities, instead devoting itself to the lofty notion of absolute poetry. Ruminating on the ideal reading performance, Jean-François Puff asks 'comment neutraliser dans la voix ce que la voix porte nécessairement de subjectivité? [how to neutralise in the voice what subjectivity the voice necessarily carries?]',[4] a question that hardly seems conducive to a politically engaged environmental message. If French poetry appears concerned first and foremost with abstract questions of language, with the search for 'une manière de le laisser parler pour lui-même de lui-même sans référence à rien [a way of letting language speak for itself of itself without reference to anything]',[5] might it be a fruitless enterprise to speak of a French ecopoetics?

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2 Jacques Roubaud, 'Poésie et oralité', in *Dire la poésie? À propos des lectures publiques de poésie*, ed. by J.-F. Puff (Nantes: Defaut, 2015), 307–18 (314–15).

3 Pippa Marland, 'Ecocriticism', *Literature Compass* 10.11 (2013), 846–68 (848).

4 Jean-François Puff, 'La Voix *off* de soi-même: poétiques de la diction non-expressive (Claude Royet-Journoud et Jacques Roubaud)', in *Dire la poésie? À propos des lectures publiques de poésie*, ed. by J.-F. Puff (Nantes: Defaut, 2015), 357–75 (367).

5 Puff, 'La Voix *off* de soi-même', 365.

There are ways, though, in which a specifically French mode of writing and reading, while not articulating an explicit environmental message, can contribute to the ecocritical project by heightening our awareness of both the natural world and the world of the text, as well as the analytical, affective, even embodied responses that we bring to them as dwelling and interpreting subjects. As Clive Scott argues in an article proposing a poetics of eco-translation, 'reading is in itself an ecological activity, is living-in-an-environment, where environment is to be understood as the continuous texturing of the life-dynamic and thus something which fully incorporates ecologies of all kinds, and of all kinds of perceptual/conceptual contact'.[6] Nineteenth-century French poetry provides a unique textual landscape for such an understanding of reading, since the profound changes it undergoes between the publication of Lamartine's *Méditations poétiques* [*Poetic Meditations*] (1820) and Mallarmé's radical constellation-poem 'Un coup de dés [A Roll of the Dice]' (1897) are unparalleled in any other century. These changes take place against the seismic social, political, economic and cultural shifts of the industrial revolution, to which our contemporary environmental concerns may be traced. It is thus possible to read in these texts' multiple hesitations between tradition and innovation a poetic enacting of environmental anxieties, both extra- and intra-textual, of our relationship with it and our duty towards it. In her survey of ecocriticism, Pippa Marland suggests:

> Perhaps the time has now come for a reinvigoration of slow and close reading, which, whether in the hope of generating environmental praxis or in a more purely investigative mode, applies these new paradigms in full-length engagements with cultural forms, interrogating from every possible angle the 'imagings' that reflect and influence our ongoing modes of being in the world.[7]

French free verse, which presents the reader with particular problems of interpretation that are culturally specific to the French context, might offer a productive model for such a 'slow reading'. Emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century, free verse was presented by its ardent supporters as a break from past modes of textual experience that had become dulled, habitual, mechanical and repetitive. It promised new ways of seeing, feeling, writing and reading, yet it could not help but maintain an open and frequently uneasy dialogue with past frameworks for inscribing our experience of the world in text. I will focus on a book that remained largely ignored until a recent surge of interest in nineteenth-century female poets:

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6 Clive Scott, 'Translating the Nineteenth Century: A Poetics of Eco-Translation', *Dix-Neuf* 19.3 (2015), 285–302 (286).

7 Marland, 'Ecocriticism', 860.

Rythmes pittoresques [*Picturesque Rhythms*] (1890), the first collection of poems by Marie Krysinska, a pioneer of *vers libre* who was sidelined by the self-appointed theorists of the form such as Gustave Kahn and Jean Moréas.

In his overview of *vers libre*, Michel Murat pays Krysinska almost no attention at all, minimising her importance and omitting her from a timeline running from Rimbaud's 'Marine' and 'Mouvement' (1873–5), via Laforgue's *Derniers vers* (1887) and Kahn's *Palais nomades* (1887), to Apollinaire's prose-to-verse *découpage* 'La Maison des morts' (1913).[8] There is no doubt, though, that Krysinska, who published poems in *vers libre* as early as 1882, well before Kahn and Laforgue, was an innovator who challenged the conventional modes of perception characteristic of regular poetic form. While the natural world is a constant presence in French poetry throughout the nineteenth century, it is subject to an artificial and highly codified metrical structure through which it can only appear as a rarefied cultural artefact. Poems in free verse, however, come with no pre-existing metrical lens – they require the reader to construct patterns of meaning with every reading, each of which will be unstable, fragile, unable to claim absolute authority. As J.-H. Rosny argues in the preface to the first edition of *Rythmes pittoresques* (1890):

> Les cygnes, les lys, les papillons et les roses, les rossignols et les étoiles, les grands souffles de l'alexandrin, la jolie ciselure du sonnet, la grâce de la ballade, tout cela apparaît tellement fatigué en face de la merveilleuse jeunesse de la prose.
>
> […] Notre génération ne perd donc pas son temps lorsqu'elle détruit les vieux systèmes, lorsqu'elle s'efforce de transformer l'emploi de la rime, de la cadence, du nombre ou de la forme, lorsqu'elle établit de frais dispositifs capables de remplacer les splendeurs surannées des types où s'imprimaient l'ode et la chanson, l'épopée et l'élégie, le conte et la satire…[9]
>
> [Swans, lilies, butterflies and roses, nightingales and stars, the pomp of the alexandrine, the pretty sculpture of the sonnet, the grace of the ballad, that all seems so tired in the face of the marvellous youth of prose.
>
> […] Our generation is thus not wasting its time in destroying the old systems, in striving to transform the use of rhyme, of cadence, of metre or form, in establishing fresh systems capable of replacing the outdated splendours of forms in which were printed ode and song, epic and elegy, tale and satire.]

Rosny reflects a widespread fatigue with the tired clichés and the fixed forms of nature poetry – forms such as the sonnet and the *ballade*, defined by their rhyme scheme, in which natural phenomena unfailingly find themselves shackled to the

8 Michel Murat, *Le Vers libre* (Paris: Champion, 2008), 70.

9 J.-H. Rosny, 'Préface', in Marie Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques* (Paris: Lemerre, 1890), vii–xi (ix–x).

same limited vocabulary, with a predictable set of associations: *onde* / *profonde* / *sonde* / *monde* [waters / deep / fathom / world]; *murmure* / *nature* / *obscure* [murmur / nature / obscure]; *écorce* / *force* [bark / strength]; *branche* / *penche* [branch / hang]; *vague* / *vague* [wave / vague]; *mer* / *amer* [sea / bitter]; *étoile* / *voile* [star / veil]; *terre* / *mystère* [earth / mystery]; *cieux* / *yeux* [skies / eyes]; *amour* / *jour* [love / light]; *infinie* / *harmonie* [infinite / harmony]. Since the nouns, verbs and adjectives that happen to rhyme with nature-words in French perpetuate a fixed interpretation of nature as intimately bound to human emotions and preoccupations, framed by an aestheticising gaze with a penchant for mysticism, *vers libre* offers a 'frais dispositif' for reading and writing the world.

Krysinska takes this line in the preface to her second collection, *Joies errantes* [*Errant Joys*] (1894), strategically subtitled *Nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* [*New Picturesque Rhythms*], in which she argues for the value of 'le dispositif inattendu [the unexpected system]' because 'telle pièce traduisant quelque capricieux coin de nature, ou quelque anxieux état de rêve, perdrait toute son intensité à être enfermée dans un cadre régulier – alors que d'autres sujets appellent à eux les rigides architectures du vers [any piece translating some capricious corner of nature, or some anxious dream state, would lose all its intensity by being enclosed in a regular frame – while other subjects call for the rigid architectures of verse]'.[10] Krysinska's use of *traduire* suggests a vision of the natural world as a coherent sign-system – unstable and shifting ('capricieux'), perhaps, but ripe for interpretation. On several occasions she refers to a mysterious language in nature, to which only certain souls are receptive, as in 'Symphonie en gris [Symphony in Grey]':

> Du sol consterné monte une rumeur étrange, surhumaine.
> Cabalistique langage entendu seulement
> Des âmes attentives. (9–11)[11]
>
> [From the distressed ground rises a strange, superhuman murmur.
> Cabalistic language heard only
> By attentive souls.]

The rustling of the wind in the leaves produces the same effect in both 'Le Hibou [The Owl]' – 'Les grands arbres balancent leurs têtes chevelues, chuchotant d'obscures paroles [The great trees nod their shaggy heads, whispering obscure words]' (10–11) – and 'Ballade [Ballad]' – 'Et le feuillage qui chuchote

10 Marie Krysinska, *Joies errantes: nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* (Paris: Lemerre, 1894), vi–vii.

11 Marie Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, ed. by S. Whidden (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2003), 39.

mystérieusement et perfidement quand approche la nuit apaisante [And the foliage whispering mysteriously and treacherously when the soothing night approaches]' (38).[12] Although ecological thought today argues for a reconnection with, and revalorisation of, the natural world, this notion of a hidden language in nature is hardly a 'frais dispositif'. It is one of the oldest clichés of Romantic poetry, a favourite theme of Victor Hugo, and the 'obscures paroles' proffered by Krysinska's trees echo Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', the poem that perhaps more than any other influenced the Symbolists' mystification of the natural world:

> La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles (1–2)[13]
>
> [Nature is a temple where living pillars
> Sometimes emit confused words]

While the form may be innovative, then, the vision of nature found in *Rythmes pittoresques* is not new. Rather, it features topoi familiar from almost any book of nineteenth-century nature poetry: a sense of potential transcendence expressed through a vague mysticism or sense of the divine ('Et le crépuscule monte de la terre – | Comme une vapeur d'encens | Monte de l'encensoir [And twilight rises from the earth | As a cloud of incense | Rises from the censer]' ('Le Calvaire [The Cross]', 24–6));[14] an irrepressible anthropomorphism ('Et les aimables lianes | Prennent dans leurs bras amoureux | Les torses des puissants chênes [And the pleasant creepers | Take in their loving arms | The torsos of the powerful oaks]' ('La Source [The Spring]', 37–9));[15] and an insistence on the music of nature ('Et les rythmes et les parfums se confondront en une subtile et unique symphonie [And the rhythms and the perfumes will mingle in a subtle and unique symphony]' ('Symphonie des parfums [Symphony of Perfumes]', 9)).[16] We might read these topoi of nineteenth-century French poetry ecocritically – they certainly represent an attempt to re-enchant our relationship with a natural world reduced by industrialisation and urbanisation to a source of raw materials, or to a picturesque, nostalgic refuge. In the preface to *Intermèdes*, Krysinska claims that her first *vers libre* poems were 'la réaction contre le naturalisme versifié de 1881–82 [a reaction

12 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 57; 82.
13 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by C. Pichois, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 11.
14 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 52.
15 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 32.
16 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 54.

against the versified naturalism of 1881–82]',[17] yet by the time of the appearance of these poems in 1890, such motifs are as tired as the swans, the lilies and the nightingales that Rosny dismisses in his preface as cultural clichés that perpetuate an artificial vision of the natural world – a reverent vision, certainly, but one doomed to keep nature enframed, static, sterile. How, then, might *Rythmes pittoresques* be read as a 'frais dispositif' with the potential to shape ecocritical reading strategies?

One answer, I would suggest, lies in the form. While the content of these poems might seem overly familiar, retrograde even, the great theoretical debate that preoccupied the *vers libre* poets concerned not the content, but formal features, namely the notoriously slippery concept which defines French poetry perhaps more than any other: rhythm. In his review, Dubus declares: 'on a voulu, le titre en est un sûr témoignage, que le rythme régnât ici en maître absolu. *En tyran*! diraient, non sans quelque raison, les partisans des formes classiques de la poésie française [as the title surely attests, the author intended rhythm to reign here as supreme ruler. The supporters of the classical forms of French poetry would say, not without some justification, "*As a tyrant!*"]'.[18] It is precisely the defenders of traditional, regular forms that Krysinska takes to task in her preface to *Intermèdes* in the name of 'cette évolution constante dans les formes poétiques [this constant evolution of poetic forms]'.[19] Instead of the 'intolérable monotonie' of regular alexandrines preferred by Sully-Prudhomme, a staunch critic of *vers libre*, Krysinska demands variety: 'la nouvelle profession de foi poétique peut se formuler ainsi: confiance plus ouvertement avouée dans les vertus de la variété et du pittoresque par conséquent, coupes alternantes librement et selon le besoin de la précision styliste [this latest profession of poetic faith can be summed up thus : confidence more openly expressed in the virtues of variety and picturesque, and thus rhythmic freedom as dictated by stylistic precision]'.[20] Since the term *pittoresque* also features in the title, it is worth pondering: while the word is commonly applied to landscapes, to paintings, or to literary description, it is less obvious how a rhythm, non-semantic and non-representational, might be described as picturesque. How, or what, might a rhythm represent? In his *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, Pierre Larousse explores how the term *pittoresque* was applied to the representation of nature across the arts. In the seventeenth and eigtheenth centuries, he explains, literature was full of stifling codes which put nature in the background

17 Marie Krysinska, *Intermèdes: nouveaux rythmes pittoresques* (Paris: Vanier, 1903), xxvi.
18 Edouard Dubus, '*Rythmes pittoresques*, par Marie Krysinska', *Mercure de France* 1.12 (1890), 443–4 (443) [original italics].
19 Krysinska, *Intermèdes*, xii.
20 Krysinska, *Intermèdes*, xvii.

– 'les règles et les conventions reléguèrent la nature au second plan; or c'est de la nature seule que le poète, comme le peintre, peut tirer les éléments du pittoresque [rules and conventions relegated nature to the background; whereas it is from nature alone that the poet, like the painter, can derive the elements of picturesque]' –, whereas, in the nineteenth century, 'c'est précisément chez les écrivains plus libres, plus vrais, plus naturels que les autres, qu'il faut en général chercher le pittoresques [it is precisely in writers who are freer, truer, more natural than others, that the picturesque is to be found]'.[21] It is in this sense of freedom that Krysinska's rhythms articulate the alluring unknowability of the natural world.

In the preface to *Intermèdes*, Krysinska asks 'peut-on prétendre que le rythme obligé d'une marche militaire, soit un rythme préférable et supérieur à celui de tel capricieux ballet […] ou telle danse espagnole pleine de soubresauts nerveux et de fantaisie? [can we claim that the rigid rhythm of a military march be preferable and superior to that of some capricious ballad […] or some Spanish dance full of nervous jolts and flights of fancy?]'.[22] The choice of adjectives is telling, with the totalitarian implications of 'obligé' contrasting with 'capricieux', which recalls her description of 'telle pièce traduisant quelque capricieux coin de nature'. Examples of both kinds of rhythm are to be found in *Rythmes pittoresques*, and they enact the tension between constraining forms and irrepressible freedom, as in 'Les Fenêtres [Windows]'. The poem describes 'le Paris noctambule [the Parisian night]' (24) with its 'bruits de fêtes [sounds of parties]' (35) until the streets empty again:

> Puis l'heure silencieuse et froide vient éteindre lumières et bruits.
> Seul le pas régulier d'un sergent de ville va et vient sur le trottoir sonore, sous les fenêtres qui s'endorment comme des yeux lassés. (36–7)[23]
>
> [Then the silent and cold hour comes to extinguish lights and sounds.
> Only the regular step of a city guard comes and goes on the sonorous pavement, beneath the windows which fall asleep like tired eyes.]

The only regular rhythm present in the whole volume is produced by this representative of the state, doing his rounds to ensure all is in order on the streets of the capital. The music played at the various *soirées* is of a different sort altogether: 'Et sur la vitre qui est d'opale, on voit glisser des ombres fugitives, aux rythmes de musiques plus vagues que des souffles [And on the pane, which is of opal, fugitive shadows may be seen to glide, to the rhythms of music more vague than

21 Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, vol. 12 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1874), 1090–1.

22 Krysinska, *Intermèdes*, xvi.

23 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 36.

breath]' (30).[24] Whereas the regular rhythm of the 'sergent de ville' suggests order and conformity, the dancers glimpsed through the darkened windows are fleeting shadows, as if their identity were harder to grasp amid the rhythmic vagueness. Likewise, the ecopoetic dimension of Krysinska's verse might be located in the ungraspable quality of her poetic rhythms, where shocks and jolts, echoes and surprises, ensure that our responses to the reading experience are as fresh and as challenging as our encounters with the natural world.

All other references to rhythm in *Rythmes pittoresques* articulate this unpredictability, this refusal to settle. In 'Chanson d'automne [Autumn Song]', 'le vent, comme un épileptique, mène dans la cheminée l'hivernal orchestre [the wind, like an epileptic, leads into the hearth the wintry orchestra]' (13),[25] indicating a spasmodic movement that is a far cry from the footsteps of the 'sergent de ville', and illustrative of nature's potential to wrong-foot us in our search for regular, predictable patterns. In 'Le Démon de Racoczi', a demon depicted in an etching produces a bewitching music on his violin:

> La valse déchaînait son tournoyant délire.
> Rythmée comme par des soupirs d'amour;
> Chuchoteuse comme les flots,
> Et aussi mélancolique qu'un adieu;
> Désordonnée, incohérente, avec des éclats de cristal qu'on brise;
> Essoufflée, rugissante comme une tempête;
> Puis alanguie, lassée, s'apaisant dans une lueur de bleu lunaire. (33–45)[26]
>
> [The waltz unleashed its whirling frenzy.
> As if rhythmed by sighs of love;
> Whispering like the waves,
> And as melancholy as an adieu;
> Disordered, incoherent, with noises like breaking crystal;
> Breathless, roaring like the tempest;
> Then languid, weary, subsiding in a lunar blue light.]

As in the case of the epileptic wind, these rhythms are disordered, incoherent, broken and their extreme states of frenzy and repose are compared to natural phenomena, namely moonlight and the tempest. A suite of eight poems entitled 'Les Danses [The Dances]' further develops this contrast, beginning with two relatively sober dances, the pavane and the minuet, both characterised by measured,

24 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 36.
25 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 45.
26 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 106–7.

tranquil rhythms – 'Dansez la Pavane au rythme câlin [Dance the Pavane with its caressing rhythm]' ('La Pavane [The Pavane]', 1; 18) – and:

Les galants paniers
Où éclosent
Des roses
Brodées
Se bercent au rythme lent et mesuré
Du menuet. ('Menuet', 4–9)[27]

[The gallant baskets
Where embroidered
Roses
Bloom
Sway to the slow and leisured rhythm
Of the minuet.]

As the dances become more exotic, the rhythms break loose, as in 'Danse d'Espagne', in which the tambourines suggest the ecstatic buzzing of bees:

Palpitantes guitares
Sur des rythmes barbares
Comme des gorges pâmées
Doucement sanglotez!
Ollé!

Les paumes frappent dans les paumes
Et les tambourins bourdonnent et sonnent
Comme des abeilles enivrées
Du sang des roses
Ollé! (7–16)[28]

[Palpitating guitars
To barbarian rhythms
Like swooning bosoms
Sob gently!
Olé!
The hands clap
And the tambourines buzz and sound
Like bees drunk
On the blood of roses
Olé!]

27 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 93; 94.
28 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 95.

In 'Danse d'Orient', the dancers move 'Sous le charme de quelque incantation vague [Charmed by some vague incantation]' (16), a far cry from the steady rhythm of European ballroom dances, before the music becomes even less coherent:

Et tandis que harcelée par les miaulements
Rauques de la *derbouka*
Et stimulée
Par les
Nerveuses crotales,
La jupe de l'almée
Se gonfle d'air
Comme une voile
Sur la mer. (17–25)[29]

[And while harassed by the rough
Caterwauling of the *derbouka*
And spurred on
By the
Agitated vipers,
The dancer's skirt
Fills with air
Like a sail
On the sea.]

Here the convulsions of the wild oriental music are replicated in the rhythms of the poem, with two cases of emphatic enjambement, the first building up to an awkward disyllabic *rejet* ('miaulements | Rauques') and the second separating a definite article from its noun ('les | Nerveuses crotales'). Enjambement does not function in *vers libre* as it does in regular metrical verse – there is no predictable pulse that might be momentarily disrupted before the forward momentum of regularity is restored –, yet these examples disturb our reading of the text by introducing a kind of epileptic jolt, to use Krysinska's term. As the poem draws to a close, we find three consecutive hexasyllabic units that call to mind the regular 6+6 rhythm of the alexandrine, reinforced by sibilance, before a pentasyllabic unit ('en faisant couler') breaks the anticipated regularity, and the rhythm disappears in the following nonasyllable with only the persistent [s] pattern providing an echo of what might have been:

29 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 96.

Et **s**onge que **c**e **s**oir, / il pourra étancher	6+6	
Sa **s**oif jalouse d'*elle*, / en faisant couler	6+5	
Son joli **s**ang rouge **s**ur **c**es **s**eins	9	(29–31)[30]

Is that a dodecasyllable in the line 'Sous le charme de quel/que incantati-on vague', a broken alexandrine of the kind popularised by Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Verlaine in the 1860s and 1870s, itself a vague incantation? Taken on its own, it does not strike our ear as an alexandrine, but given the six-syllable fragments we find towards the end of the poem, we might be encouraged to scrutinise the textual landscape for other rhythmic signposts. As Scott suggests, the rhythm of free verse is 'the instrument of restless, active relating, a mode of palpation of sense, of linguistic becoming'.[31] It is the tentative negotiation of such patterns, at once familiar and unfamiliar, with which *vers libre* encourages us to grapple, that could provide the key to an ecocritical reading of the volume's picturesque rhythms.

In her use of traditional metre, Krysinska operates a kind of rhythmic defamiliarisation that serves to heighten our senses in each encounter with the text. While line-lengths range from two syllables to over two dozen across the whole volume, giving the impression of freedom, of a 'frais dispositif', there are lines which strike the ear as strangely familiar, thanks to the eerie presence of what seems to be an alexandrine appearing out of the rhythmic haze:

Plus d'ardentes lueurs / sur le ciel alourdi	('Symphonie en gris', 1)
C'est l'Heure épanouie / comme une large Fleur	('Midi' III, 7)
Tout est miraculeux / dans ce Jardin de Joie	('Eve', 8)
Rouges comme des cœurs / et blancs comme des âmes	('Eve', l10)
Un merveilleux Serpent / à la bouche lascive	('Eve', 31)
Le ciel a revêtu / ses plus riches armures	('Ariane', 22)

The effect is even more compelling, sensual even, in the case of a palpable 3+3+3+3 pulse:

Et voici / que pareil / à un bras / amoureux	('Eve', 34)
Les muraill/es d'azur / qui support/ent son ciel.	('Marie', 7)
Et des pierr/es émane / une odeur / de tristesse	('Magdelaine', 3)
Où le ciel / attristé / semble prendr/e en ses bras	('Midi' III, 8)

In these lines, the natural imagery is enframed in a familiar rhythmic context that marks it as high art, artifice even, and the effect on the reader is reassuring, soothing. We are not obliged to read these isolated examples in *vers libre* poems as alexandrines, so their value is unstable to the extent that we are unsure

30 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 97 [original italics].
31 Scott, 'Translating the Nineteenth Century', 293.

what exactly they represent – as Murat observes, 'le vers libre met en évidence la nécessité en même temps que l'indécidabilité du choix [free verse highlights the necessity, as well as the impossibility, of choosing]'.[32] These fragments, while encouraging ever closer scrutiny, resist our interpretative gaze to the extent that we might wonder if they are there at all. Given that the book opens with a section entitled 'Mirages', perhaps this elusive shimmering effect is precisely the point: just as a quasi-alexandrine from 'Naissance d'Aphrodite' – 'Et les reflets de l'eau / devenue radieuse' (33) – is transformed six lines later into a 5+6 hendecasyllable, an imperfect reflection – 'Les reflets du ciel / et de l'eau radieuse' (39) –,[33] the poems create a rhythmic mirage. Does the author intend such lines to be read as alexandrines? To expect an answer is to miss the point, for, as Seth Whidden points out, free verse performs 'une constante remise en question […] de toute notion d'autorité [a constant questioning […] of all notions of authority]'.[34] In the context of nineteenth-century France, when political as well as religious authority was consistently challenged, we might read this textual undecidability, this provocative questioning, as a way in which the poem and the natural world depicted in it resist utilitarian, one-dimensional and exploitative readings.

The contours of this rhythmic mirage, as the text flutters between the familiar and the unfamiliar, are further blurred by the inclusion of numerous lines reminiscent of the *vers libéré*, the alexandrine that is metrically destabilised by indivisible syntactic units around the caesura:

Où fermente **le vin** / **noir** des mélancolies ('Eve', 17)

By a monosyllabic preposition, or a counted feminine 'e' in sixth position, pre-caesura:

Du Dieu qui règne **sur** / les sublimes ivresses ('Ariane', 55)
Ainsi, le flot ros**e** / d'un vin de Syracuse ('Hélène', 16)
La mer écuman**te** / de sa révolte vaine ('Marie', 10)

By a counted feminine 'e' at seventh position, post-caesura:

Mais, voici reparaîtr/**e** la montagne – Reine ('Midi' III, 15)
Les branchages s'étoil/**ent** de fruits symboliques ('Eve', 9)
Coucha toutes les jeun/**es** et puissantes joies ('Ariane', 6)

32 Murat, *Le Vers libre*, 228.
33 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 60.
34 Seth Whidden, 'Sur la "supercherie" de Marie Krysinska: vers une lecture sérieuse de "Symphonie en gris"', in *Le Vers libre dans tous ses états: histoire et poétique d'une forme (1886–1914)*, ed. by C. Boschian-Campaner (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 79–88 (86).

By an uncounted feminine 'e' pre-caesura – the *coupe épique* familiar from medieval verse, but unsanctioned in the nineteenth century:

Et le Lotus august(e) / rêve aux règnes futurs	('Eve', 18)
Et vêtus d'ailes sombr(es) / comme les Trahisons	('Eve', 24)
O les nuits irréell(es), les merveilleuses nuits!	('Ballade', 18; 22)

Or, most tenuously of all – since the possibility of reading a quasi-alexandrine does not announce itself at a word boundary, and must be practically counted on the reader's fingers – by a mid-word caesura:

Dans tous les chers et *charm*/*eurs* parfums d'autrefois	('Symphonie des parfums', 2)
Frémissent les *papill*/*ons* d'ombre saphirine	('Ariane', 19)
Celle qu'il devait *aim*/*er* d'un amour unique	('Roman dans la lune', 7)

Finally, what are we to make of the line from 'Symphonie des parfums' that looks like prose on the page – 'Mes souvenirs chanteront sur des rythmes doux, et me berceront sans réveiller des regrets (3) –, but might be seen to conceal, if we peer closely enough, at least two dodecasyllables, if not two alexandrines:

Mes souvenirs chante/ront sur des rythmes doux,
et me berceront sans / réveiller des regrets.

None of these lines demand to be metrically read, but such hesitation lies at the heart of *vers libre*, a form in which, in Murat's words – with a nod to Mallarmé – 'chaque poème et même chaque vers y devient le moment d'un coup de dés où tout doit être réinventé [every poem, and even every line, becomes a roll of the dice where everything must be reinvented]'.[35] As we look for patterns, as we measure and gauge, as we speculate and infer, our efforts to interpret the text rhythmically recreate the processes by which we create meanings for the world that are always unstable, fragmentary, conjectural. It is in this sense that Krysinska's rhythms are picturesque: they do not paint a fixed picture of a rural idyll; they formally recreate the interpretative hesitations to which the world constantly makes us return.

Such hesitations become even more acute in lines of eleven or thirteen syllables that seem to push our reading towards the familiar, only to disappoint us. Although these lines are harder to spot, there is a precedent for both forms in poems from the pre-*vers libre* canon that compensate for the unstable rhythm with a constant caesura, such as Banville's 'Le Triomphe de Bacchos à son retour des Indes' from *Les Stalactites* (5+8 throughout) and the fourth of Verlaine's 'Ariettes oubliées' from *Romances sans paroles* (5+6 throughout). Krysinska's 6+5 lines

35 Murat, *Le Vers libre*, 68.

begin as if luring us into anticipating a satisfying alexandrine rhythm, only to confound us with a missing syllable:

Le long des boulevards / et le long des rues	('Les Fenêtres', 27)
Qui porte dans les plis / de son long manteau	('Midi' III, 16)
Et l'opaque fumée / de notre malice	('Le Calvaire', 11)
Où la Fée de la Nuit / mène sous la lune	('La Reine des Neiges', 43)

The 6+7 lines create similar confusion:

Un deuil cruel et cher / la possède pour jamais.	('Magdelaine', 10)
Et les oiseaux veilleurs / chantent l'immortel Amour	('Nature morte', 23)

More than once, Krysinska creates a curious mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar with the chiastic pattern 6+5 | 5+6 over consecutive lines:

Et, tandis que sa main / enfantine mêle	
A ses beaux cheveux / les odorantes roses	('Hélène', 41–2)
L'air est plus opprimant / par ce soir d'orage	
Dans le creux de roche / où Magdelaine pleure	('Magdelaine', 1–2)

A similar sense of unfulfilled rhythmic potential comes in lines beginning with two tetrasyllabic units that appear to announce a 4+4+4 alexandrine, only to have the third unit prove too short, or too long, by one syllable:

En vain rôdaient / autour de lui / leurs yeux ivres	4+4+3
('Roman dans la lune', 21)	
Musc minuscule / et compliqué / comme une arabesque	4+4+5
('Symphonie des parfums', 17)	

These familiar fragments force us to examine our reading habits, to question the pertinence of the interpretative framework that we bring to the text. In 1890, metrical verse in France still had decades left in it, and *vers libre* emerged after centuries of metrical conditioning. It is thus hardly surprising that we feel drawn towards the suggestion of regular rhythms – those rhythms through which nature had hitherto been expressed in poetry – as a means of guiding our response to the text. Yet the text encourages us to doubt our assumptions and question our habits: by identifying and classifying these rhythms, are we not doing an injustice to the complexity and the infinite diversity of the material?

Should our metrical framework, then, be seen as an artifice to be abandoned so that we might read unencumbered by tired habits? In order to preserve the salutary otherness of the natural world, should our rhythmic experience not also slip out of our grasp just at the point of seizing it? In 'Métempsychose [Reincarnation]', Krysinska imagines human souls returning to 'la terre veuve | Où toute vie aura cessé [the widowed earth | Where all life has ended]' (6–7) to examine the ruins

of what they had built 'Tandis que palpitait en eux la terrestre vie [While earthly life palpitated in them]' (22).[36] Life on earth, in which humans play an integral part, is thus characterised by rhythm, palpitation. While metrical rhythms may seem artificial, they respond to a fundamental rhythmic truth about the world and our relation to it – and yet that truth must remain elusive. As if to demonstrate this tension, Krysinska expresses that essential rhythm in a tantalising 6+7 line – 'Tandis que palpitait / en eux la terrestre vie' – that makes us anticipate the most traditional of alexandrines, before the metrical rhythm collapses with the one word that refuses to submit to the syllable count, 'vie' itself. This is especially noteworthy because the line would have been a perfect alexandrine if Krysinska had placed the adjective after the noun, as one might expect – *Tandis que palpitait / en eux la vie terrestre*. As such, this line articulates the quintessential picturesque rhythm, illustrating the endlessly elusive nature of life on earth through a carefully constructed rhythmic hesitation.

Enjambement also plays an important role in this rhythmic breaking and remaking, as indivisible units – compound nouns, preposition + noun, noun + adjective, article + noun – find themselves dislocated across two lines:

Contagieuse douleur | Des choses	('Effet de soir', 21–2)
aux bras enlaçants | D'amants…	('Magdelaine', 32–3)
des branches | D'arbres	('La Reine des neiges', 32–3)
les bûchers du Saint- | Office	('La Pavane', 19–20)
les âpres portes | Du Réel	('Sonate', 42–3)
Les bras le long | Du corps	('La Gigue', 32–3)
devers | Les mers	('Midi' I, 4–5)
devant | Les rides.	('La Reine des neiges', 6–7)
l'instant | Immortel	('Sonate', 40–1)
toute | Pleurante	('Pleine mer', 5–6)
Par les | Recors	('La Gigue', 18–19)

The effect is not the same as in isometric verse, since the presence of such disruptive pressure-points in *vers libre* asks different questions of the text. In metrical verse, enjambement might suggest a momentary rebellion against predictable form, but here the poet's hands are not tied by any such obligation, and in several of these examples the transgressive words are isolated in blank space:

Balancent leurs fervents encensoirs	
Auprès	
Des chères coupes des Iris	('Eve', 14–16)[37]

36 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 111.

37 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 28.

[Swing their fervent censers
By
The dear heads of the Irises.]

For Scott, at such moments the page becomes 'a particular typographical/topographical ecology, a certain distribution and dynamisation of language, a certain set of pathways, a psychogeography, no longer a surface for the eye to skate across, but a tabular location for the eye, the ear and the voice endlessly to explore and engage with'.[38] From a rhythmic perspective, such 'coupes' (rhythmic breaks) are indeed 'chères' since they enact in verse our fundamental interpretative hesitations about the world, a simultaneous joining and breaking-apart. Krysinska also frequently achieves this with a disjunctive hyphen within a syntactic unit:

les boucliers des héros morts – resplendissaient au soleil ('Pleine mer', 12)
les jours clairs et monotones – d'enfance ('Effet de soir', 2)

This sense of deconstruction and reconstruction is vital to the negotiation between *vers libre* and traditional verse, and to the free-verse dramatisation of our interpretative encounter with the world. In 'Javanaises', emphatic enjambement such as 'la folle | Vision' (4–5) and 'des chattes | Jaunes' (8–9) accompanies the broken rhythms of the dance:

Tandis qu'en rythmes brisés,
Pleuvent des musiques farouches et subtiles. (14–15)[39]

[While in broken rhythms,
Wild and subtle musics rain down.]

Although the rhythm is dislocated, the poem creates formal patterns across the rhyme scheme, adhering not to traditional rhyming rules (such as no singular with plural, and no masculine with feminine), but to the transgressive principle of rhymes for the ear – 'idoles / folle / symboles' (1–5) and 'graciles / avril / subtiles' (11–15) – alongside a strong *rime léonine* 'grisés / brisés' (12–14). Rhyme is not banished from free verse, but the acoustic patterning in each poem is new and surprising, while encouraging our irrepressible sense of rhythm:

Implacablem**en**t
Et rythmiquem**en**t,
Avec une méthode d'**en**fer,

38 Scott, 'Translating the Nineteenth Century', 287.
39 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 97.

Les tal*on*s
V*on*t. ('La Gigue', 9–13)[40]
[Implacably
And rhythmically,
With a devil of a method,
The heels
Fly.]

Such rhythms are capricious, but extremely productive, as in the text-as-landscape metaphor that Krysinska offers in 'Danse slave [Slavic Dance]' by linking the fiddler's rhythmic gesture with the hand which sows the seed:

Le ménétrier assis sur la table
Lance d'un geste large de semeur
Le rythme de la danse. (11–13)[41]
[The fiddler, sat on the table
With a wide sowing movement sets off
The rhythm of the dance.]

Thus we might see the rhythmic exuberance of Krysinska's poems as generating new life within the text, at the point where nature and culture meet.

This essay took as its point of departure anglophone ecocritics' dismissal of a strand of theory seen as particularly French. I hope to have suggested ways in which French free verse might provide a compelling model of ecocritical reading as an exciting, productive, and necessary encounter with otherness. Indeed, several critics found *vers libre* disconcerting on account of its foreignness: of Krysinska's poems, Aurélien Scholl wrote in *Le Matin* that 'on dirait des couplets traduits d'une langue étrangère, et où le traducteur ne met pas de rimes pour conserver la pensée intact [they resemble verses translated from a foreign language, the translator avoiding rhyme in order to preserve the meaning]',[42] while Philippe Gille of *Le Figaro* suggested that 'on dirait d'une traduction d'un poème étranger, et l'œuvre de Mme Krysinska est pour l'oreille une nouvelle musique qui, pour n'être pas celle de notre vers français, possède cependant un charme pénétrant et incontestable [it seems to be the translation of a foreign poem, and Mme Krysinska's work provides the ear with a new music which, while not that of our French verse, possesses nonetheless a penetrating and incontestable charm]'.[43] For some, this hybridity was to be feared, with Catulle Mendès dismissing Peruvian poet Nicanor Della

40 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 100.
41 Krysinska, *Rythmes pittoresques*, 98.
42 Aurélien Scholl, 'Chronique parisienne', *Le Matin* (18 October 1890), 1 (1).
43 Philippe Gille, 'Revue bibliographique', *Le Figaro* (26 November 1890), 5 (5).

Rocca de Vergalo, author of *Poëtique nouvelle*,[44] as 'un excellent homme, un peu ridicule, féru, comme beaucoup d'étrangers, de transporter dans notre langue les règles prosodiques et même grammaticales de sa langue natale [an excellent fellow, slightly ridiculous, intent, like many foreigners, on importing into our language the prosodic and even the grammatical rules of his native language]'.[45] There is one point, however, on which all sides agree: in Charles Maurras's words, 'les poètes ne sont point des superfluités ainsi que l'imaginent quelques hommes d'État, et, de toutes les lois, de tous les parlements, c'est encore le rythme qui nous fait le plus d'heur et d'honneur dans le monde [poets are not superfluous, as some statesmen might think, and, of all the laws, of all the parliaments, it is still rhythm which seals our greatest glory and honour in the world]'.[46] It is this specifically French concept of poetic rhythm – the banner behind which poets of all convictions unite – that in free verse can reflect the diversity of the world and its ultimate unknowability, performing a kind of resistance to ownership that provides an answer to what Marland identifies as 'the difficulty of speaking for the earth itself'.[47] Such an ecocritical mode of reading provides a way of inhabiting the text as one inhabits the world, challenging us to reassess modes of dwelling and reading. Through the shocks, jolts, hesitations and temptations of the rhythmic experience, French free verse might provide a potent example of a text which demands Marland's 'slow reading', a practice that Roman Bartosch and Greg Garrard identify as crucial to the ecocritical project: 'a slow reading that conducts the student into a singular and unpredictable encounter with otherness'.[48]

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Part IV
Twentieth-Century Ecological Thought

Teófilo Sanz

Marguerite Yourcenar's Ecological Thinking: Wilderness, Place-Connectedness, Biocentrism, and an Ethic of Care

Abstract: In recent years, literary critics in the francophone world have attempted to develop their own ecocritical theory as a counterpoint to the enormous weight of anglophone studies in the field, and the emergence of *écopoétique* [ecopoetics] is a response to ecocriticism's supposed lack of attention to a text's formal and aesthetic elements. This chapter reflects on the potential of a specifically francophone ecocriticism based on non-anthropocentric ethical values. Twentieth-century writer Marguerite Yourcenar always claimed that ecology was a main concern for her, and this chapter uses an ecocritical approach to consider her relationship with nature. Studying in particular her fictional novel *Un homme obscur* [*An Obscure Man*], and taking into account her autobiographical work and paratexts, this chapter analyses the role of the natural environment in the literary production of the first female writer accepted into the *Académie française* [French Academy]. My overview shows the rich variety of ecocritical themes in Yourcenar's work: wilderness, place-connectedness, biocentrism, and an ethics of care. Yourcenar's texts, which evoke remarkable sensitivity and commitment to animals and the planet, are proof that her literary aesthetic goes hand-in-hand with an environmental commitment, giving a voice to what French philosopher Michel Serres calls *Biogée* – all life on Earth.

The collective volume *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (2012), edited by Greg Garrard, offers a broad panorama of ecocritical theory and its innovative results. Multiple discourses and aspects of reality are implicated that allow us to reconceptualise the world: literature, postcolonial theory, globalisation, post-humanism, climate change, new media, deconstructionism, film, etc. The most important thing, as Richard Kerridge writes, is that an ecocritical approach be guided by the principle of connections between humans and the non-human world.[1]

Adopting a broad framework that takes into account various ecocritical hypotheses, I will explore the ways in which the ethics and ecological poetics of Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–87) can be read in relation to the natural

1 Richard Kerridge, 'Ecocriticism and the Mission of "English"', in *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, ed. by G. Garrard (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 11–23 (12–13).

environment. Ecology is indubitably present in the reader's expectations of Yourcenar's work, since she pioneeringly alerts us to catastrophes related to the deterioration of our planet. A collection such as *Marguerite Yourcenar y la ecología* [*Marguerite Yourcenar and Ecology*] (2007), edited by Andrea Padilla and Vicente Torres, is a valuable tool for understanding the scope of the author's ecological commitment. As Michèle Goslar writes in her contribution to the volume,

> Si lo político puede ser definido como voluntad de incidir en el comportamiento de un grupo de individuos, puede decirse entonces que la preocupación constante de Marguerite Yourcenar por el porvenir de los animales y la naturaleza fue de carácter político. Esta preocupación por el respeto de la vida en todas sus formas se manifestó desde sus primeros escritos y en todos los géneros que cultivó: novela y poesía, teatro y ensayos, traducciones y discursos, entrevistas y correspondencia.[2]
>
> [If the political can be defined as a willingness to affect the behaviour of a group of individuals, it can thus be said that Marguerite Yourcenar's constant concern for the future of animals and nature was of a political nature. This concern for respecting life in all its forms manifested itself beginning with her first writings, and in all the genres that she cultivated: novels and poetry, theatre and essays, translations and discourses, interviews and correspondence.]

Another broad anthology about Yourcenar's ecological thinking, entitled 'Marguerite Yourcenar et l'écologie [Marguerite Yourcenar and Ecology]', was published by the Centre International de Documentation Marguerite Yourcenar (CIDMY) in 1990.[3] An ecocritical approach to Yourcenar's œuvre reveals that, in the majority of her works, there is a chance for real compromise with respect to Nature and the living beings – human animals and non-human animals – inhabiting it. Yourcenar's *Un homme obscur* [*An Obscure Man*] (1981) offers a vision of nature conveyed through a stark aesthetic of writing that can be studied from an ecopoetic

An ecocritical approach to Marguerite Yourcenar

Marguerite Yourcenar was the first woman to hold a position in the *Académie française* [French Academy]. Nominated by Jean d'Ormesson, her appointment took place in 1981, not without reticence on the part of some of *les immortels* [the immortals], many of whom – including Claude Lévi-Strauss – strongly opposed a woman entering into the exclusive body. Renowned anthropologist Lévi-Strauss defended his opposition with the argument that 'on ne change pas les règles de la tribu [you don't change the rules of the tribe]'.[4]

Yourcenar was a writer committed to ecological matters. She expressed her support for the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Animals, proclaimed by the International League of Animal Rights in 1978, and signed at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. She maintained that ecology was a part of her life, and one of her main concerns. In the chapter 'Un écrivain dans le siècle [A Writer of the Times]' in *Les Yeux ouverts* [*Open Eyes*], she responds to Matthieu Galey's questions about ecology by referring to the sombre state of affairs depicted by some thinkers, such as geographer Franz Schrader, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yourcenar predicts that all the catastrophes foreseen at that time will eventually turn out even worse, given that the panorama had become more terrifying by the end of the century due to acid rain, the pollution of rivers and seas with chemical and atomic residues, the disappearance of thousands of animal species, the generalised use of pesticides, oil spills, destruction of the ozone layer, etc.[5]

Yourcenar continually participated in public activities with associations aimed at the defence of the planet. At eighty-four years old, one month before her death, she travelled to Laval University in Canada to give her penultimate speech, 'Si nous voulons encore essayer de sauver la terre [If We Still Want to Try to Save the Earth]', in which she spoke of 'cette espèce d'égarement de la conscience humaine [this kind of confusion of human conscience]', and emphasised that 'la formule "Terre des hommes" est extrêmement dangereuse. La Terre appartient à tous les vivants et nous dépérirons avec eux et avec elle [the formula "Earth of men" is

4 Claude Lévi-Strauss, quoted in Josyane Savigneau, *Marguerite Yourcenar: l'invention d'une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 406; translated in Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey, 'Introduction: Part I', in *Subversive Subjects: Reading Marguerite Yourcenar*, ed. by J. H. Sarnecki and I. Majer O'Sickey (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 11–16 (12).

5 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts: entretiens avec Matthieu Galey* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1980), 293–4.

extremely dangerous. The Earth belongs to all living beings, and we will perish with them and with it]'.[6] This conviction is found in the worlds of her literary fiction, in her essays and interviews, and in her extensive autobiographical work, in which she alludes to her fundamental concerns: ecological problems, wars, racism, the ivory trade, factory farms, the leather industry, seal hunting, vivisection, and hunting. I will analyse Yourcenar's work from an ecocritical perspective, mainly focussing on *Un homme obscur*, her last novel, and occasionally referring to her other writings, fictional and factual.

Nature and place-connectedness

First of all, we must ask what role nature plays in the author's aesthetics. Certainly, it is not a Romantic idea of nature that predominates in Yourcenar's writing; she distances herself from Old World discourses when referring to landscapes.[7] Yourcenar avoids European idyllic types of narration that emphasise the beauty of the landscape in tandem with the feelings of a character afflicted by misery. We do not find representations of Nature as mere scenery or a projection of human moods, whereby a domesticated landscape is portrayed as an ideal refuge and a propitious distraction from the hardships of the Romantics. By contrast, Yourcenar adopts the notion of 'wilderness', of nature uncontaminated by civilisation. This is evident in *Un homme obscur*, which can be considered her ecological testament.

Set in the seventeenth century, the novella narrates the story of Nathanaël, a young Englishman who is sensitive and sickly, who works on a boat roaming the seas at the apogee of the Cartesian era. During his voyages, Nathanaël faces the reality of life and the atrocities of the world. He symbolises naturalness and sensibility. The experience of the journey allows him to discover the unmarred, splendid nature of North America. This world is much more than background scenery for the hero; it is a presence with its own reality. Nathanaël is in awe of this wild nature, and from the ship he perceives coasts fringed by impenetrable forests that bring to mind his reading of Virgil's descriptions of forests at the edge of sanctuaries. At the end of the story, Nathanaël's fusion with Nature becomes complete.

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6 Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Le Droit à la qualité de l'environnement: un droit en devenir, un droit à définir', *Centre International de Documentation Marguerite Yourcenar* (30 September 1987), <http://www.cidmy.be/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43:conference-2&catid=4:discours-conferences&Itemid=34> [accessed 23 May 2016].

7 Teófilo Sanz, 'L'Engagement écologique de Marguerite Yourcenar', *Polymnies* 1 (2010), 113–18.

It is not surprising that Marguerite Yourcenar, through her protagonist, intently describes these landscapes devoid of all cultural or literary semanticisation. In *The Song of the Earth*, pioneering critic Jonathan Bate utilises an ecocritical approach to English literature to assert the importance of poetry in a highly technological society at the turn of a new millennium, and to emphasise the capacity of poetry to return us to the earth that is our home.[8] We find this function in many of Marguerite Yourcenar's works: a tireless traveller, she develops an imaginary marked by a commitment to denounce disasters that affect the beings who inhabit Earth.

In 1942, the author discovered Mount Desert Island in Maine, and a connection was born that led to her living there until the end of her life. Over the course of her time in the area, she came to adopt a sensitivity to wilderness that is characteristic of North American nature writing. In that place, open to the sea, she declared: 'on a le sentiment d'être sur une frontière entre l'univers et le monde humain [one has the impression of being on a border between the universe and the human world]'.[9] In the prologue to one of her first texts, the play *La Petite Sirène* [*The Little Mermaid*] (1942), Yourcenar writes that she replaced her interest in landscapes of the past with an interest for increasingly out-of-the-way places untouched by humanity.[10]

In the autobiographical trilogy *Le Labyrinthe du monde* [*The Labyrinth of the World*] (1974–88), which rejects conventional historical narration, the author confirms the degradation of idyllic places from her childhood. In the first entry, *Souvenirs pieux* [*Pious Recollections*], she focusses on the search for her maternal roots. Aiming to be true to reality, the narrator visits places that encompassed her family history, and adds to what she has learned from documents that guide her on trips to Belgium, the land of her ancestors and her first experiences of 'place-connectedness'.[11] In 1956, during one of these trips, she stops at the castle in Flémalle, near Liège. By visiting a familiar place, which had captured her attention in an engraving that she owned, Yourcenar asserts the reality of how symbols of history die: the virgin place shown in the engraving has become a

8 Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), vii.

9 Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts*, 134.

10 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Théâtre*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 176 [*La Petite Sirène*, 135–72].

11 The concept of place-connectedness is evoked by Lawrence Buell in *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 64.

place without grass or trees, an industrial zone with a hellish topography; of the castle, only some ruins remain; of the mansion, allotted to a demolition company, the best-conserved part is an eighteenth-century banister made from wrought iron. Yourcenar arrives one day before the demolition, and the scenery makes her think of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's eighteenth-century etchings, in which staircases happily rise to the sky.[12] Yourcenar considers it vitally important to visit former residences because the stones and interiors that witnessed the lives of the inhabitants help to reconstruct memories.

During a trip in 1971, Yourcenar confirms the degradation of the place: dense, stinking clouds suffocate the visitor; the landscape is littered with closed coal mines and abandoned buildings that remind her of the black sorcerer's ruined castle in *Parsifal*; the engraving *Les Délices du pays de Liège* [*The Delights of the Region of Liège*] is transformed into the 'Apocalypse',[13] triggered by the errors of the human who becomes an apprentice to the sorcerer. In describing the industrial disfiguration of her parents' region, Yourcenar shows her ecological commitment, as she draws on the vestiges of her family history to judge the world.

In *Archives du Nord* [*Archives of the North*], the second book of the familial trilogy, Yourcenar delves into the origins of her paternal family. Thinking about the place in which her family lived, she imagines its state before the birth of the world. She recalls a time when man did not exist,[14] and imagines a virgin nature that changes according to seasons, untouched by calendars or timepieces, returning us to a tranquil world featuring the noises of free animals in their natural environment. The idyllic peace is swiftly shattered by the appearance of 'le prédateur roi, le bûcheron des bêtes et l'assassin des arbres, le trappeur ajustant ses rêts où s'étranglent les oiseaux [the predator-king, the butcher of beasts, and the assassin of trees, the hunter setting his traps in which birds are strangled]'.[15] Man is reflected in all his brutality:

> Les bandes dessinées et les manuels de science populaires nous montrent cet Adam sans gloire sous l'aspect d'une brute poilue brandissant un casse-tête: nous sommes loin de la légende judéo-chrétienne pour laquelle l'homme original erre en paix sous les ombrages d'un beau jardin.[16]

12 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 763–4 [*Souvenirs pieux*].
13 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 765–6 [*Souvenirs pieux*].
14 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 954 [*Archives du Nord*].
15 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 957 [*Archives du Nord*].
16 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 958 [*Archives du Nord*].

> [Comic books and popular scientific manuals show us this inglorious Adam as a hairy brute brandishing a club: we are far from Judeo-Christian legend, in which originary man wanders in peace among the shadows of a beautiful garden.]

Man and his powers are an anomaly within the whole; his presence is not beneficial to the primitive garden.

Situating the fiction of *Un homme obscur* in the seventeenth century, Yourcenar alerts us to the danger that looms over natural spaces with the advent of modernity. Nathanaël admires the immense beauty of virgin Nature, and his thoughts convey the fragility of the jungles starting to be destroyed by human excess.[17] As with Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature*,[18] Yourcenar denounces mechanistic philosophies that strip Nature of its ancient dignity as a possessor of spiritual energy. Yourcenar's attraction to Renaissance animism, which succumbed to the attacks of mechanism, is shown in the choice of an alchemist as the main character of her novel *L'Œuvre au noir* [*The Abyss*] (1968), in which we find a critique of technologically advanced societies that consider Mother Earth to be inert material. The Yourcenarian condemnation of a disenchanted world given to intensive exploitation of Nature chimes with Rachel Carson's admonitions in *Silent Spring*.[19]

An ethics of care and gender

Universal compassion is at the centre of Yourcenar's ethics. Beginning with her early writings, she shows sensitivity to the sorrow of living beings who have 'le sens d'une vie enfermée dans une forme différente [the sense of life enclosed in a different form]'.[20] In a letter of 1957, Yourcenar congratulates poet and animal-rights activist Lise Deharme:

> Je vous félicite d'avoir eu le courage de traiter ce sujet (il en est peu de plus graves) et de dédaigner d'avance les reproches de sentimentalité que les sots ne manqueront pas de vous adresser.[21]

17 Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts*, 296.

18 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980).

19 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

20 Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts*, 317.

21 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Lettres à ses amis et quelques autres*, ed. by J. Brami and M. Sarde (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 165.

> I salute you for having had the courage to engage with this issue (there are few more serious), and for pre-emptively disdaining the accusations of sentimentality that fools will surely launch against you.]

Yourcenar is aware of resistance to the development of a moral sensibility that acknowledges suffering beyond our species. Faced with a rationalist tradition that considers piety a passion, making it an expression of our corporeal nature that is inferior to intellect, Yourcenar advocates for the development of our sensory and affective capabilities, which have become subjugated to 'cet ordinateur que le cerveau est pour nous [the computer that is the brain for us]'.[22]

In recent decades, the revaluation of sentiment in the realm of morality has gone hand-in-hand with increased attentiveness to gender studies. With *In a Different Voice*,[23] Carol Gilligan calls for the recognition of a 'different voice', an ethic of care – a specifically feminine morality that has traditionally been dismissed. According to Gilligan's empirical studies, men are guided in moral decisions by principles – they speak of concepts and duties, and think in terms of justice. Instead of a logic of principles, women start from a relational self that leads to a morality of responsibility, as well as to greater contextual relativism. The typologies of moral theorists such as Lawrence Kohlberg characterise the latter form of ethical thinking as inferior to one based on duties and principles, but Gilligan – together with other female theorists of an ethic of care – postulates that these two moral perspectives are not contradictory, and should not be hierarchised.

The concept of a feminine form of moral thinking has been widely debated and criticised. It has been pointed out that modern societies are complex, and that gender roles have become less rigid, making it erroneous to generalise a breed of moral thinking that is characteristic of women, yet statistics continue to show a difference in the numbers of women and men who fulfil caring roles. Most members of ecological and animal rights movements around the world are women.[24] Ecofeminist theorists have taken up the idea of an ethic of care as a way of broadening a sense of moral responsibility for the non-human world, although they have adjusted it to theoretical positions that are very different from each other.[25] Despite disparities, these ecofeminist readings concur in distancing

22 Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts*, 320.

23 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

24 Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, *Éthique animale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2008).

25 Greta Gaard, ed., *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993); Karen Warren, ed., *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (Bloomington,

themselves from essentialist ecofeminist positions that would impede men from adopting an ethic of care; they postulate the end of gendered contrapositions, aspiring to a non-androcentric morality shared by all.

In this sense, we could see Nathanaël as an ethical model in *Un homme obscur*. Nathanaël does not renounce his emotive nature, as dictated by the norms of masculinity – according to which nature is to be denigrated and considered an object that should be dominated in order to defend culture. He does not participate in this power structure, nor does he adhere to an attitude of competition practised by men. Over the course of his life, he accepts an 'inferior' rank, showing absolute discretion until his final, silent fusion with nature. Traits such as practising an ethic of care, rejecting violence, manifesting emotions – characteristics devalued on the basis of being historically attributed to women – are the basis of the affective world of Yourcenar's lattermost characters.

Paradoxically, the women who appear in *Un homme obscur* conform to stereotypes. An analysis of the figures of femininity in the text – if we adopt the stance of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* [*The Second Sex*][26] with regard to the work of André Breton, Paul Claudel and others – confirms that the women in the novel are not granted individuality. Janet, with whom Nathanaël has a short relationship before setting off on his journey, is a clearly stereotyped character, limited to a set of ruses through which she seduces the young man. Foy, Nathanaël's companion on a deserted island, embodies the naïve woman who knows how to work the land, and is blessed with a seductive spontaneity. On his return to Europe, Nathanaël lives with Saraï, a prostitute who tricks and robs her clients. There are positive feminine figures in the novel, but they are always simplified.[27] The main character crosses paths with women who help or save him, such as Madame d'Ailly, who is a symbol of the ideal woman, but she remains unreachable. As in the model of courtly love, Nathanaël's veneration for her serves as a vehicle for perfecting his character. Madame d'Ailly gives him the spiritual force to continue on his path, and sacrifices her physical integrity by kissing him, though she knows that he has a contagious pulmonary disease. Nathanaël slowly becomes a complex character, whereas the women – a means to an end – remain anchored to a concrete function

IN: Indiana University Press, 1996); Alicia H. Puleo, *Ecofeminismo para otro mundo posible* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2011).

26 Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

27 Teófilo Sanz, 'Féminiser le masculin ou renier la féminité: l'éthique de la sollicitude dans *Un homme obscur*', in *Marguerite Yourcenar: la femme, les femmes, une écriture-femme?*, ed. by M. Ledesma Pedraz and R. Poignault (Clermont-Ferrand: Société Internationale d'Études Yourcenariennes, 2005), 377–85.

in a narrative that serves to show the transcendence of a masculine figure. The central masculine character represents the voice of the non-human other: upon freeing himself from the norms of his gender, he becomes a transcendent and wise subject in the very heart of Nature. We can conclude that Yourcenar was able to overcome anthropocentric bias, but not its androcentric counterpart, leading her to attribute a particular of gender to the false universal concept of Man.

Her efforts to overcome anthropocentrism make Yourcenar a pioneer deserving of ecocritical attention. Given the variety of perspectives in the spectrum of environmental thought, we can ask which position most characterises her work. Yourcenar criticises humanist anthropocentrism and the Cartesian theory of the *animal-machine* as a construction that favours exploitation and indifference. She wonders whether the Cartesian assertion has been fundamentally misunderstood, given the common ground of human beings and animal-machines:

> Une machine à produire et à ordonnancer les actions, les pulsions et les réactions qui constituent les sensations de chaud et de froid, de faim et de satisfaction digestive, les poussées sexuelles, et aussi la douleur, la fatigue, la terreur que les animaux éprouvent comme nous le faisons nous-mêmes.[28]
>
> [A machine to produce and order the actions, impulses, and reactions that constitute the sensations of hot and cold, hunger and fullness, the sexual impulses, as well as pain, tiredness, and terror that animals feel just as we do.]

In other words, her environmental thinking grants animal dignity a privileged place.

Sentiocentrism and biocentrism

Yourcenar expresses pathos-imbued sentiocentrism corresponding to the utilitarian philosophy of Peter Singer,[29] who inherits Jeremy Bentham's idea of the capacity to feel pain – not the capacity to reason – being the criterion for acting with moral consideration towards other living beings. In contrast to philosophers such as Singer who seek to ground *anti-speciesism* exclusively in reason, Yourcenar places great importance on the feelings of the subject, without disregarding norms and principles. Yourcenar is attentive to the fact that, despite the French Revolu-

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28 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 375 [*Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur* ('Qui sait si l'âme des bêtes va en bas?')].

29 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (New York, NY: New York Review, 1975); *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

tion's *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* [*Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*] (1789), there has been massive destruction of human lives, especially in concentration camps, which has degraded the notion of humanity to an extraordinary degree. Reflecting on whether such declarations will be effective if human beings do not change, she responds affirmatively:

> Il convient toujours de promulguer ou de réaffirmer les Lois véritables, qui n'en seront pas moins enfreintes, mais en laissant ça et là aux transgresseurs le sentiment d'avoir fait mal. 'Tu ne tueras pas'. Toute l'histoire, dont nous sommes si fières, est une perpétuelle infraction à cette loi.[30]
>
> [It is always advisable to promote or reaffirm the true Laws, not that this will stop them from being infringed upon, but to leave transgressors here and there with the feeling of having behaved badly. 'Thou shalt not kill'. All of history, of which we are so proud, is a perpetual violation of that law.]

Yourcenar extends this law to non-human animals as well: in an era when the abuse of animals continues to worsen seemingly without end, she finds some use in the UNESCO *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'animal* [*Universal Declaration of Animal Rights*] (1978).

Yourcenar's positioning with respect to non-human animals is present in *Un homme obscure*: Nathanaël constantly rejects violence against them; he never speaks of their location, so that hunters cannot shoot them. A representative passage, narrated in a lyrical style, is when the protagonist and Foy spend time in an English colony in the New World. Nathanaël prefers to collect fruits, and to enjoy the forest, instead of following the rest of the young men, who enjoy hunting and fishing. The young man is united in solidarity with the animals who populate the forests: with the bear that he encounters; with the skunk that observes him; with the snakes condemned to be crushed if he reveals their existence to others.[31]

Yourcenar's ethics have biocentric roots. A collection of her reading notes, published as *Sources II*, includes many texts that reveal her thinking and method of writing. Rémy Poignault highlights that these texts 'tenían ante todo un objetivo personal, a saber, el de la meditación cotidiana a la manera de los estoicos, los cristianos o los filósofos orientales [had above all a personal objective, namely one of daily meditation in the style of the Stoics, the Christians, or the

30 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 375 [*Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur* ('Qui sait si l'âme des bêtes va en bas?')].

31 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 930 [*Un homme obscur*].

Eastern philosophers]'.[32] In one of the sections entitled 'Souhaits [Wishes]', Yourcenar writes about her desires in relation to the world in which she would like to live: 'un monde où tout objet vivant, arbre, animal, serait sacré et jamis détruit, sauf avec regret, et du fait d'une absolue nécessité [a world where every living object, tree, animal, would be sacred and never destroyed, except with sorrow, and in case of necessity]'.[33] In 'L'Homme qui aimait les pierres [The Man Who Loved Stones]' – one of the essays included in *En pèlerin et en étranger* [*As a Pilgrim and a Stranger*] (1991), and dedicated to writer Roger Caillois – Yourcenar writes that stone is an antecedent of man; it is 'un alphabet inconscient [an unconscious alphabet]'.[34] The author even talks about the friendship of stones and their import because – as thirteenth-century mystic Eckhart von Hochheim believed – 'la pierre est Dieu, mais elle ne sait pas qu'elle l'est [the stone is God, but it does not know that it is]'.[35] In *La Voix des choses* [*The Voice of Things*],[36] a quasi-anthology from the end of Yourcenar's life, she insists on what an object can communicate to us. The title of the volume alludes to the noise emitted by the shattering of an ancient sheet of malachite from India that fell from her hands when she was very weak during a period of hospitalisation. Yourcenar, though upset by the destruction of a perfectly shaped mineral as old as the Earth, notes that the sound of it breaking – an example of the voice of things speaking to us – was very beautiful.

Does Yourcenar align herself with a kind of holism that gives value to ecosystems without regard for individuals? No. Yourcenar adopts a kind of biocentrism that encompasses an ethic of responsibility towards every non-human entity. Her biocentrism, corresponding to a markedly mystical anti-violent spiritualism in communion with the cosmos, is the basis of her belief that plants and stones practise reciprocity, thanking us for our care by way of vibrations when we touch them.[37] This idea is exemplified in *Un homme obscur* by Nathanaël's rejection of violence against all life-forms, animal or vegetal: 'le garçon chérissait de même les arbres; il les plaignait, si grands et si majestueux qu'ils fussent, d'être incapables de fuir ou de se défendre, livrés à la hache du plus petit bûcheron [the boy equally loved the trees;

32 Rémy Poignault, 'Ensayos y meditaciones', in *Marguerite Yourcenar y la ecología: un combate ideológico y político*, ed. by A. Padilla and V. Torres (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2007), 49–50 (49).

33 Marguerite Yourcenar, *Sources II*, ed. by É. Dezon-Jones (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 240.

34 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 552 [*En pèlerin et en étranger*].

35 Yourcenar, *Essais et mémoires*, 550 [*En pèlerin et en étranger*].

36 Marguerite Yourcenar, ed., *La Voix des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

37 Yourcenar, *Les Yeux ouverts*, 322.

he pitied them, so tall and so majestic as they were, for being incapable of fleeing or defending themselves from the axe of the weakest lumberjack]'.[38] For the young protagonist, trees are individuals with an inherent value.

Conclusion

Yourcenar's great yearning at the end of her life was for the planet to be free of violence and pollution. She never stopped standing firm against those whom she called 'murderers' of Nature, and 'tormenters' of animals. For her, literature was not only an aesthetic composition, but also an ethical commitment. Ecocriticism should be a sociopolitical commitment as much as a theoretical one, since fiction is tied to the context from which it emerges. The environmental crisis of our world is not a metanarrative, and we should remember that texts do not exist autonomously. In carrying out studies of representations of nature from the innovative perspective of ecocriticism, we must seek, in the words of Richard Kerridge, 'to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their *coherence* and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis'.[39] We can thus raise awareness of the great danger that threatens the survival of our planet. An ecocritical approach to Marguerite Yourcenar's work demonstrates the fruitfulness of this innovative current of cultural criticism that speaks to a far-reaching kind of eco-ethical commitment. Yourcenar's texts and paratexts give a voice to what philosopher Michel Serres calls 'la Biogée [Biogea]', namely all life on Earth,[40] and thus supply ample food for thought about the increasingly pressing need to find ways of preserving the community of all living things for generations to come.

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38 Yourcenar, *Œuvres romanesques*, 930 [*Un homme obscur*].

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Michel Serres: From Restricted to General Ecology

Abstract: Michel Serres's relation to ecocriticism is complex. On the one hand, he is a pioneer in the area, anticipating the current fashion for ecological thought by over a decade. On the other hand, 'ecology' and 'eco-criticism' are singularly infelicitous terms to describe Serres's thinking if they are taken to indicate that attention should be paid to particular 'environmental' concerns. For Serres, such local, circumscribed ideas as 'ecology' or 'eco-philosophy' are one of the causes of our ecological crisis, and no progress can be made while such narrow concerns govern our thinking. This chapter intervenes in the ongoing discussion about the relation of Serres to ecology by drawing on some of Serres's more recent texts on pollution and dwelling, and this fresh material leads us to modulate existing treatments of Serres and ecology. I insist on the inextricability of two senses of ecology in Serres's approach: a broader meaning that refers to the interconnectedness and inextricability of all entities (natural and cultural, material and ideal), and a narrower sense that evokes classically 'environmental' concerns. Serres's recent work leads us to challenge some of the vectors and assumptions of the debate by radicalising the continuity between 'natural' and 'cultural' phenomena, questioning some of the commonplaces that structure almost all ecological thinking, and arguing that the entire paradigm of ecology as 'conservation' and 'protection' is bankrupt and self-undermining. After outlining the shape of Serres's 'general ecology' and its opposition to ecology as conservation, this chapter asks what sorts of practices and values a Serresian general ecology can engender when it considers birdsong, advertising, industrial pollution and money to be manifestations of the same drive for appropriation through pollution. A response is given in terms of three key Serresian motifs: the world as fetish, parasitic symbiosis, and global cosmocracy.

Michel Serres's relation to ecocriticism is complex. On the one hand, he is a pioneer in the area, anticipating the current fashion for ecological thought by over a decade. He was thinking deeply and at length about ecological issues at a time when few others cared to address the subject: 'I was one of the first, if not the first, to make ecology not just a matter of fundamental urgency but above all a philosophical and even metaphysical question'.[1] When we engage with Michel Serres's ecological thought, we are not simply reading a reaction to a recent critical trend, much less jumping on a modish bandwagon. This links to a wider point of crucial

1 Michel Serres, *Pantopie: de 'Hermès' à 'Petite Poucette'* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2014), 62 [hereafter *P*; my translation].

importance for understanding Michel Serres as an ecological thinker, since much ecological rhetoric – from philosophers and politicians – is reactive, seeking to respond to changes and problems, always on the back foot, always fighting a losing battle to 'protect' and 'conserve'. Eschewing this responsive paradigm, Serres's thought offers a larger ecological vision that can set a positive agenda for change. His proactive stance is driven by the question that he chooses to ask: whereas much ecological thought asks the question 'how?' (how do we reduce emissions? How should we think of 'nature' differently? How do we 'save the planet'?), Serres insists on the deeper question 'why?' – why do we pollute? 'What do we really want when we dirty the world?'.[2]

On the other hand, 'ecology' and 'eco-criticism' are infelicitous terms for describing Serres's thinking if they are taken to indicate that attention should be paid only to particular objects (trees, animals, rivers) or questions (climate change, deforestation). For Serres, such local, circumscribed ideas as 'ecology' or 'eco-philosophy' are one of the causes of the 'ecological crisis', and no progress can be made while such narrow concerns govern our thinking. His work abounds with themes that would commonly be filed under 'ecology', but if he uses the term relatively little in his writing it is because of his fundamental conviction that it is impossible to isolate a set of discrete ideas under this label. As for the 'criticism' in 'eco-criticism', the notion has a very unfavourable reputation in Serres's thinking. The academic culture of critique and criticism that produces one commentary after another has become an impotent and stale exercise in repetition,[3] and with *Le Parasite* [*The Parasite*] (1980) Serres turned his back for good on academic criticism and traditional university discourse (*EHP* 98).

Any attempt to evaluate Serres in relation to ecocriticism must therefore find a way to negotiate these two problems, namely that his thought resists becoming narrowly ecological, and that he eschews the culture of critique. If we allow Serres to challenge and rethink what we might mean by 'ecocriticism', we find that he provides us with a deep and robust reframing of ecological thought, and a proactive ecological political agenda.

Among the scandalously sparse secondary literature on Serres, ecology is one of the themes that has received a comparatively thorough treatment. As we embark on the current study, it is helpful to survey salient perspectives on his work. Often

2 Michel Serres, *Le Mal propre: polluer pour s'approprier?* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008), 57 [hereafter *LMP*]; *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. by A.-M. Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 40 [hereafter *M*].

3 Michel Serres and Luc Abraham, 'Un entretien avec Michel Serres', *Horizons philosophiques* 10.2 (2000), 97–116 (99; 105) [hereafter *EHP*].

at stake in discussions of Serres as an ecological thinker has been the relation between a broad sense of 'ecology' as general interconnectedness of all knowledge and all fields of inquiry, and a more specific sense pertaining specifically to the 'natural' world. This distinction is brought into play by Sydney Lévy in his introduction to a special edition of the journal *SubStance* (1997) on Serres's ecological thinking. Lévy frames his understanding of 'ecology' in terms of Serresian interdisciplinarity, tracing 'local, tenuous, perilous' passages between different fields.[4] Of particular note in the issue is Paul A. Harris's 'The Itinerant Theorist', in which Harris elegantly articulates the broader and narrower senses of ecology in his contention that 'Serres attempts to evoke an intimate, visceral knowledge of nature in order to redefine the nature of knowledge', in what Harris terms a Serresian 'cultural ecology'.[5] Both the natural world and the universe of knowledge are to be thought, analogously, as complex open systems of interconnection that do not sacrifice the empirical and material on the altar of the general and the abstract.

In her doctoral thesis (2003), Stephanie Posthumus evokes the relation between the broader and narrower senses of ecology in her discussion of Serres's ecological thought. She unfolds the broader sense through careful studies of the motifs of structures[6] and *réseaux*[7] [webs] in Serres's thought, arguing that the author of *Le Contrat naturel* [*The Natural Contract*] (1990) is elaborating his eco-philosophy (in the narrower sense) in terms of his 'vision interconnectée du monde [interconnected vision of the world]',[8] while refusing to identify with narrowly ecological concerns.[9] Making a finer set of distinctions within the two categories of 'broad' and 'narrow' ecologies,[10] Posthumus distinguishes between the academic discourse of 'scientific ecology', the 'ecological consciousness' that names a mere awareness of ecological concerns, and the 'ecologism' that takes action on the basis of those concerns. She further differentiates between the 'ecophilosophy' of Serres's more theoretical texts, the 'ecopoetics' of his treatments of literature, and the 'ecopolitics'

4 Sydney Lévy, 'Introduction: An Ecology of Knowledge: Michel Serres', *SubStance* 26.2 (1997), 3–5 (3).

5 Paul A. Harris, 'The Itinerant Theorist: Nature and Knowledge/Ecology and Topology in Michel Serres', *SubStance* 26.2 (1997), 37–58 (39; 44).

6 Stephanie Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie chez Lévi-Strauss, Tournier, Serres' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2003), 71–100.

7 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 186–99.

8 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 194 [unreferenced translations are mine].

9 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 221.

10 The terms 'broad' and 'narrow' are mine, not Posthumus's.

of *The Natural Contract* and *Hominescence*, concluding that the three ecologies are almost impossible to isolate from each other.[11]

In the article 'Translating Ecocriticism' (2007), Posthumus develops her Serresian insights, using them to shine a light on some of the shortcomings of anglophone ecocriticism in terms of five themes: ecology; science; nature; language; humanity. Through a threefold insistence on 1) the inextricability of the broader and narrower senses of ecology in Serres's eco-philosophy, 2) his affirmation of humanism in an ecological context, and 3) the refusal of ecology – in the broader sense – to distinguish between 'natural' and 'cultural' interconnectedness, Posthumus is able to offer Serresian thought as a corrective to some of the more unreflective Romantic sensibilities of anglophone ecocriticism. *The Natural Contract*, she insists, 'is not a call to get back to nature, to a less technological way of life',[12] but encompasses a broader idea of 'living together'[13] in a way that cuts across the nature-culture divide. Serres's usefulness for ecocriticism, according to Posthumus, is manifold: he offers 'exactly what a new generation of ecocritics has been looking for as a way to combine both an urbancare and earthcare politics';[14] his *Grand Récit* [Great Story] of the universe helps us 'avoid an all or nothing attitude towards scientific discourse';[15] he helps cultivate scientific literacy within ecocriticism;[16] his rejection of linguistic philosophy and his insistence on the empirically encountered material world offers ecocriticism 'a foundation for reasserting a materialized language in a literary world';[17] he helps us think the global 'without erasing local differences';[18] he 'presents us with a field of literary texts that would otherwise be excluded from a strictly nature-oriented ecocritical approach'.[19]

In 'Vers une écocritique française' (2011), Posthumus returns to the shortcomings of anglophone ecological thought, the monolingualism of ecocriticism, and its neglect of literature. Setting Serres in opposition to an Anglo-Saxon 'return to

11 Posthumus, 'La Nature et l'écologie', 229.
12 Stephanie Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism: Dialoguing with Michel Serres', *Reconstruction* 7.2 (2007), 37 paragraphs, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/072/posthumus.shtml> [accessed 27 May 2016], paragraph 11.
13 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 12.
14 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 12.
15 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 17.
16 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 18.
17 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 28.
18 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 35.
19 Posthumus, 'Translating Ecocriticism', paragraph 37.

nature' – which, Serres insists, would merely spell the victory of town over country[20] – she argues that ecocriticism must be able to yield an ecological politics,[21] which is precisely what Serres's natural contract provides. Once more, she insists that (narrowly) ecological themes cannot adequately be addressed apart from a (broad) ecological way of thinking that embraces all fields of knowledge,[22] and that prevents *The Natural Contract* from being reduced to a thesis on environmentalism.

The present chapter intervenes in this ongoing conversation by bringing some of Serres's more recent texts into the limelight.[23] This fresh material leads us to affirm, and to challenge, existing treatments of Serres and ecology. I affirm the insistence on the inextricability of the narrower and broader senses of 'ecology' (which I call 'restricted' and 'general' ecology) in Serres's approach, but the new material leads me to challenge some of the vectors and assumptions of the debate by radicalising the continuity between 'natural' and 'cultural' phenomena, questioning some of the commonplaces that structure almost all ecological thinking, and arguing that the entire paradigm of ecology as 'conservation' and 'protection' is bankrupt and self-undermining.

Towards a general ecology

The proposal for a 'natural contract' remains Serres's most widely known contribution to ecological thought, narrowly conceived. Though Serres seeks to avoid the label 'ecological', it is not quite correct to say that the natural contract has nothing to do with ecology. In an interview included in *Pantopie* [*Pantopia*] (2014), he

20 Stephanie Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française: le contrat naturel de Michel Serres', *Mosaic* 44.2 (2011), 85–100 (88).

21 Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française', 90.

22 Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française', 91.

23 The discussion will interact mainly with the work usually considered to be Serres's most 'ecological': *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Bourin, 1990) [hereafter *LCN*]. In addition to this common reference, I will explore the impact on the debate around Serres and ecology: *La Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2008) [hereafter *GM*]; *Biogée* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2010) [hereafter *B*]; *Habiter* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2011) [hereafter *H*]. My reflections are informed by interviews in which Serres clarifies his arguments: Michel Serres and *Clés*, 'Michel Serres: "Nous traversons la plus importante mutation depuis la préhistoire!"', *Clés* (2014), <http://www.cles.com/enquetes/article/michel-serres-nous-traversons-la-plus-importante-mutation-depuis-la-prehistoire> [accessed 27 May 2016]; Michel Serres and *Pouvoirs*, 'Entretien avec Michel Serres: le droit peut sauver la nature', *Pouvoirs* 127 (2008), 5–12.

expands on his aversion to the ecological in a way that helps us to gain a better appreciation of how he situates his own natural contract:

> *You have proposed a 'natural contract'. Was this a foray into ecology [une démarche écologiste] on your part?*
>
> No, certainly not. I have studiously avoided the term. There is a confusion today around the word 'ecology' between its use by politicians and by scientists. In political discourse, ecology is the ethical concern to keep nature – understood as a virgin and wild species – protected against human violation. In science, ecology (*oikos-logos* – knowledge of the milieu, of the habitat) is a different thing altogether. The biologist Ernst Haeckel defined it at the end of the nineteenth century as a very sophisticated science that tries to gather together all the geological, chemical, biological, vegetal and animal interactions that constitute a milieu – for example, the biotope of Mont Ventoux. (*P* 233–6 [my translation])

The two senses of ecology here are in direct opposition: the first, restricted sense reinforces the dichotomies of a thoroughly human politics and a wild or unkempt nature, or of human environmental damage in opposition to a virgin or unspoiled world; the second sense seeks to find links, dependencies and passages between all of the entities in a given milieu, travelling across dichotomies and back again. While Serres does not write about ecology in the first, restricted sense, his thought is most certainly ecological in the second sense – insisting on links and continuities across apparent divisions and differences.

The most fruitful way to understand Serres's contribution to ecology in the aforementioned narrow, political sense must necessarily pass through his elaboration of an ecology in the broader, scientific sense. I introduce the term 'general ecology' to describe this latter ecology in Serresian thought, proceeding as it does not by drawing distinctions and creating oppositions in the spirit of academic 'criticism', but by seeking translations and equivalences between seemingly disparate areas of thought or domains of existence.

Malfeasance: is everything ecological?

The radical subversion of dichotomies in Serres's general ecology is shown more clearly through specific examples than through abstract discussion, and adopting an approach that foregrounds particular instances of general ecology will help to clarify how Serres forces us to understand the world differently, refusing to set the 'natural' world and human action against each other, and forcing us to revisit aspects of our world and society that we do not commonly associate with ecological concerns. Taking the lead from *Malfeasance*, and incorporating discussions of other key ecological texts, we shall see how Serres frames the phenomenon of pollution not as something utterly foreign and alien to non-human ecology, but as

something fundamentally in continuity with it. If Serres is correct in this regard, we must recognise that the great majority of our environmentalism is built on an assumption that actively hampers clear ecological understanding and intervention.

Serres approaches the phenomenon of pollution not by asking how it can be reduced, but why it is produced. He answers by arguing that it is only one instance of a universal desire, shared by humans and the non-human alike, to occupy space, and to make it unusable by others. Pollution, in short, is a mode of appropriation.[24] Understood as an action that fulfils the desire to occupy space, pollution can be seen alongside other territorial activities that cut across the customary divide between nature and culture: 'just like animals, we sully the place we want to make into our own nest'.[25] The tiger that urinates to mark its territory is engaging in an action qualitatively equivalent to the multinational corporation dumping its effluent. In micturating on its terrain, the tiger is merely asserting itself as 'master and possessor' of its lair (*LMP* 113; *M* 85). Although we have a curious tendency to assume that conventions of property are an exclusively human trait, Serres insists that animals also mark, possess and protect their property and goods (*P* 250).

We may be tempted to dismiss pollution as an unfortunate and avoidable by-product of industrial processes, but Serres insists that to do so is to prevent ourselves from understanding its deep motivation, hence from addressing it in anything but a superficial way. At the very least, Serres is inviting us to reflect on whether we have misunderstood the meaning of pollution:[26]

> When rich countries discharge their industrial waste in the mangroves of poor countries, are they not also seizing and re-colonising them? When, on the other hand, inhabitants of a place protest against its designation as a nuclear storage site, do they revolt against a medical risk or against a power exploiting the right to expropriate them? 'We want to keep our own homes,' they shout. (*LMP* 67; *M* 48)

Could it not be that in polluting we are exercising that deepest of human (and non-human) desires to appropriate a place in the world, or to appropriate the world itself?

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24 In common with most Serresian themes, this idea does not emerge ex nihilo in its most developed form in *Malfeasance*. It is adumbrated in *Le Parasite* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1980), *Rome: le livre des fondations* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1983) and *Statues: le second livre des fondations* (Paris: Julliard, 1987).

25 Michel Serres, *Rameaux* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2004), 195 [hereafter *R*; my translation].

26 This interrogative mood is indicated by the question mark at the end of the book's subtitle in English and French (*Le Mal propre: polluer pour approprier?*; *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*). The interrogative is a pedagogic tool, rather than a genuine doubt, as it is clear that Serres sees a Leibnizian translation from pollution to property.

Moving from the 'hard' (physical, material pollution) to the 'soft' (symbolic, informational, linguistic pollution), Serres finds a similar appropriation of space in the cacophony of multiple voices – in the choral hymns of a Greek tragedy, or – to take Steven Connor's example – in the chants and songs of the home fans at an Arsenal football match.[27] In such a sporting context, the noise generated by the crowd acts as a weapon, 'a muniment of din to crush the opposing team',[28] and it is the vocal appropriation of space – more than the geographical location of the turf – that makes the fixture a 'home' tie. In this aggressive occupation of space, the baying crowd is obeying precisely the same logic as the songbird's chirping (*P* 249–50) – likewise a strategy to occupy space – or the sound of a noisy aeroplane, car or motorbike that rings out victory over the space that is occupied (*LMP* 57; *M* 40). In both 'hard' and 'soft' ways, pollution is the signature of the will to power (*LMP* 92; *M* 68).

Serres discerns another common structure between 'natural' and 'cultural' appropriations of space in his comparison between advertising campaigns and epidemics, both of which function as 'machines à fabriquer de l'invasion [invasion-making machines]' (*B* 96) that spread 'virally'. Corporations mark their products in the form of logos and brand names, harnessing all their consumers as willing co-workers charged with scattering their symbolic ordure (*LMP* 37–8; *M* 25) to demarcate their territory. As much as any form of pollution, advertising is about appropriating space – a point that Serres makes through rewriting Jean-Jacques Rousseau's quotation on the origin of civil society:

> The first one who, once he had measured out a plot, bought it to besmirch it with his brand so that it proclaimed: 'this is mine and I am the best', and who in fact found people naive enough to let him steal their view, and become his slaves, invented advertising. (*LMP* 70; *M* 50 [translation altered])

The paradigm of appropriation through pollution is also found in the 'golden excrement' of money – a proxy pollutant that serves to appropriate territory and goods just as effectively as sullying them (*LMP* 66–7; *M* 48). For Serres, 'the polluter pays' is an evident tautology, mirroring the equivalence of money and excrement (*LMP* 67; *M* 48) found in Freud's discussion of the anal stage of development (*EP* 9). In the case of the carbon tax, a polluting appropriation covers and doubles another in a seamless emphasis: polluter pollutes.

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27 Steven K. Connor, 'Play Grounds: The Arenas of Game', *StevenConnor.com* (13 February 2008), <http://stevenconnor.com/playgrounds.html> [accessed 27 May 2016]; *A Philosophy of Sport* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 57.

28 Connor, 'Play Grounds'; *A Philosophy of Sport*, 60.

The same logic of appropriation through pollution similarly obtains in the 'soft' realm of language. Writing one's signature is a way of sullying – thus taking ownership of – a document or page, and language more broadly is a means of appropriation: 'can I now say, describe, show what I perceive? No; I have no language at my disposal to do this because all languages come from the networks through which I perceive the so-called real, and that prove there is nothing that cannot be said' (*LMP* 101; *M* 75). Pollution slips easily from the field to the book, from the hard to the soft, from the *pagus* – into which excrement is turned by the ploughing of oxen – to the *pagina* whose parallel lines of text mimic the agricultural furrow (*LMP* 35–6; *M* 23).

Serres also sees a continuity between pollution and phenomenology. The presuppositions in terms of which we perceive the world are sophisticated strategies of appropriation (*LMP* 100), what in another discourse might be called confirmation bias or the minimisation of cognitive dissonance. Thinking that we see and understand things directly, what we encounter is already polluted as it passes through a series of appropriation strategies, such that one is unable to describe that which does not or cannot be appropriated by anyone (*LMP* 102). Serres draws a direct analogy between meaning and pollution when he claims that 'by splashing about in this foul rubbish of meaning, we appropriate the world' (*B* 166 [my translation]).

In all of these examples of appropriation through pollution, Serres insists on the continuities between the 'natural' and the 'cultural'. There is no fundamental division between the 'hard' and the 'soft', no original dichotomy between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' pollution (though such a distinction can of course be introduced later): 'the spit soils the soup, the logo the object, the signature the page: property, propriety, or cleanness. The same word tells of the same struggle; in French, it has the same origin and the same meaning' (*LMP* 11; *M* 3). The dog that barks, the nightingale that sings, the deer that bellows, the hunter who sounds the horn, the lecherous voyeur who whistles at a woman, the company that buys advertising to brag about its products, the warring army, the writer, the perceiver of the world – each is seeking to extend its territory; everyone is urinating in the swimming pool (*LMP* 59; *M* 42).

It could well be objected that Serres is mixing apples and oranges: advertising and brand names are not threatening to destroy the earth; the circulation of money does not pose an immediate ecological danger; the chants of a football crowd do no physical harm; the chirping of songbirds precipitates no ecological crisis. So, why try to argue that they are manifestations of the same phenomenon? What is to be gained, practically speaking, by grouping all these disparate behaviours together under the banner of appropriation through pollution? The reply is quite simply that we cannot understand what motivates, or what is at stake in,

actions and behaviours which are 'destroying the earth' until we allow ourselves to see them in their non-atomised context. The desire to treat narrowly ecological questions without reference to any of these other phenomena is an instance of the partial thinking that insists on separating the 'natural' from the 'cultural', preventing us from asking the 'why?' behind the 'how?', and from discerning the links that would help us to understand – thus to respond to – ecological questions more adequately. Serres laments that 'we deal with pollution only in physical, quantitative terms, that is by means of the hard sciences. Well no, what is at stake here are our intentions, decisions and conventions. In short, our cultures' (*LMP* 87–8; *M* 63).

If we follow Serres in making these links across natural and cultural boundaries, we must acknowledge that polluting behaviour is an extension of patterns and ways of acting to be found in the 'natural' world, not something monstrously unnatural that threatens to destroy the pristine 'natural' patterns upon which it supervenes. It is important to note that for Serres 'nature' does not mean that which 'given' as opposed to artificial or constructed. In *Rameaux* [*Branches*] (2004), he explains: 'how to define it? By its original sense: what was being born, what is born, what will be born; that is, a narrative of newborn events' (*R* 134 [my translation]). Serres evokes birth as a figure of the new, as opposed to a linear continuation of a pre-existing story. That which is born departs from the predictable 'format' to introduce a new chapter such as the emergence of life on Earth. Within this frame, we might reasonably conclude that pollution could constitute just as decisive an event in the narrative of the world – or of a particular ecosystem – as the emergence of life itself. By this definition, it is far from clear that pollution is unnatural; there is nothing more natural than pollution.[29] The importance of this realisation is that, if true, the entire paradigm of ecology as 'conservation' and 'protection' is exposed as bankrupt, for it arbitrarily seeks to protect certain manifestations of the very same behaviours that it is militating to exclude. Ecology pursued on this basis undermines its own justification.

Practising general ecology

Serres's exposure of the self-undermining nature of ecology as conservation leaves open the question of a more adequate ecological paradigm. In the light of Serres's general ecology, we must strongly resist the mistaken notion that 'nature' is something 'other' to be protected. We must stop seeing pollution as a purely human destruction of a purely natural world. But what must we think and do instead? We

29 I am grateful to Stephanie Posthumus for highlighting Serres's insistence on understanding nature in terms of birth (*naissance*; *naître*).

need better environmental imperatives than to protect and conserve, but what are they? What sort of ecology (in the narrow sense of the term) can arise if the very divisions between the natural and cultural, between the subject and the object, are contested? What imperatives can an ecology engender when birdsong, advertising, industrial pollution and money are considered to be manifestations of the same drive for appropriation through pollution? Serres has much to say on these questions, and the forthcoming section proposes to bridge the gap between the aforementioned principals of general ecology and a specific, determined set of ecological practices. This bridge is tripartite, highlighting three important motifs in Serres's thought that take us from the fact of general ecology to its behavioural and institutional outworking.

The world as fetish

The first important move in the practice of general ecology is to replace the artificial dyads of nature/culture and subject/object with the subtler notion of the fetish. Serres derives his notion of the fetish from Auguste Comte's evocation of Earth as the *Grande-Fétiche* [Great Fetish] in *Synthèse subjective* [*Subjective Synthesis*] (1856), and he uses it to describe the current relation between humanity and the world, where a fetish is understood as an idol made by human hands that is invested with a transcendent power (*H* 169). In the case of the world as fetish, the stakes are higher. It is not at all Serres's claim that we invest the world with some spiritual or religious power, but that we depend upon the world: it is our condition of possibility. Nor is Serres suggesting that the world in its brute materiality is a human artefact. Such a patent falsity, he hastens to point out, was never the claim in relation to the fetish. Fetishists did not create the block of marble or the log of wood from which they carve their idols any more than we created rocks and the soil (*P* 269). When Serres says that the world is a fetish, he means that we depend upon it, it depends upon us (*LCN* 51),[30] and we produce that which produces us. This change has a subtle but very important consequence: if we depend upon the things that depend upon us, the concept of 'us' itself is necessarily changed (*RH* 141). Is it not just as appropriate, Serres wonders in *L'Incandescent* [*The Incandescent*] (2003), to say 'we are raining' as 'it is raining'?[31] To whom or to what should we attribute the weather when culture is natural, and nature is cultural?

The strength of fetishism as a notion for comprehending our current relation to the habitable world is that it understands the fetish-maker and the fetish as both

30 See also Michel Serres, *Récits d'humanisme* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2006), 138 [hereafter *RH*].
31 Michel Serres, *L'Incandescent* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2003), 338–9 [hereafter *Inc*].

subject and object.[32] In other words, humanity is changed by its new relation to the world just as much as the world itself is transformed. Having treated the world as an object, we find ourselves to be its objects,[33] and we have also become our own fetishes, bringing about our own birth through the intermediary of the world that depends upon us: *homo causa sui*.[34] Just like the natural world, the human is no longer (indeed, never was) something that is given, but rather something that is constructed by our thoughts and actions (*Hom* 24), as well as by the world upon which we depend: 'we are our own ancestors, Adam and Eve, through the intermediary of the Earth and of life, which we mold almost at our leisure'.[35] Our mastery of DNA and the atomic bomb put our birth and death in our hands, and having become our own handiwork we are no longer the same (*P* 204; see also *R* 40). Serres names this complex intertwining of dependency and agency *natura sive homines* (*E* 256; *C* 176).

Serres's insistence on the world as fetish is related to, but goes beyond, the notion of the Anthropocene as defined by the Anthropocene Working Group[36] of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy.[37] The Anthropocene is – if a

32 In this respect, it bears affinities with his notion of the quasi-object that is elaborated in *Le Parasite* and elsewhere. The quasi-object, Serres stresses, is also a quasi-subject, and fits comfortably into neither category (objectivity or subjectivity). The quasi-object is also a quasi-subject because it designates a subject that would not be a subject without it. *Le Parasite*, 302; *The Parasite*, trans. by L. R. Schehr (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 225. When Serres evokes the relation between humanity and the world, he prefers Comte's notion of fetishism, rather than the quasi-object. The fetish foregrounds the dialectic of creation (the created creates its creator) in a way that, while not necessarily absent from the quasi-object, is not emphasised. While it is conceivable for a quasi-object to be 'natural' and unmade, manufacture of some description is indispensable to the notion of the fetish.

33 Michel Serres, *Hominescence* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2001), 214 [hereafter *Hom*].

34 Michel Serres, 'Le Temps humain: de l'évolution créatrice au créateur d'évolution', in *Qu'est-ce que l'humain?*, ed. by P. Picq, M. Serres and J.-D. Vincent (Paris: Le Pommier, 1999), 71–108 (107).

35 Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Éclaircissements: cinq entretiens avec Bruno Latour* (Paris: Bourin, 1992), 255 [hereafter *E*]; *Conversations on Culture, Science and Time*, trans. by R. Lapidus (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 176 [hereafter *C*].

36 Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, 'Working Group on the 'Anthropocene'', *quaternary.stratigraphy.org* (23 February 2016), <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene> [accessed 27 May 2016].

37 Colin N. Waters, et al., 'The Anthropocene Is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene', *Science* 351.6269 (8 January 2016), <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/351/6269/aad2622> [accessed 27 May 2016].

little homophonous wordplay might be permitted – anthropocentric because it registers only one direction of influence: human beings are changing the earth and the climate. The idea of the fetish, by contrast, acknowledges the mutual influence of world and humanity on each other. Nor is Serres's recuperation of Comte's *Grand-Fétiche* to be confused with James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis.[38] The grave error of this latter hypothesis, Serres argues, is to treat the earth as a living entity, whereas life is defined by reproduction (*P* 278). The earth has no offspring, thus it is not alive. Serres considers that the intentionality and teleology ascribed to the world in the Gaia hypothesis is naive and unscientific – an opinion that he makes very clear in response to a direct question about Bruno Latour's Gifford Lectures on 'Facing Gaia' (2013): 'I recognise, of course, that the earth, considered as a whole, possesses certain characteristics of life – self-regulation, in particular – but that is where it stops. The earth does not evolve in the Darwinian sense of the term' (*P* 274–5 [my translation]).[39] Serres is a little hasty in his criticism of Latour, since the latter explicitly distances himself from Lovelock's description of Gaia as a 'living organism',[40] reading the ascription of life and intentionality to the planet as an analogue of Louis Pasteur's hesitant granting of agency to bacteria in *Les Microbes organisés* (1878). In 'The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia', the third of his Gifford lectures in Edinburgh (21 February 2013), Latour frames his acceptance of the agency of Gaia with the acknowledgment that 'the philosophy of biology has never stopped borrowing its metaphors from the social realm',[41] and he is explicit in stating that 'it is not that Gaia is some "sentient being" but that the concept of "Gaia" captures the distributed intentionality of all the agents

38 James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

39 The fetish is conspicuously absent from Latour's writings on ecological themes, including the French version of his six Gifford lectures on 'Facing Gaia' (University of Edinburgh, 18–28 February 2013), in which Gaia is constructed not as a fetish but as a collective term for a distributed proliferation of agencies. 'Facing Gaia: A New Enquiry into Natural Religion', *University of Edinburgh* (18–28 February 2013), <http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour> [accessed 27 May 2016]; *Face à Gaïa: huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).

40 Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia*, xvi.

41 Bruno Latour, 'The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia', *University of Edinburgh* (21 February 2013), <http://www.ed.ac.uk/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour/lecture-three> [accessed 27 May 2016], 34:41–7.

that are modifying their surroundings to suit themselves better'.[42] Latour is not suggesting that the Earth can reproduce itself, nor that we understand it as living in a straightforwardly biological sense. Though Serres's criticism of Gaia rings true for Lovelock, it rings hollow for Latour.

Fetishism undermines the dichotomy between the given and the constructed, hence the artificial division between manipulation and conservation/protection. There can thus be no self-coherent minimalist or non-interventionist environmentalism. To withdraw from the world is not to preserve its purity, naturalness or sacredness, but to draw an arbitrary line between some actions of appropriation through pollution, and others. Furthermore, there never was a nature that was free from the impositions and manipulations of culture because human culture is an excrescence of natural rhythms.

Symbiosis

If the condition of the world as fetish means that it is no longer possible to try to 'conserve' or 'protect', we must modulate the way in which we conceive our relation with the world, moving from a moribund host dying at the hands of its insatiable parasite to one of parasitic symbiosis. We must understand that the change of outlook that Serres is pressing on us is no trivial or obvious one. The paradigm of symbiosis stretches wide and deep, challenging some of our deep assumptions and predispositions. Serres argues in conversation with Latour that the approach of seeking to 'cure' or 'eradicate' cancer is misguided:

> We must always reformulate this question: What is an enemy, who is he to us, and how must we deal with him? Another way to put it, for example, is: What is cancer? – a growing collection of malignant cells that we must at all costs expel, excise, reject? Or something like a parasite, with which we must negotiate a contract of symbiosis? I lean toward the second solution, as life itself does. (*E* 281; *C* 195)

Rather than seeking to eliminate cancer, Serres wagers, we will find a way to 'profit from its dynamism', to live with it in a parasitically symbiotic relation. Similarly, he warns that if we try to eradicate a microbe, it will mutate as many times as necessary, and kill ten great-grandchildren of the child whom we inoculate against it (*B* 146). It would be better to seek to understand how it receives, stores, processes and emits information, in order to find a mutually beneficial symbiosis. Like all diplomacy, such an approach must begin by learning to speak the language of the other.

42 Bruno Latour, 'The Puzzling Face of a Secular Gaia', 40:26–43.

This example from pathology hopefully suffices to show that Serres's symbiosis is not a 'motherhood and apple pie' response to the environmental crisis, and is no trivial or 'common sense' paradigm to embrace. It will doubtless raise the objection in the minds of some readers that symbiosis forecloses any possibility of radical, contestatory or disruptive politics. Does symbiosis mean that we are to find a way to live together with, say, racist ideologies and oppression? Where is the possibility for dissent in a system where we seek a way to live together with every enemy, however objectionable? Surely, are there not times when we need to oppose and eradicate? There are, indeed, and symbiosis radically undercuts such objectionable ideologies. To find out how this is the case, we need to turn to the third of the three Serresian motifs that will help us cross the bridge from general ecology to determinate ecological policy: the motif of cosmocracy.

From multinational democracy to global cosmocracy

On a collective level, the paradigm of parasitic symbiosis needs to be accompanied by what Serres calls a new cosmocracy. The old politics was, as its etymology suggests, an irreducibly urban affair at a time when the *polis* could rule the *pagus* as the subject to its object. Today, we no longer live in the same sort of city – one that can separate itself from the earth surrounding and sustaining it – and a new *polis* comes with the need for a new politics. One feature of the new politics offered by Serres is the end of relations of tribal belonging or group affiliation (*appartenance*), in favour of a double affirmation of universality and singularity. The old politics entailed a series of necessary affiliations – to family; to village and community; to nation – facilitated by the difficulty of connecting over distance with people who do not share one's affiliations. The political paradigm of this period was citizenship: affiliation to a particular, geographically determined collective with its own structures and laws. Today, Serres argues, affiliation is on the wane, and it has been overtaken by an increasingly aggressive affirmation of individuality, and a growing sense of the universal, of humanity as a whole beyond its local affiliations (*P* 229–30). It is a change facilitated by the triviality and ubiquity of information storage and retrieval, and by the ease of connecting almost any individual on the planet with any other in a virtual space that does not obey geometric boundaries (*GM* 165–6). This dual affirmation of individuality and university has come to fruition in the twentieth century, with the increased assertion of individual identity over corporate affiliation, and the increased awareness of humanity as a whole, as well as of the world as a contemplable whole. The new politics is not one of citizens or states, but of

individuals who know themselves to be part of humanity; not of the general, but of the singular and the universal.

The simultaneous emergence of a growing sense of human universality, and a growing individualistic resistance to group affiliations, opens the way for what Serres calls a new 'cosmocracy' – a political system that seeks to cultivate peace between humanity and the environment in the same way that current democracies seek to preserve peace among the citizens of a nation (*LMP* 98). Cosmocracy is a political system in which not only human interests are represented (as in democracy) – a system that finds a way of formally incorporating the interests of non-human actors in the political process.[43] Cosmocracy is a truly global politics, and Serres takes care to distinguish it from the current multinational system that obeys the old paradigm of affiliation. On a number of occasions, he recounts the time that he encountered Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations (1992–6). Serres, asking about the possibility of the organisation performing the function of a world assembly, found himself corrected by the Egyptian diplomat: 'it is not a "global assembly"; it is an "international assembly" where each civil servant is present to defend the interests of his government against the interests of the government facing him across the table. So, kiss goodbye to the world!' (*P* 262 [my translation]). Boutros-Ghali could find no one to talk to him about air or water as such, for everyone responded that their role

43 Serres's cosmocracy bears close affinities to Bruno Latour's 'parlement des choses [parliament of things]', an idea that can be traced in Latour's work as far back as *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* [*We Have Never Been Modern*] (1991). Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 197. An important distinction can be made between the two along the lines of the difference between Anglo-Saxon democratic politics and the French Republican model. Latour's parliament of things is an extension of representative democracy: each human and non-human 'concern' receives political representation in the parliament. Serres's emphasis, by contrast, is not on the communitarian notion of each interest group receiving its voice at the table, but on the commonality of all the members of the cosmocracy. It is precisely the sort of tribal belongings and group affiliations perpetuated (if not fostered) by Latour's parliament of things that are challenged by the universalism of the Serresian cosmocracy: members of a cosmocracy do not seek representation for their particular lobby or set of concerns; their concern is for the whole. Serres's twin prongs of individualism and universalism stand in contrast to Latour's gathering of 'concerns', which remain instances of Serres's unfavoured notion of *appartenance*. For a clarification of the difference between republicanism and democracy in this context, see Jules Régis Debray, 'Êtes-vous démocrate ou républicain?', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1308 (30 November 1989), 115–21.

was to represent the interests of their own government (*EP* 22). Serres concludes that there can never be an intergovernmental solution to environmental problems because the international system is based on affiliation, predisposing everybody to ignore global concerns (*EP* 22). The UN remains an institution of affiliations, resistant to the emergent twin values of individuality and universality.

Far from thwarting political engagement, the twin affirmation of individuality and universality provides Serres with a powerful set of political tools. Let us consider the example of racist ideology that was raised as a potential objection to Serresian symbiosis at the end of the previous section. Racism is the very definition of an ideology of belonging (as opposed to one of universality), creating local groups of affiliation and setting them against each other in just the way that Serres condemns the multinationalism of the United Nations. Racism has no place in his cosmocracy. How does racism differ from the cancer with which Serres seeks to live in symbiosis? In the following way: the equivalence is not between cancer and racism, but between human death caused by cancer and racism. Serres does not argue, let us remember, that we should let cancer ravage the human population on the basis that it has as much of a right to exist as we have. Symbiosis is not a laissez-faire policy of 'live and let live', but an intricate, high-stakes game of diplomacy that must serve the interests of both parties. Just as Serres's symbiotic response to cancer is one in which it no longer kills people, but has its energy harvested in productive and beneficial ways, so a symbiotic response to the curse of racism would be to identify and redirect the lust for affiliation and domination that lies at its heart.

In place of the outdated assumptions and institutions that underlie the current resistance to a new politics, Serres offers at the end of *L'Incandescent* a thought-experiment that he entitles 'Appel aux universités pour un savoir commun' ['Call to Universities for a Common Knowledge'] (*Inc* 407–8), to which he appends the outline of a curriculum for the first year of university studies (*Inc* 409–10). The proposal is built on the twin observations that the hard sciences have attained a level of general acceptance transcending national affiliation (universality), and that world cultures form a mosaic tapestry of diverse forms and colours (individuality). It is important to point out that the suggestion is not to create an international monoculture, but to bring together the multicoloured Harlequin of culture and the monochrome Pierrot of the sciences in the same curriculum. Nor is Serres calling for the homogenisation of education, since one third of the curriculum in his plan for the first year remains dedicated to the individual student's speciality. The innovation of the curriculum is that it marries specialisation with the sort of cross-disciplinary training characteristic of Serres's 'tiers-instruit

[troubadour of knowledge]' (*GM* 158) – a formation that would forestall the mutual suspicion and rivalry between academic disciplines, which merely mimics the competition between national interests in current multinational institutions. It would, furthermore, be a global curriculum taught in academic institutions across the world – a feature that reflects the emergence of the new universality, replacing Neolithic affiliations.

Only one who is educated in the sciences, humanities and arts can respond adequately to an ecological crisis that knows no boundaries between the natural and the cultural. Only such an individual would be ready to embrace Serres's proposal for a global (as opposed to multinational) institution – an assembly that he playfully names *WAFLE* (Water, Air, Fire, Life, Earth), at which non-human interests would be represented alongside those of humanity. Such an assembly is, Serres freely admits, a utopian proposal in the context of contemporary politics ruled by the logic of affiliation. But, taken together with his proposal for a new curriculum, it presents a concrete political vision that takes seriously the inextricability of nature and culture in general ecology, and the twin assertions of universality and individuality at the expense of local affiliations.

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Part V
Millennial Bodies, Origins and Becoming-Milieu

Jonathan Krell

Ecoerotica in Stéphane Audeguy's *La Théorie des nuages*

Abstract: In his extraordinary first novel about the men who shaped our understanding of clouds, Stéphane Audeguy proposes a provocative interpretation of 'human geography'. Richard Abercrombie, travelling around the world in the 1890s to compile an atlas of clouds in texts and photographs, abandons science for a new obsession: female genitalia. His atlas, instead of containing scientific information, becomes a collection of photos of women's sexual organs. Scribbled next to the pictures are enigmatic symbols and words like 'origin', 'similitude', and 'infinite'. Audeguy merges gynaecology, meteorology and geology to form a geography of the body. The word 'origin' repeatedly written by Abercrombie is undoubtedly a reference to Courbet's (in)famous oil painting *L'Origine du monde* [*The Origin of the World*] (1866), whose photographic quality is shockingly different from the portrayal of female nudes from the time. In his essay *Opera mundi*, Audeguy suggests that *L'Origine du monde* depicts a landscape, 'une vallée extraordinaire, dont les plis semblent des coulées de lave souples et vivantes', strikingly similar to the many paintings that Courbet made of the source of the Loue, a small river flowing from a cave near his home in Franche-Comté. Like Courbet – and Baudelaire ('La Géante'), Sade (*Justine*), and Lucretius (*De rerum natura* [*On the Nature of Things*]), Audeguy develops a micro-cult of sexuality with origins in the macrocosm of the sky and the earth, similar to 'the sexualized world' that Mircea Eliade finds in many pre-modern societies. As Audeguy states in *Opera mundi*, the analogy between the human body and nature comes down to our inability to comprehend the endlessness of both: a 'confrontation avec l'illimité du désir et l'impensable infinité de la nature'. *La Théorie des nuages* recalls Robinson Crusoe's eroticised island in Michel Tournier's *Vendredi*, and echoes the words of geographer Luc Bureau, who claims that 'c'est érotiquement que l'homme habite', and that one who studies the relationship between humans and the earth is destined to become a 'disciple d'Eros, un érotologue, un expert en érotologie'.

> C'est *érotiquement* que l'homme habite. Le géographe qui, avec patience et modestie, étudie la relation des hommes avec la Terre serait ainsi un disciple d'Éros, un *érotologue*, un expert en *érotologie*.[1]
>
> [Man lives *erotically*. The geographer who modestly and patiently studies the relationship between humans and the Earth would thus be a disciple of Eros, an *erotologist*, an expert in *erotology*.]

1 Luc Bureau, *Terra erotica* (Montréal: Fides, 2009), 9 [unreferenced translations are mine].

Stéphane Audeguy's first novel, *La Théorie des nuages* (2005), calls for an ecocritical reading on several levels. We encounter the familiar Romantic topos of clouds early on, recalling nineteenth-century nature poets like William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822).[2] The first sentence evokes the melancholy of twilight, and leads into the story of the first main character (the only historical figure), Luke Howard (1772–1864). Howard, a London pharmacist, was the first to classify clouds, and his *Essay on the Modification of Clouds* (1804)[3] was much admired by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). Howard may even have crossed paths with the German poet at the prototypical Romantic site of the Rhine Falls in Switzerland, also visited by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851), and painted by Joseph Mallord William Turner (1841). Audeguy subsequently tells the story of Carmichael, a fictional English Romantic painter of clouds, who was driven to suicide by their dangerous beauty and infinitely unfathomable structures. The author then focusses on a different kind of cloud, one that has become an ominous metaphor for the destructive power of nature and of humankind. The narrator compares the volcanic explosion on Krakatoa – and the enormous cloud that it produced – with the obliteration of Hiroshima in a blinding flash, followed by an apocalyptic cloud and black rain. The main narrator of the novel, Akira Kumo, is a survivor of the Hiroshima attack; his attempts to recall the event are part of a *fil conducteur* decrying humans' predatory nature and insane Promethean hubris.

But the genius of *La Théorie des nuages* emanates neither from Romanticism nor from stunning descriptions of the destructive power of volcanic and atomic clouds. Its audacity and originality arise from Audeguy's ability to detect an erotic presence in nature. Audeguy's clouds reveal a kind of nature that Canadian geographer Luc Bureau describes with the following formula: 'notre relation à la Terre et au monde est fondamentalement une relation de désir, de sensualité, d'amour diffus: bref, une relation érotique [our relationship to the earth and the world is fundamentally one of desire, of sensuality, of diffuse love: in short, an erotic relationship]'.[4]

On the first page of *La Théorie des nuages*, we meet Kumo, a retired couturier living in Montmartre on the Rue Lamarck. He has just hired a librarian named Virginie Latour to classify his considerable collection of materials related to

2 Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (1807) is one of his best-known poems. Shelley's 'The Cloud', published with *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), meditates – like Audeguy's narrator – on the infinite nature of clouds: 'I change, but I cannot die' (76).

3 Luke Howard, *Essay on the Modification of Clouds* (London: Josiah Taylor, 1804).

4 Bureau, *Terra erotica*, 9.

clouds.[5] Kumo loves to talk about clouds, and it is through his story-telling that Virginie learns about men who shaped our knowledge of clouds and weather. One of these men is Richard Abercrombie, a fictional Scottish meteorologist whose story dominates the final section of the novel, in which he begins a journey around the world with the intention of assembling a complete photographic cloud atlas. His odyssey ends with the compilation of the mysterious and notorious Abercrombie Protocol, the photographic contents of which are the *ecoerotica* to which I refer in my title.

Abercrombie enthusiastically departs on his voyage 'à la recherche du temps [in search of weather/time]' (*N* 203)[6] – as he proudly calls it – but a traumatic event in Indonesia changes his life forever. He arrives in Borneo to continue taking photographs for his cloud atlas, heading upriver with two hunters into the jungle. He is struck by the deafening noise of the rainforest, and realises that – contrary to the animals in English forests, in close proximity to towns – these animals are completely indifferent to humans, unaware that the human being is the 'prédateur suprême [supreme predator]' (*N* 219), killing for recreation, not survival. Left alone to rest in a clearing for a short time, Abercrombie is elated to come across a large orangutan with her baby. They look at each other calmly and without fear: 'dans ce regard de bête qui n'a jamais croisé celui d'un homme, il n'y a absolument

5 Stéphane Audeguy, *La Théorie des nuages* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 19–20 [hereafter *N*]. The proper names are well chosen. Kumo means 'cloud' in Japanese, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, the great naturalist, had an interest in clouds: he proposed a five-type classification in 1802, just before Luke Howard's more famous four-type classification (cirrus, cumulus, stratus, nimbus).

6 The phrase recalls Marcel Proust's masterpiece *À la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*] (1913–27), and is a play on the two meanings of *temps* (time and weather), bringing to mind one of the major themes of Michel Tournier's *Les Météores* (1975), which Audeguy cites as an inspiration for *La Théorie des nuages*. *Temps* as weather is the major concern of Audeguy, but the first sentences of his novel remind us of its other meaning: 'vers les cinq heures du soir, tous les enfants sont tristes: ils commencent à comprendre ce qu'est le temps. Le jour décline un peu. Il va falloir rentrer pourtant, être sage, et mentir [all children become sad in the late afternoon, for they begin to comprehend the passage of time. The light starts to change. Soon they will have to head home, and to behave, and to pretend]' (*N* 13). Stéphane Audeguy, *The Theory of Clouds*, trans. by T. Bent (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2007), 3 [hereafter *C*]. Michel Serres's *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992) regards 'les deux temps' as a central concern (51). Climate change is essentially a problem of *temps* as weather, but our inability to deal with it comes down to a refusal to consider *temps* as time in the long term. Similarly, 'pollution matérielle', exposing *temps* as weather to major risks, is a function of 'pollution culturelle', the mismanagement of the earth that began many centuries ago (57).

rien de sauvage [in the eyes of a beast that had never before come across those of a man, there was absolutely nothing the slightest bit savage]' (*N* 227; *C* 189). Sadly, the animals pay for their lack of fear, as one of the hunters shoots the mother from several hundred feet away, then coldly snaps the neck of the baby.[7]

In a rumination entitled 'De la nature de quelques choses', Audeguy examines our ambiguous relationship with nature. He declares that, though we are part of nature, we are denatured animals, and this denaturation is what led to the radioactive cloud over Hiroshima, and the clouds of ashes over Auschwitz.[8] Our bond to nature is predatory, like that of the hunter to the orangutan.[9] Audeguy prefers

7 In a personal interview, Stéphane Audeguy revealed that his character Richard Abercrombie is loosely based on Ralph Abercromby (1842–97), a well-travelled Scottish meteorologist and author of *Seas and Skies in Many Latitudes* (London: Edward Stanford, 1888). Audeguy has a copy of a lithograph featuring Ralph Abercromby proudly standing behind an orangutan that he had just shot. The fictional Abercrombie, who detests hunting, is profoundly changed by his travels and becomes closer to nature; his historical namesake remained an avid hunter.

8 Stéphane Audeguy, 'De la nature de quelques choses', in *Les Assises du roman 2009*, ed. by D. Bourgois (Paris: Bourgois, 2009), 241–8 (245). The title, 'On the Nature of Some Things', is a tribute to Titus Lucretius Carus's *De rerum natura* [*On the Nature of Things*] (50 BCE). Audeguy's remark on humans' problematic place in nature echoes the dispute between the typical humanist position which considers humans separate from nature – as Luc Ferry argues in *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique* (Paris: Grasset, 1992) – and environmental philosophers like Michel Serres and Bruno Latour who contend that humans have never been disconnected from nature. Bruno Latour, 'Arrachement ou attachement à la nature?', *Écologie & Politique* 5 (1993), 15–26.

9 In an interview, Audeguy cites the novels of Jules Verne as excellent illustrations of our predatory instinct, of the 'fantasme occidental de la clôture, de faire le tour du monde. Verne exprime quelque chose de l'emprise capitaliste, scientifique et marchande sur le monde qui est encore vrai: la predation [the Western fantasy of enclosing, of going around the world. Verne expresses something of the capitalistic, scientific, and commercial appropriation of the world that is still true: predation]'. Thierry Guichard, 'Le Monde réapproprié: dossier Stéphane Audeguy', *Le Matricule des Anges* 101 (2009), 18–27 (21). In *Le Crépuscule de Prométhée* [*The Twilight of Prometheus*], François Flahault devotes a lengthy chapter to Verne's 'Promethean imagination'. In Verne's exceedingly virile 'geographical' novels, male protagonists embark on improbable conquests of nature, science, and technology, 'pour dominer ce qui les domine [to dominate that which dominates them]'. François Flahault, *Le Crépuscule de Prométhée* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2008), 122. *La Théorie des nuages* critiques this western worldview in passages on military men who arrogantly ignored the science of meteorology, or attempted to enlist the weather to help defeat an enemy: Napoleon in Russia and at Waterloo (*N*

the terminology of *arraisonner*/*arraisonnement*, a nautical expression that means to board and seize a ship forcibly:

> Nous avons arraisonné la nature, comme un navire: on s'en empare, on s'en croit le propriétaire. […] L'arraisonnement est le mouvement même de notre civilisation; il détermine ses progrès, mais il abrite également un fantasme morbide, dément, qui menace l'humanité elle-même.[10]
>
> [We have commandeered nature, like a ship: we seize it, we believe we own it. […] Commandeering is the driving force of our civilisation; it determines its progress, but it also contains a morbid, insane fantasy that threatens humanity itself.]

Our desire to commandeer nature amounts to the same Promethean hubris that culminated not only in the atomic bomb, but also in the Chernobyl disaster;[11] we treat nature as a stockpile of energy to be used in human technology, which is ultimately uncontrollable, and leads to humanity's self-destruction.

After that day in the jungle, Richard Abercrombie never photographs another cloud. The shame and the rage felt after the murder of the orangutans alter him forever, and he ceases to be a man of science. The Abercrombie Protocol changes from being about clouds to being about women, as the once puritanical Scotsman's obsession shifts from meteorology to sexology. Over a century later, Kumo comes into possession of the Protocol, never seen by anyone outside the Abercrombie family, and is surprised that only the first few pages contain pictures of clouds:

104–7), the French navy during the Crimean War (*N* 86–7), and the American planners of the Hiroshima attack (*N* 156–7).

10 Audeguy, 'De la nature de quelques choses', 244. *Arraisonner* has been used by French translators of Heidegger to convey the term *Gestell*, usually translated as 'enframing'. The term captures the threatening essence of technology – reducing nature to a 'standing reserve' – that Heidegger describes in 'Die Frage nach der Technik [The Question Concerning Technology]' (1953). David Farrell Krell explains the hostile nature of *Gestell* in his introduction to Heidegger's essay: 'the question concerning the essence of technology confronts the supreme danger, which is that this one way of revealing beings may overwhelm man and beings and all other possible ways of revealing. Such danger is impacted in the essence of technology, which is an ordering of, or setting-upon, both nature and man, a defiant challenging of beings that aims at total and exclusive mastery'. David F. Krell, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From 'Being and Time' (1927) to 'The Task of Thinking' (1964)*, trans. by D. F. Krell (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1977), 284–6 (285).

11 The connection between Prometheus and Chernobyl is painfully direct. In front of the ruins of the nuclear plant stands a bronze statue of the Titan, triumphantly stealing fire from the gods in order to give it to humans. Flahault, *Le Crépuscule de Prométhée*, 11–13.

> Plus bizarrement encore, il y a ces photographies spéciales qui occupent l'autre face des feuilles, des centaines de photographies de sexes féminins. […]
>
> [L]es clichés ne cherchent pas l'excuse de paraître ethnographiques, ou même anthropologiques. Les sujets qui ont posé sont tous entièrement nus; ils ne portent ni bijoux ni tatouages visibles. […] Les clichés ne relèvent pas non plus du style vaporeux, supposément suggestif, de la photographie dite de charme de ces années-là, ni de la gaudriole puérile de la pornographie habituelle; simplement, frontalement, tranquillement, le professeur Abercrombie, membre de la Royal Society, a photographié des sexes féminins. Ils sont, à l'évidence, soigneusement éclairés pour que tous les détails en soient visibles […]. Les pages de droite sont couvertes de dessins répétitifs où Kumo distingue des coquillages, des têtes d'animaux, encore des sexes féminins, des nuages aussi. Chacune des entrées est datée. (*N* 197–8)
>
> [Most disturbing of all were those photographs of women's sexual organs – numbering in the hundreds – on the book's facing pages. […]
>
> The images could not be explained away as having ethnographic or anthropological value. The women posing in them were wearing no clothes; no folk art, jewels, or tattoos were visible. […] The photographs weren't fuzzy or gauzy in that suggestive style that had been considered charming in photographs of the period. Nor were they as crude as typical pornography. The images were simple, unadorned. Great care had been taken to highlight every detail. […] The recto page was covered with drawings, the same design, repeated over and over. Kumo could see they were of shells, animal heads, women's vaginas; a few clouds as well. Each entry was dated.] (*C* 165)

The Theory of Clouds metamorphoses at this point into a theory of bodies, as Gallimard's scarlet cover-band proclaimed,[12] and a novel about clouds of all sorts – natural and unnatural – turns into a kind of environmental erotica. While Abercrombie's photographs are solely of women – at first full-length, then limited to torsos – his drawings alternate between vaginas and non-human objects: seashells, animal heads, and clouds. Audeguy finds sexual analogies between the macrocosm of the world and the microcosm of the human body, in the tradition of ancient and medieval thinkers, such as the alchemists of the Near and Far East studied by Mircea Eliade in *Forgerons et alchimistes*. Eliade devotes a chapter to 'Le Monde sexualisé [The Sexualised World]', 'une conception générale de la *réalité cosmique* perçue en tant que *Vie*, et par conséquent sexuée, la sexualité étant un signe particulier de toute *réalité vivante* [a general conception of cosmic reality seen as *Life* and consequently endowed with sex; sexuality being a particular sign of all

12 Below the title – *La Théorie des nuages* – appeared a provocative red band: 'et des corps [and bodies]'.

living reality]'.[13] Eliade recalls the gynaecological symbolism of the sacred Earth Mother in traditional societies:

> L'idée que les minerais 'croissent' dans le ventre de la Terre, ni plus ni moins que les embryons. La métallurgie prend ainsi un caractère obstétrique. Le mineur et le métallurgiste […] collaborent à l'œuvre de la Nature, l'aident à 'accoucher plus vite'. Bref, par ses techniques, l'homme se substitue peu à peu au Temps, son Travail remplace l'œuvre du Temps.[14]
>
> [The notion that ores 'grow' in the belly of the earth after the manner of embryos. Metallurgy thus takes on the character of obstetrics. Miner and metalworker […] collaborate in the work of Nature and assist it to give birth more rapidly. In a word, man, with his various techniques, gradually takes the place of Time: his labours replace the work of Time.]

In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant explains that from Antiquity through the Renaissance, the prevailing world view saw nature as a living organism with a double personality: normally a kind, 'nurturing mother', the earth at times became 'wild and uncontrollable', unleashing violent storms, floods, droughts, etc.[15] This organic view encouraged respect and restraint from humans. Merchant echoes Eliade when she recounts the sacred vocation of miners who entered 'earth's vagina', and the 'awesome responsibility' of metallurgists who engaged in 'the human hastening of the birth of the living metal in the artificial womb of the furnace'.[16]

The Scientific Revolution, seeking to impose rationality on the world, seized upon the notion of nature's destructive side, 'nature as disorder', and determined to master and dominate the earth. Nature was no longer viewed as a living being, and was thus ripe for exploitation: 'the new images of mastery and domination functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature. Society needed these new images as it continued the processes of commercialisation and industrialisation, which depended on activities directly altering the earth'.[17] This mechanistic world view did not completely destroy ecological consciousness; Merchant cites Edmund Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*, 1590–6), John Donne (1572–1631) and

13 Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956), 29; *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. by S. Corrin (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 36].

14 Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes*, 7; *The Forge and the Crucible*, 8.

15 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989), 2.

16 Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 4.

17 Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 2.

John Milton (*Paradise Lost*, 1667–74) among several sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors who condemned mining as a rape of the earth. Spenser considered mining to be a sin of avarice, comparable to lust: 'digging into the matrices and pockets of earth for metals was like mining the female flesh for pleasure. […] Both mining and sex represent for Spenser the return to animality and earthly slime'.[18]

For some years, ecofeminists have been fighting against this ancient association of women and nature. In 'Unearthing Herstory', the introduction to *The Lay of the Land*, Annette Kolodny describes how a protest in Berkeley, California, in 1969 called the 'Battle for People's Park' revealed a deeply ingrained American fantasy, 'a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine – that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification'.[19] The conquest of the American wilderness was, in large part, a violation of this 'land-as-woman'.[20] Kolodny calls for a 'new symbolic mode' to govern our relationship to landscapes because 'we can no longer afford to keep turning "America the Beautiful" into *America the Raped*'.[21] In 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology', Ynestra King writes of the shared voicelessness of women and nature (heralding Élisabeth de Fontenay's account of the silence of animals).[22] Without feminism, ecology is incomplete: 'the special message of ecofeminism is that when women suffer through both social domination and the domination of nature, most of life on this planet suffers and is threatened as well'.[23]

In Audeguy's novel, a hint of correspondences between the macrocosm and microcosm emerges early on. He devotes several pages to Goethe, whose interest in meteorology led to admiration for Howard's research on clouds. Goethe researched morphology as well, and Audeguy envisions the similitude Goethe may have observed between clouds and the human brain:

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18 Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 39.

19 Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 4 ['Unearthing Herstory: An Introduction'].

20 Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*, 155.

21 Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*, 148.

22 Élisabeth de Fontenay, *Le Silence des bêtes: la philosophie à l'épreuve de l'animalité* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

23 Ynestra King, 'The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology', in *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. by J. Plant (Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1989), 18–28 (25).

> Même il pense parfois […] que le cerveau des hommes a la forme des nuages, et qu'ainsi les nuages sont comme le siège de la pensée du ciel; ou alors, que le cerveau est ce nuage dans l'homme qui le rattache au ciel. (*N* 27)
>
> [He even imagined that the brain of man was like a cloud, and thus that clouds represented the heavenly seats of thought, connecting the human and the divine]. (*C* 17)

Many of Abercrombie's sketches in the Protocol reveal the same connection – spirals of cloud-like lines shrinking into forms resembling tiny brains (*N* 247).

But female sexuality is obviously what most interests the author and his character. Audeguy states that the photos in the Protocol have no cultural value: no clothing or markings hint at the women's ethnicity; nor is the pubic hair 'airbrushed', as it might have been if Abercrombie had wanted to conform to his own cultural tradition (*N* 197).[24] More and more, Abercrombie excludes the women's faces from his photos, focussing on the subject's pelvic area. 'L'effet est étrange: les sexes perdent de leur humanité; et l'on voit surgir à leur place des reliefs de chair étonnants, lunaires, volcaniques [Abercrombie began focusing only on the subject's midriff, which had the effect of dehumanising the sexual organ, creating landscapes of pure flesh, lunar, as it were, or volcanic]' (*N* 246; *C* 205–6). Virginie, annotating and cataloguing the Protocol, is struck by the diversity of the large quantity of vaginas pictured, as Abercrombie must have been: 'là où, sagement sans doute, le langage commun parlait comme pour le ramener à une simplicité presque domestique, *du* sexe, ou d'*un* sexe, Richard Abercrombie, lui, n'avait vu que *des* sexes; et il n'en était jamais revenu [rather than refer to *the* female sexual organ in the singular, Abercrombie henceforth used the plural]' (*N* 246; *C* 206).[25] In close-up photography, the sexual organs lose

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24 For earlier reflections on this subject, see Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 17; Françoise Gaillard, 'Allégorie d'un fantasme fin de siècle: Courbet, *L'Origine du monde*', in *Mimesis et semiosis: littérature et représentation*, ed. by P. Hamon and J.-P. Leduc-Adine (Paris: Nathan, 1992), 427–34 (428–9).

25 The italics in the French are Audeguy's. His insistence on the plural (*des sexes*, not *un sexe*) translates as an articulation of female subjectivity. Abercrombie is hardly an ecofeminist; Virginie notes that he never quite got over the idea that all the genitalia in his photos were unique and diverse. But Audeguy underscores the dignity of these women who – like nature in René Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (1637) – are mastered and possessed by men. This plural is a plea to save women from male violence, as with Jacques Derrida's use of *animaux* (or *animot*) in reference to another silent minority:

> Je voudrais donner à entendre le pluriel d'animaux dans le singulier: il n'y a pas l'Animal au singulier général, séparé de l'homme par une seule limite indivisible. […] [P]armi les non-humains, et séparés des non-humains, il y a une multiplicité

their humanity, and take on the relief of rocky, mineral landscapes. Gynaecology merges with geology to form a geography of the body. Scribbled next to the photos are increasingly enigmatic words – *similitude*; *origine*; *parallélisme* (*N* 247) – until the last word of the Protocol: *Infini* [infinite] (*N* 293).

Similitude and *parallélisme* are linked to two other obsessive ideas on Abercrombie's part: *isomorphie* and *analogie*. He even dreams of the University of Cambridge creating a Chair of Analogy for him. He is clearly fascinated by the correspondences that he has discovered between nature and humans, giving 'human nature' a radical new meaning. The word 'origin', which he repeatedly writes, is undoubtedly an Audeguyan reference to Gustave Courbet's infamous oil painting *L'Origine du monde* [*The Origin of the World*] (1866), whose photographic quality inspired Peter Brooks to call it 'a decisive gesture toward hyper-realism in the representation of the nude'.[26] Françoise Gaillard comments on the painting's 'réalisme photographique [photographic realism]',[27] shockingly different from the portrayal of female nudes accepted by the Académie des Beaux-Arts [Academy of Fine Arts] at the time – paintings that, like statuary, achieved a 'désexualisation du sexe', depicting only a marmoreal 'petit monticule qu'on croirait fait de saindoux ou d'albâtre, figurant le si bien nommé mont de Vénus [a desexualisation of the genitals, depicting only a little marmoreal mound that seemed to be made of lard or alabaster, representing the so well-named *mons Venus*]'.[28] In his essay *Opera mundi* (2012), Audeguy suggests that *L'Origine du monde* should not be considered pornographic, because – as in most of Abercrombie's photographs – the woman's face is not pictured. According to Audeguy, what makes an image pornographic

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immense d'autres vivants qui ne se laissent en aucun cas homogénéiser, sauf violence et méconnaissance intéressée, sous la catégorie de ce qu'on appelle l'animal ou l'animalité en général. Il y a tout de suite des animaux et, disons, l'animot.

[I would like to have the plural of animals heard in the singular. There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. […] Among nonhumans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenised, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. From the outset there are animals and, let's say, *l'animot*.]

Jacques Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, ed. by M.-L. Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 73; 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. by D. Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002), 369–418 (415–16).

26 Brooks, *Body Work*, 142.

27 Gaillard, '*L'Origine du monde*', 429.

28 Gaillard, '*L'Origine du monde*', 428.

is the concurrence between the permitted view of the face and the prohibited, transgressive view of the sexual organs.[29] Like Abercrombie's pictures, Courbet's painting is faceless, thus dehumanised.[30] It is a landscape that Audeguy describes as 'une vallée extraordinaire, dont les plis semblent des coulées de lave souples et vivantes, et d'une délicatesse infinie [an extraordinary valley, whose folds seem like supple, living lava flows, infinitely delicate]' (*O* 38).

Courbet may well have been sensitive to the correspondence between *L'Origine du monde* and a particular landscape – it is tempting to see a marked similarity between the painting of a vulva and the many paintings of the source of the Loue, a small river that flows out of a cave near Courbet's hometown of Ornans in Franche-Comté. Audeguy comments: 'difficile de ne pas associer la béance de la résurgence karstique, cette vallée étroite, avec la vallée de *L'Origine du monde* [difficult not to associate the opening of the karstic resurgence, this narrow valley, with the valley of *The Origin of the World*]' (*O* 38).[31] Courbet scholars have long noted the resemblance between his canvases of the physiological 'origin', and the

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29 Stéphane Audeguy, *Opera mundi: une rêverie* (Paris: Créaphis, 2012), 37 [hereafter *O*].

30 Françoise Gaillard's reading of *L'Origine du monde* is quite similar: 'rien, en effet, de louche ni de libidineux dans cette représentation réaliste du sexe autant dépourvu d'érotisme que d'obscénité [there is, in fact, nothing sleazy or libidinous in this realist representation of genitalia lacking eroticism as much as obscenity]'. Courbet's framing of the painting only allows us to see 'la génitalité pure […] privée de ce qui la pare de ses troublants attraits: la femme [pure genitality […] deprived of the very object of desire: the woman]'. Gaillard, '*L'Origine du monde*', 429–30.

31 In this quotation and the preceding one, Audeguy draws attention to the fluid nature of the female sexual organs with terms like 'lava flows' and 'karstic resurgence' (*karstique* refers to the limestone composition of the cave from which the spring emerges). In *La Théorie des nuages*, the descriptions of Virginie's 'jouissances océaniques [oceanic orgasms]' connect the human body to the forces of nature (*N* 146). In an interview, Audeguy explains:

> Dans cette scène de plaisir solitaire, ce qui était important pour moi, c'est qu'on a une femme qui pleut. […] Il y a toute une mystique sur les orgasmes de ces femmes fontaines. Mais pour moi, cette jouissance renvoie à la pluie donc aux nuages. Après, ça m'intéressait que cette bibliothécaire fasse ça, parce que la masturbation est une autonomie. Cette scène lui donne un univers.
>
> [In this scene of solitary pleasure, what was important for me is that we have a woman who rains. […] There is a sort of mystique about the orgasms of these fountain women. But for me, this pleasure is connected to rain and thus to clouds. Also, I found this librarian's actions interesting, because masturbation implies autonomy. This scene gives her a universe.]

Guichard, 'Le Monde réapproprié', 27.

geological 'source'.[32] The similarity corroborates Eliade's recounting of gynaecological myths of the Earth Mother from the archaic 'sexualized world', such as the Zuni myth of the origin of the human race, whereby the first humans climbed up four 'cavern wombs' until they finally emerged on the surface of the earth.[33] The source of the Loue is a karstic spring that mysteriously emerges from a rocky grotto in the Jura Mountains after flowing underground for some distance. For Courbet, the stony origin of the river is a metaphor for the birth of human life, as in many mythologies. Eliade cites numerous myths of *petra genitrix*, 'stone parentage': 'l'idée que la pierre est source de Vie et de fertilité, qu'elle vit et procrée des êtres humains comme elle a été elle-même engendrée par la Terre [the notion that stone is the source of life and fertility, that it lives and procreates human creatures just as it has itself been engendered by the Earth]'.[34] Art historian Linda Nochlin wonders if Courbet's two paintings may be clues to the origin of art itself:

> In an article entitled 'The Origins of Art', Desmond Collins and John Onians attempted to 'trace back' historically the origin of art to the engraving of crude but recognizable vulvas on the walls of caves in Southern France during the Aurignacian Period, about 33,000 to 28,000 B.C. According to this scenario, masculine desire literally led lusting but frustrated Aurignacian males to represent in stone the desired, absent object – the female sex organ – and thereby to create the very first artwork. In the light of this assumption, all other artworks ought to be considered simulacra of this originating male act, and representation must itself be considered a mere simulacrum of that desired original.[35]

Perhaps the troubling photographs of Abercrombie's Protocol are not so out of place, not such a departure from his original scientific task.

The erotic bond between humans and landscapes is – as the preceding examples indicate – as ancient as humankind itself. In *Opera mundi*, Audeguy refers to two French writers whose work illustrates the connection: in Donatien Alphonse François de Sade's *Justine* (1791), the narrator proclaims the 'étrange desir [strange desire] (*O* 39)' to become Mount Etna, and the character Almani transforms into a human volcano through sex; Charles Baudelaire's 'La Géante' ('The Giantess') is about a woman and a mountain landscape simultaneously (*O* 34). In the last two lines of Baudelaire's sonnet, the poet – exhausted after a day of climbing – wants nothing more than to 'Dormir nonchalamment à l'ombre de ses seins, | Comme un hameau paisible au pied d'une montagne [Drowse in nonchalance below her

32 Linda Nochlin, 'Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*: The Origin without an Original', *October* 37 (1986), 76–86 (82).

33 Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes*, 32–3.

34 Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes*, 35; *The Forge and the Crucible*, 43.

35 Nochlin, 'Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*', 81–2.

breast, | Like a calm village in the mountain's shade]'.[36] Analogy, or isomorphism – the term that the protagonist prefers – becomes Abercrombie's new science (*N* 294). Although it leads nowhere, it serves to actualise the archaic belief of a necessary bond between macrocosm and microcosm: a link between nature and humans. Abercrombie stumbles upon the correspondence in his own way, linking clouds to the region 'entre les cuisses des femmes [between the thighs of women]' where he 'avait dressé l'autel de sa religion personnelle [had […] built the altar of his private religion]' – Virginie admits that this 'n'était pas un culte plus fou qu'un autre [was no more or less crazy a cult than any other]' (*N* 310–11; *C* 259). The key to understanding Abercrombie's odd science is the last term that he scrawls in his notebook: 'infinite'. This concluding word is his best description of the limitless irregularities in natural and human geography. One could never truly measure, Abercrombie believes, 'chaque sinuosité, […] chaque anfractuosité [each sinuosity, each anfractuosity]' (*N* 292) of a mountain-side, a vaginal wall, a cloud, or the coast of Cornwall – of which he says that 'la plus petite irrégularité, prise en elle-même, se compose de minuscules anfractuosités, de sorte qu'il faut aller jusqu'à dire que la côte des Cornouailles est rigoureusement infinite [the tiniest irregularity itself consists of even tinier irregularities, and so on, such that we would have to conclude that the coastline was infinite]' (*N* 293; *C* 245). Such an act would lead one to become lost in the fractal-like infinity of nature – just as Carmichael, the painter of clouds, lost his mind when he attempted to illustrate the infinite *mise en abyme* that he perceived in clouds. As Audeguy succinctly puts it in *Opera mundi*, the analogy between the human body and nature comes down to our inability to comprehend the endlessness of both: a 'confrontation avec l'illimité du désir et l'impensable infinité de la nature [confrontation between the limitlessness of desire and the unthinkable infinity of nature]' (*O* 39).

In *Terra erotica*, Bureau contends that Nature's very condition is desire: our relationship with nature is erotic. Nothing has changed since Plato's *Symposium* (360 BCE), in which the doctor Eryximachus declares that Love's empire extends over all of nature, human and non-human alike.[37] For Bureau, Eros is the greatest of the gods; he even makes an appearance in the harsh Old Testament, most notably in the Song of Solomon, a love poem infused with natural metaphors. 'L'œuvre d'Éros repose […] sur le principe de l'indissoluble unité du monde. La sainteté et la volupté, la nature et l'homme, le bien et le mal, la force et la douceur cohabitent

36 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by C. Pichois, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 22–3; *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by J. McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41.

37 Bureau, *Terra erotica*, 54.

sans hostilité [the work of Eros rests on the principle of the indissoluble unity of the world. Saintliness and sexuality, nature and man, good and evil, strength and gentleness live together without hostility]'.[38] One is reminded of the beautiful passages in Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967), in which Robinson Crusoe's sexuality turns toward the 'voie végétale [vegetal realm]',[39] and he begins a love affair with the soft earth of a valley. His erotic relationship with the island is accompanied by readings from the Song of Solomon 7.2–3 and 7.7:

> Ton ventre est un monceau de froment entouré de lis.
> Tes seins sont comme deux faons, jumeaux d'une gazelle.
> Ta taille ressemble au palmier, et tes seins à ses grappes.[40]
>
> [Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies.
> Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins. […]
> Thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.]

Robinson's sexuality, like Abercrombie's, possesses an inextricable bond between the human and the non-human, the microcosm and the macrocosm.

Bureau laments the fact that, for many of us, nature and Eros have nothing in common. When Eros abandons nature, the world is nothing but faded matter:

> Sans le titillement voluptueux d'Éros, la nature n'est plus qu'un agrégat muet de matière, qu'un corps dénudé semblable aux débris d'un astre éteint. Sans Éros, les lieux de la Terre ne sont plus que des morceaux d'espaces réductibles à leurs seuls attributs physiques ou géométriques.[41]
>
> [Without the voluptuous titillation of Eros, nature is but a silent aggregate of matter, a bare body, like the debris of a dead star. Without Eros, the places of the Earth are but pieces of space reduced to nothing but their physical or geometrical attributes.]

Desire, he writes, is an attribute not only of humans, but also of the earth:

> Sans désir, l'homme n'est plus qu'une statue de sel. Sans désir, la Terre n'est qu'un grain de poussière dans l'Univers, un astre mort, tout au plus une figure géométrique difforme. C'est sous les auspices d'Éros qu'un pacte se noue entre le désir de l'homme et le désir de la Terre.[42]
>
> [Without desire, man is nothing more than a statue of salt. Without desire, the Earth is but a speck of dust in the Universe, a dead star, at most, a deformed geometric shape. It is under the auspices of Eros that a pact is made between man's desire and the Earth's desire.]

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38 Bureau, *Terra erotica*, 63.
39 Michel Tournier, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 140.
40 Tournier, *Vendredi*, 156.
41 Bureau, *Terra erotica*, 71.
42 Bureau, *Terra erotica*, 73.

Bureau calls himself an *érotologue* [erotologist]. He writes:

> J'ai fait mon choix. Parmi tous les dieux connus ou inconnus, chastes ou noceurs, bienveillants ou malveillants, il n'en est qu'un dont je voudrais m'instruire des aventures sur Terre, Éros, celui qui assure l'union des éléments primordiaux et qui suscite le désir amoureux.[43]
>
> [I've made my choice. Among all the gods known or unknown, chaste or unchaste, benevolent or malevolent, there is only one I would like to teach me of worldly adventures: Eros, he who ensures the union of the primordial elements and who arouses love's desire.]

Tournier's Robinson sheds his puritanical past to become an *érotologue* when his 'elemental' sexuality changes elements: his love affair with the earth is verticalised, redirected towards the heavens – sky, sun, constellations.[44] He no longer experiences the 'brutal pleasure' of genital sex, but a solar or cosmic sexuality:

> Mes amours ouraniennes me gonflent au contraire d'une énergie vitale. […] S'il fallait nécessairement traduire en termes humains ce coït solaire, c'est sous les espèces féminines, et comme l'épouse du ciel qu'il conviendrait de me définir.[45]
>
> [My sky-love floods me with a vital energy […]. If this is to be translated into human language, I must consider myself feminine and the bride of the sky.]

His days are identical; he lives in an eternal present. He writes in his logbook: 'mes journées se sont redressées. Elles ne basculent plus les unes sur les autres. Elles se tiennent debout, verticales, et s'affirment fièrement dans leur valeur intrinsèque [it is as though, in consequence, my days had rearranged themselves. No longer do they jostle on each other's heels. Each stands separate and upright, proudly affirming its own worth]'.[46] This passage inspired Gilles Deleuze's comment in the *Postface* [Afterword] to the novel that Robinson's existence becomes 'une érection généralisée [a generalised erection]'.[47]

Like Robinson, Abercrombie is truly the *érotologue* that Bureau describes in the epigraph at the beginning of the present analysis. Robinson's mind is filled with erotic images and symbols from classical mythology: 'Vénus, le Cygne, Léda, les Dioscures… je tâtonne à la recherche de moi-même dans une forêt d'allégories [Venus, the Swan, Leda, the Twins… I grope in search of myself in this forest of

43 Bureau, *Terra erotica*, 59.
44 Tournier, *Vendredi*, 264.
45 Tournier, *Vendredi*, 265; *Friday*, trans. by N. Denny (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 212.
46 Tournier, *Vendredi*, 252; *Friday*, 204.
47 Gilles Deleuze, 'Postface: Michel Tournier et le monde sans autrui', in Tournier, *Vendredi*, 317 ['Afterword: Michel Tournier and the World without Others'].

allegory]'.[48] Similarly, Abercrombie's analogies lead him to conclude that 'tout, dans l'univers, revient au même: le monde est la résultante de la combinaison de formes toujours identiques [everything in the universe reverts to the same forms. The world consists of recurring combinations of these forms]' (*N* 248; *C* 207). Abercrombie's universe is ruled by vaginas and clouds, his two personal obsessions. They are not only analogous but infinitely complex, as the final word of the Protocol suggests.

Where did Stéphane Audeguy find inspiration for this troubling and truly original novel? I have mentioned his debt to Tournier's *Vendredi* and *Les Météores*. Tournier would probably have seen Audeguy as a kindred spirit if he had read the article in *Le Monde des livres* in which Audeguy says that 'je n'écris jamais sur la nature, mais j'espère écrire avec [I never write about nature, but I hope to write with it]'.[49] Like Tournier's two novels, *La Théorie des nuages* treats nature as a subject, rather than a lowly object lorded over by humans. Audeguy thus accomplishes an important task that ecocritics have assigned to contemporary writers. In the article 'Littérature & écologie', Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe – referring to Lawrence Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001)[50] – insist on a writer's capacity to evoke 'l'environnement non human […] comme acteur à part entière et non seulement comme cadre de l'expérience humaine [the non-human environment […] as an independent actor and not simply as a frame around human experience]',[51] giving nature the status of subject, not object.[52] The three critics maintain that fiction must not settle for imitating non-human nature; it must aim for 'le renouveau, voire le bouleversement, de notre façon de l'appréhender [a renewal, even a revolution, in the way we comprehend nonhuman nature]'.[53] In this regard, Audeguy has admirably succeeded. Readers of *La Théorie des nuages* will never look at clouds without being reminded of volcanic eruptions, nuclear annihilation, and the lacy veil of Eros.

48 Tournier, *Vendredi*, 268; *Friday*, 214.

49 Alain Beuve-Méry, 'Stéphane Audeguy: "Nous avons arraisonné la nature"', *Le Monde des livres* (21 May 2009), <http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2009/05/21/stephane-audeguy-nous-avons-arraisonne-la-nature_1196148_3260.html> [accessed 25 May 2016].

50 Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

51 Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe, 'Littérature & écologie: vers une écopoétique', *Écologie & Politique* 36 (2008), 17–28 (19).

52 Blanc, Chartier and Pughe, 'Littérature et écologie', 24.

53 Blanc, Chartier and Pughe, 'Littérature et écologie', 22.

Stéphane Audeguy is not a 'nature writer' in the American tradition initiated by Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82). 'Dans mes romans, […] il n'y a aucune description de nature pure. Sont en revanche présents des personnages qui ne sont pas des humains [in my novels, […] there is no description of pure nature. There are, however, characters who are not human]'.[54] There are clouds and their simulacra: volcanoes; the explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the ashes of Auschwitz. *La Théorie des nuages* bears some resemblance to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* [*The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*] (1782); like Rousseau, Audeguy wishes to 'mettre en relief des intensités liées à la perception de la nature [highlight the intensity of the experience of perceiving nature]'.[55] But one must go back to Roman antiquity to find Audeguy's most compelling influence. In 'De la nature de quelques choses', Audeguy suggests that 'rien n'a changé depuis Lucrèce. Tout est possible [nothing has changed since Lucretius. Everything is possible]'.[56] The Latin poet's *De rerum natura* [*On the Nature of Things*] is an epic poem about all things big and small, material and immaterial: the principle of atomism that structures the universe, nature and its phenomena; the creation of the world and the development of civilisation; human psychology, biology, sexology, and mortality. Scientific and philosophical, it nevertheless opens with a prayer to Venus – goddess of love, 'power of life' – who can 'hush the winds and scatter the clouds'.[57] Lucretius, celebrating the dispersal of wind and clouds in the wake of Venus's arrival, prefigures the transition in Abercrombie's life from clouds to sex. Abercrombie's Protocol represents Audeguy's belief in – as he writes in *Opera mundi* – 'l'illimité du désir [the limitlessness of desire]' (*O* 39). Similarly, the Roman poet prays that Venus will vanquish her bellicose lover Mars 'by the never-healing wound of love',[58] so that 'tranquil peace' may finally supplant 'barbarous war' among mortals.[59] *La Théorie des nuages* carries a similar message. Who would not prefer the work of Abercrombie – which converts cirrus, cumulus, stratus, and nimbus clouds to a 'cult' of sexuality, a *terra erotica* – to the folly of warring nations, whose technology invented the very particular kind of cloud that rose above Hiroshima, 'un nuage prolongé, jusqu'au sol, d'un pédoncule effilé, un nuage posé sur un pied comme

54 Beuve-Méry, 'Stéphane Audeguy'.
55 Beuve-Méry, 'Stéphane Audeguy'.
56 Audeguy, 'De la nature de quelques choses', 248.
57 Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. by M. F. Smith (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 5.
58 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 34.
59 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 32.

un champignon grotesque [a tall cloud, anchored to the ground by an enormously long stalk: a cloud on a pedestal, like a grotesque mushroom]' (*N* 270; *C* 226)?

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Nikolaj Lübecker

The Individual as Environment: Watching Jean-Claude Rousseau's *La Vallée close* with Lucretius and Simondon

Abstract: Over a ten-year period, the experimental filmmaker Jean-Claude Rousseau visited the Fontaine de Vaucluse, a natural spring in southern France. The result of Rousseau's encounter with these landscapes, *La Vallée close* (1995), explores three processes of becoming. The first is cosmological: the director films the valley and its spring, bringing to life the landscape with its river, vegetation and grotto. The second is meta-filmic: the film thematises its very singular production process, discreetly showing how images combine without any cuts being made. The third is (auto-)biographical: towards the end of its 143-minute running time we understand that the film is a reflection on Rousseau's childhood, and a semi-fictional chronicle of the break-up of a relationship. This chapter draws on Henri Bergson's commentary on Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (explicitly featured in the soundtrack to the film), Félix Guattari's late ecosophical writings, and the process-oriented philosophy of Gilbert Simondon, in order to analyse Rousseau's exploration of the relations between ontology, perception and subjectivity. From Simondon's work, the chapter imports the concept of the *individu-milieu* [the individual as environment]. Simondon's concept helps to explain how worldmaking and filmmaking connect in an individual, bringing it into being, pulling it apart, eventually renewing it. The chapter concludes that the *individu-milieu* is a thoroughly ecological concept with a relevance for ecocriticism that far exceeds the particular case of *La Vallée close*.

In the Vaucluse region of southern France, a peculiar natural phenomenon has fascinated locals and visitors for centuries. If you walk along the river Sorgue, all the way to the end of the valley, you arrive at the Fontaine de Vaucluse. For most of the year, a small stream runs from this grotto into the river. But every spring, a violent gush of water bursts forth, emptying millions of cubic metres into the river. The amount of water and the specific moment of its release do not correlate in any obvious way with the downpour seen throughout winter. Not surprisingly, a rich tradition of folklore has arisen around the fountain. Holy rituals have been performed, dragons and fairies have been spotted, artists and poets have painted and written (Petrarch; Frédéric Mistral), and scientists have attempted to dispel the myths – sometimes with near-fatal consequences (Jacques-Yves Cousteau and his team).

When the French experimental filmmaker Jean-Claude Rousseau visited the Vaucluse in the mid-1980s, he immediately experienced the pull of the valley, in particular the power of the mysterious fountain.[1] Over the subsequent ten years he often returned, bringing along a small Super-8 camera that his parents had given to him during his childhood. He would walk into the valley, find a spot, and try to *meet* the landscape through filming. For a long time, he had no intention of making a film; rather, it was a question of falling into *vision*. Eventually, he wanted to offer this experience – *le saisissement*, the intense emotion of being grasped – to viewers.[2] The result is *La Vallée close* [*The Closed Valley*] (1995), a title that brings out the Latin root of 'Vau-cluse'.

This chapter will focus on the sharing between world and filmmaker that takes place in the *saisissement*, with attention to several key intertexts that help to conceptualise the sharing. Some of these intertexts feature explicitly in the film (Lucretius's *De rerum natura*), while others do not (the writings of Gilbert Simondon and Félix Guattari). My argument will be that Rousseau's film offers a particularly rich example of how art can make us realise that we are (and always have been) what Simondon calls *individus-milieux*, individuals as environments. This chapter further aims to demonstrate that the notion of the *individu-milieu* can operate as a strong eco-theoretical alternative to more dialectical analyses of the relation between man and environment. In order to establish and unpack this argument, we must begin with Rousseau's cinematic method – his praxis.

Rousseau's praxis

La Vallée close shows the beautiful landscape of the Vaucluse, the life of the locals, and the tourists that come to visit the fountain. These tourists walk up the valley,

1 Today, La Fontaine de Vaucluse is less mysterious. Geologists have discovered that the fountain is the only exit point for a huge underground lake measuring some 1100km^2. It is the fourth biggest underground water reservoir in the world, and the biggest in Europe. It goes 308m into the mountainous ground, and every year about 700,000,000 m^3 of water flow from the spring. It is the sheer size of this underground system that explains why measurements of the annual downpour do not straightforwardly lead to an accurate forecast about when the gush of water will emerge. Even though modern technological instruments have allowed scientists to map a substantial portion of the underground area, no human has reached the bottom of the grotto.

2 On Rousseau's method, see Cyril Neyrat and Jean-Claude Rousseau, 'Entretien avec Jean-Claude Rousseau', in *Lancés à travers le vide…: 'La Vallée close'*, ed. by C. Neyrat (Nantes: Capricci, 2009), 18–38.

and stare into the mysterious black grotto. Occasionally, a man – Rousseau – appears: we mainly see him in a small hotel room, and we come to understand that he is a filmmaker based on calls that he makes to someone whom we assume to be his partner, Alain. There are images from the village: cafés, streets, an empty and decrepit building (a school?). Towards the end of the film, it transpires that *La Vallée close* might also be a film (halfway between fiction and documentary) about the end of a love affair – and, possibly, the beginning of a new adventure.

The film is discreet and enigmatic. Its tone is far from the mythic register that many of the folkloric texts about the fountain exploit. The images, beautiful and painterly, are often devoid of human figures. Slowly the various elements begin to crystallise; a world takes form. Just before the end of the film, the voice-over announces: 'ce pourrait être l'histoire de Paul, Guy et Laure [this could be the story of Paul, Guy and Laure]'. The suggestion seems to be that now, *only now* – after 2 hours and 20 minutes – a story is possible, but then a surprise ending throws us in a new direction: clearly Rousseau's interests lie with the forms of life that precede narrative organisation.

In many scenes, Rousseau stays in the same place for a long time, sometimes for the entire 2½ minutes of the 8mm reel. For other scenes, he shoots, turns off the camera, moves, and shoots again. Only once, towards the end of the film, does the camera move: Rousseau shoots from the interior of a car. He explains that his preference for the static shot relates to perspective: inspired by certain paintings by Johannes Vermeer (1632–75), he searches for geometrical compositions that allow the filmmaker and the spectator to travel along the various axes in the image.

Rousseau's camera did not record sound, so he went through the recording process again with a microphone and tape recorder once he had enough images. He did not systematically revisit the locations in which he had filmed, so the sounds and images of the finished work often come from different places. On the whole, the soundtrack is more quotidian and urban than the images: it consists largely of telephone conversations, sounds from the valley, and traffic noise from Paris. These different sounds tend to de-romanticise the landscape. Rousseau describes how certain sound recordings gravitated towards certain images, while other recordings fell away. After his combining of sounds and images, the 2½-minute sequences were put together – again some reels fell away – and the whole film emerged through what could be called a process of coagulation.

Rousseau's method justifies the detailed presentation given here because it is key to understanding the film. Occasionally, the film draws attention to its own compositional principles: the voice-over – Rousseau's voice – speaks about the process of recording and adding sound; Rousseau lets the camera roll to the point

that we watch the film run out, with the codes at the end of the reel made visible. These different elements remind us that we are watching and hearing a filmmaker at work. The key point about Rousseau's method is that *he does not make cuts*. Quite radically, he argues that montage ruins a film. For him, filming is a question of responding to landscapes and to the world. It is not a question of making the world conform to the filmmaker's preconceived ideas (which is why he does not work with a script or a storyboard, either).[3]

In one of his interviews, Rousseau describes the recordings as 'bricks'. This comparison brings to mind the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon's analysis of brick-making,[4] not least because the comparison between recordings and bricks emphasises the material and practical dimension of the filmmaking process.[5] Simondon uses the example of bricks to demonstrate that the relation between form and matter is much more complex than we usually care to think – indeed, that any distinction between the two ultimately collapses. It is easy for Simondon to show that the process of taking form begins long before the clay is poured into the mould. The clay is extracted from an area in which it has been pre-formed by the interplay between earth, water, stones, etc.; it is subsequently purged of air pockets, plants, and other impurities. On the other hand, the mould is not just a form; it is matter. In Simondon's example, it is made of wood. This form/matter is coated in order to release the brick more easily. Simondon includes a third player in this exchange: the brick-maker. He may have assembled the form, in which case he had to take the quality of the wood into consideration (he is likely to have carefully perused the wood before cutting it). He then poured clay into the form – each brick-maker does this in his own way (depending, moreover, on whether he is beginning his day, or is tired from having worked all day). Simondon's complication

3 The soundtrack, on the other hand, partly results from manipulations (such as the overlaying of two tracks). Rousseau distinguishes sharply between images and sounds: 'il n'y a pas de saisissement au niveau du son. C'est bizarre à dire mais ce saisissement est d'ordre géométrique et donc relève de la vue… le son ne se trouve justifié que par sa rencontre avec l'image [there is no *saisissement* at the level of sound. It may sound odd, but this *saisissement* is of a geometrical kind and therefore happens through vision… The sound is justified only when encountering the image]'. Neyrat and Rousseau, 'Entretien avec Jean-Claude Rousseau', 24 [unreferenced translations are mine].

4 Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, ed. by J. Garelli (Grenoble: Millon, 2013), 39–45.

5 Rousseau belongs to what is often called a materialist and formalist tradition of filmmaking that includes directors such as Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. *La Vallée close* is dedicated to Straub and Huillet, and the film was made possible because Straub helped to secure funding.

of this form-versus-matter dichotomy contains other details, but the conclusion is clear: rather than thinking of form versus matter, we should consider the relation between clay, wood, brick-maker, time of day, and so on, as the interplay of forces. A brick is not the result of matter going into a form; it is, rather, something like a 'theatre' of the relation between forces.[6] This theatre begins long before the brick is shaped, and it continues long after the brick has been moulded (we could take into account the 'afterlife' of the brick: how it eventually cracks, disintegrates, etc.). A brick is an activity (in a temporary equilibrium), not a product.

Simondon is not only offering an argument about bricks; his analysis concerns what he calls human and non-human processes of individuation. We shall shortly see how this analysis connects to a conception of subjectivity and ontology. The brick-analysis (and Simondon's philosophy more generally) resonates with *La Vallée close*, insofar as Rousseau presents a form-taking theatre of relations – he gives us the joint emergence of a film, a human figure and a landscape. As with Simondon, Rousseau suggests that the performance of these forces continues long after the film ends. We thus have a kind of reciprocal moulding that affects character/filmmaker, images and environment simultaneously and to such an extent that it becomes impossible (and misguided) to separate the forces. Rousseau undoubtedly aims to present – and to engage the viewer in the co-creation of – this kind of form-taking theatre. This becomes clear if we consider some of the intertexts that the film brings into its process of becoming.

Rousseau's ecologies

Rousseau was inspired by Giorgione's famous Renaissance painting *Tempesta* [*Tempest*] (1506). A reproduction of the painting features in the film, and the footage from Vaucluse ends with a tempest. What fascinates Rousseau in this enigmatic painting is not only the mysterious subject matter (a woman quietly breastfeeding her baby as a storm approaches), but also the complex geometrical composition which – like the Vermeer paintings that he mentions – allows spectators to lose themselves along various axes in the image. In interviews, Rousseau refers to Marcelin Pleynet, who in an article for *Tel Quel* emphasised the vaginal nature of this geometry.[7] Landscape and female body combine in a manner that fascinates Rousseau and links back to the mysterious fountain.[8]

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6 Simondon, *L'Individuation*, 65.

7 Marcelin Pleynet, 'Poésie oui', *Tel Quel* 75 (1978), 73–86.

8 Rousseau and Pleynet are not the only (male) writers and artists to link vaginas and grottos: Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866) was – Rousseau explains – inspired by the

A second intertext – more frequently cited in the film – is an old geography book for primary-school pupils: Jean Brunhes's *Leçons de géographie*.[9] We listen to passages from this book, and thereby learn about the weather, the formation of landscapes, the passing of seasons, and time. The book also explains how to read maps, and it considers the ways in which humans construct a society. In short, the book offers a cosmology and a cartography, putting the world together step by step, and helping children to read it. Rousseau divides his film into chapters that borrow their names from the headings in the schoolbook ('Le Jour et la nuit [Day and Night]'; 'Les Saisons [The Seasons]'; 'Les Voies de communication [Transportation Routes]'), and we are shown the beautiful watercolours that illustrate the book. The director clearly shares the cosmological ambition of the school book (less so, the belief in making the world fully readable). He dedicates his film to 'ma mère qui fut institutrice [my mother who was a primary school teacher]', thereby linking the cosmological schoolbook to the autobiographical dimension, and recalling the breastfeeding mother in Giorgione's painting. In addition, Rousseau includes two 8mm reels showing a mother and child from what appears to be a different setting and time. We are invited to think that this pair could be Rousseau and his mother (in reality, the woman is a cousin living close to the village where Rousseau's mother was born).[10] In one scene, the woman is hanging out the washing, visually responding to a reading from the geography book that explains why the sun and wind can dry our clothes. In these complex and poetic ways, the cosmological, the biographical and the autofictional combine. This kind of interweaving becomes even more apparent if we turn to the richest of Rousseau's intertexts.

In 1884, 24-year-old Henri Bergson published a pedagogical book introducing and paraphrasing Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. One of Bergson's paraphrases is recited on several occasions in Rousseau's film; it functions as a *ritournelle* (Guattari) around which other elements find their place. This text is double-authored (by Lucretius and Bergson) before Rousseau embraces it:[11]

> Le mouvement des atomes est éternel. Lancés à travers le vide, soit par leur propre poids, soit par le choc des autres atomes, ils errent, jusqu'à ce que le hasard les rapproche. Il y en a qui arrivent à se cramponner fortement les uns aux autres; ils forment les corps les

artist's paintings of La Grotte de la Loue in Franche-Comté. On this point, see Jonathan Krell's contribution to the present volume.

9 Jean Brunhes, *Leçons de géographie: cours élémentaire* (Tours: Mame, 1924).

10 Jean-Claude Rousseau, personal email to the author (29 October 2016).

11 Lucretius's cosmological poem does not claim to offer an original worldview; rather, it aims for an accurate and poetic exposition of Epicurus's ontology. The quotation could thus be seen as 'triple-authored' before Rousseau becomes involved.

> plus durs. D'autres, plus mobiles, laissant entre eux de plus grands intervalles, constituent les corps moins denses, l'air et la lumière. Enfin il en est qui n'ont pu se faire admettre dans aucun assemblage: ceux-là s'agitent inutilement dans l'espace, comme ces grains de poussière qu'éclaire sur sa route un rayon de soleil pénétrant dans une chambre obscure.[12]
>
> [The movement of atoms is eternal. Thrown through the void, either by their own weight or by the impact of other atoms they wander until chance brings them together. Some of them manage to cling tightly together; they form the most solid bodies. Others, more mobile, are separated by a greater distance, they form the less dense bodies, air and light. Finally, some have not been able to gain admission to any group: they move around uselessly in space like dust motes lit up by rays of light in a dark room.]

It is a beautiful and poetic text insisting on the eternal movement of atoms (or primordia) in the unending process of world-formation. In the context of the film, the passage works on at least four levels.

First, we should read this passage *metafilmically*, in that it provides a description of Rousseau's creative method. Every image, every sound is an atom. They come to Rousseau without having been called, and he gives himself over to them. In the next phase, the recordings coagulate to form the film, and some of them are pushed towards the margins. Rousseau downplays his own role in this process, suggesting that filming and combining happen independently of him (happen *to* him). In this manner, *assembling* a film (there is no montage) is about having the courage and the discipline to partake in the experience that Simondon described as a form-taking theatre. Expanding on this metafilmic reading, Bergson-Lucretius's description also refers to the viewing experience. During the film's 2½ hours, viewers find that some scenes crystallise into bigger unities, whereas others move towards the periphery. It is true that spectators always see films differently, but the length of *La Vallée close*, the high number of still shots, and Rousseau's preference for long-takes (allowing spectators to drift more freely in the field of vision) intensify this tendency. At this metafilmic level, Rousseau must have been delighted to find a *darkroom* in Bergson-Lucretius's text.

Second, we should read the passage *anthropomorphically*. It seems to explain how *humans* come to be – and how they come together – in the film. It describes the process of individuation that brings forth our central character that becomes a point around which things begin to crystallise. This anthropomorphic reading is stimulated by Bergson's vocabulary; his verb choice, in particular, ascribes

12 Henri Bergson, *Extraits de Lucrèce, avec un commentaire, des notes et une étude sur la poésie, la philosophie, la physique, le texte et la langue de Lucrèce* (Paris: Delagrave, 1884), 27; translation transcribed from subtitles of Jean-Claude Rousseau, *La Vallée close* (Nantes: Capricci, 2009).

human intentionality and agency to the atoms. We thus feel sad for those atoms 'qui n'ont pu se faire admettre dans aucun assemblage [who have not been able to gain admission to any group]', and we are touched and immediately relate to those that strive to 'se cramponner fortement les uns aux autres [manage to cling tightly together]'. Similarly, we feel sad for Rousseau's human figure as he seems to lose his lover (this loss, we come to understand, explains the significance of the recurrent shots of the empty bed). Despite the rigorous refusal of montage, and despite the interest in nature and empty landscapes, the film does not seek to move beyond the human; rather, it presents the process of becoming-human in such a way that we understand that we are always already inseparable from the world. *La Vallée close* thus offers an alternative to conventional narrative films that generally invite us to think of the world as a stage on which human dramas play out.

Third, we should read the passage as it wishes to be read: as an *ontology* about eternal movements in infinite space, the composition and decomposition of bodies. Here, the universe is a process of formation and transformation, an infinite play between void and matter that brings about densities and textures (until – according to Lucretius – everything necessarily ends). In the context of the film, the quotation refers to everything that we see: the many ancient rock formations, the tourist bars, the beautiful trees, the abandoned building, the water springing forth from another 'darkroom' – the grotto of the fountain. Like many other cosmologies (such as Brunhes's geography book and Lucretius's poem), the film unfolds in deep time and in the present – it blends personal and geological history. We see the natural elements in shifting light; in different seasons; in grainy, dusty images. Staring into the dark grotto, we seem to move beyond the temporal as the image disappears. Towards the end, the film becomes explicitly cosmic: after the tempest, Rousseau overlays his images from the Vaucluse with the soundtrack of a televisual programme about space travel. The astronauts are sleeping, the voiceover recites the names of the places that they would have seen if awake, and a romantic orchestral piece plays underneath the solemn voice of the televisual presenter. For the first (and the only) time, the images move: Rousseau shoots from the front seat of a car as he drives through a small town at dawn. The scene links the town, the sky, and the cosmos, before culminating in a shot of the rising sun that coincides with the mention of a sunrise on the soundtrack.

It should be underlined that Rousseau's adaptation of Bergson-Lucretius serves to blur the relation between the metafilmic, the anthropomorphic, and the ontological. *La Vallée close* explores filmmaking, lovemaking, worldmaking – and the many different ways in which these processes connect in an individual, bringing it into being, pulling it apart, possibly renewing it, and producing a film in the process. It is a melancholic film, but the spectatorial experience of being pulled

into this process of coagulation softens the melancholy: although the film never closes on itself, it comes together in beautiful, dynamic and satisfying patterns.

The individual as environment

My fourth observation about the quotation from Bergson-Lucretius relates to perception. Watching the grainy Super-8 images while listening to Bergson's poetic paraphrase, the spectator forgets that the dancing dust motes in the sunlight are a simile ('*comme* ces grains de poussière [*like* dust motes]'). In many shots, we almost seem to watch atoms. In this manner, the linguistic image and the grain of the Super-8 help us to 'see' (i.e. imagine) an invisible world; they produce reality for the spectator. This link between image (verbal, visual and mental) and ontology not only recalls the aforementioned metafilmic and ontological readings, but also speaks more generally about our perceptual engagement with the world *and* about how perception leads to our entanglement in this world. In a key passage from one of his interviews, Rousseau insists on this point, explaining that 'le cinéma […] peut donner à voir (et à entendre) les éléments et *nous saisir dans la perception* de leurs correspondances [cinema […] can make us see (and hear) the elements, and it *can seize us as we perceive* their correspondences]'.[13] By seeing and filming – by imagining – we become entangled in the texture of this world, and thereby reinvent both ourselves and the world. Or more precisely: we discover that we were always already caught up in the texture of the world.

Rousseau's conception of the image strikingly resembles that of Simondon. In his lectures on 'Imagination et invention', Simondon emphasises that 'images' (a term that also refers to mental images) are representations and actors: they make us see the world, and they help us to realise that we are caught in the world through this perception. For Simondon and Rousseau, the image is an active player in a process of subjectification and world-production that is always ongoing.

It should be acknowledged that bringing Rousseau, Lucretius (as filtered through Bergson), and Simondon together is somewhat problematic. In some passages – most obviously at the beginning of *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*[14] – Simondon associates Lucretius with precisely the kind of 'matérialisme atomistique strict [strict atomic materialism]'

13 David Yon and Jean-Claude Rousseau, 'Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Rousseau', *Dérives* 1 (2007), 23–44 (44) [my emphasis].

14 Simondon, *L'Individuation*, 23.

from which he wants to move away.[15] To put it simply, Simondon argues that Lucretius begins with atoms that are subsequently animated by various processes, whereas he begins with processes that can subsequently take form as temporary assemblages. For Simondon, Lucretius is too mechanistic; his assemblages are insufficiently fluid. In a complex – but crucial – passage, Simondon presents his alternative philosophy of individuation:

> Nous voudrions montrer qu'il faut opérer un retournement dans la recherche du principe d'individuation, en considérant comme primordiale l'opération d'individuation à partir de laquelle l'individu vient à exister et dont il reflète le déroulement, le régime, et enfin les modalités, dans ses caractères. L'individu serait alors saisi comme réalité relative, une certaine phase de l'être qui suppose avant elle une réalité préindividuelle, et qui, même après l'individuation, n'existe pas toute seule, car l'individuation n'épuise pas d'un seul coup les potentiels de la réalité préindividuelle, et d'autre part, ce que l'individuation fait apparaître n'est pas seulement l'individu mais le couple individu-milieu. L'individu est ainsi relatif en deux sens: parce qu'il n'est pas tout l'être, et parce qu'il résulte d'un état de l'être en lequel il n'existait ni comme individu ni comme principe d'individuation.[16]
>
> [It is my intention to demonstrate the need for a complete change in the general approach to the principle governing individuation. The process of individuation must be considered primordial, for it is this process that at once brings the individual into being and determines all the distinguishing characteristics of its development, organisation and modalities. Thus, the individual is to be understood as having a relative reality, occupying only a certain phase of the whole being in question – a phase that therefore carries the implication of a preceding preindividual state, and that, even after individuation, does not exist in isolation, since individuation does not exhaust in the single act of its appearance all the potentials embedded in the preindividual state. Individuation, moreover, not only brings the individual to light but also the individual-milieu dyad. In this way, the individual possesses only a relative existence in two senses: because it does not represent the totality of the being, and because it is merely the result of a phase in the being's development during which it existed neither in the form of an individual nor as the principle of individuation.]

In Anne Sauvagnargues's terms, Simondon suggests that we must replace an ontology of being (like the one that can be found in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*) with an ontology of becoming.[17] We must begin not with individuals, but with

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15 Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965–66)*, ed. by N. Simondon (Chatou: La Transparence, 2008), 47.

16 Simondon, *L'Individuation*, 24–5; 'The Genesis of the Individual', trans. by M. Cohen and S. Kwinter, in *Incorporations*, ed. by J. Crary and S. Kwinter (New York, NY: Zone, 1992), 297–319 (300).

17 Anne Sauvagnargues, 'Crystals and Membranes: Individuation and Temporality', trans. by J. Roffe, in *Gilbert Simondon: Being and Technology*, ed. by A. De Boever, A. Murray, J. Roffe and A. Woodward (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 57–70 (58).

the 'preindividual reality' that can bring into existence that 'relative reality' that the 'individual' is. This leads to the introduction of the central category of the 'individu-milieu'. This notion is commonly translated as the 'individual-milieu', but we can also think of it as the 'individual *as* environment'. Simondon's 'individual' is never really an individual, but always the temporary effect of multiple ongoing processes of individuation. It is worth mentioning that Simondon adds a footnote to the sentence introducing the 'individu-milieu', which stipulates that the latter part of this hyphenated concept should not be conceived as homogenous:

> Le milieu peut d'ailleurs ne pas être simple, homogène, uniforme, mais être originellement traversé par une tension entre deux ordres extrêmes de grandeur que médiatise l'individu quand il vient à être.[18]
>
> [Moreover, it is quite possible that the milieu is not to be thought of as a simple, homogeneous and uniform phenomenon, but something that, from its very inception, is characterised by a tension in force between two extreme orders of magnitude that mediatise the individual when it comes into being.]

In other words, we find a radical insistence on relationality (everything is relation) and process (everything is movement). Simondon pushes these points so far that a gap towards Lucretius and atomism is opened.

The size of this gap, however, remains debatable. Michel Serres has offered a reading that brings Lucretius closer to Simondon, insisting on the fact that we must not read *De rerum natura* as a poem about the mechanics of solid bodies, but as a poem about fluid bodies. Serres argues that this change of perspective allows us to make sense of the famous passage on the *clinamen* [unpredictable movement of atoms], and links the work more logically to ancient physics. Serres's reading of Lucretius is thus more process-oriented than atomistic.

Another way to reduce the distance between Simondon and Lucretius is to recall Lucretius's famous understanding of perceptual and mental images. According to this understanding, the atoms on the surface of objects quiver, and some of them are cast off, thereby forming what Lucretius (in Martin Ferguson Smith's translation) describes as 'extraordinarily fine films shaped like the object from which they emanate'.[19] These 'filmy images' (in Greek, *εἴδωλα*/*eidola*; in Latin, *simulacra*) enter our minds through the eyes: the simulacra press on the air, and 'this air then glides through our eyeballs, brushes through our pupils, and passes

18 Simondon, *L'Individuation*, 25; 'The Genesis of the Individual', 300n1.

19 Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. by M. F. Smith (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), xxvii.

on'.[20] The im-pression formed in our minds (the image) results from the pressure that the particles of the filmy images exert on the mind.

Lucretius's universe is remarkable for its multi-layered thickness. Lucretius explains that 'from all objects emanations flow away and are discharged in all directions on every side'.[21] These emanations are not only visual, but also olfactory and acoustic, and they manifest themselves as heat. Here we are, as in the aforementioned quotation from David Yon's interview with Rousseau, *caught up in the world through our perception of the elements*. The world appears as a thick multisensory ecosystem that constantly washes over (and through) our bodies. In his theory of communication, Michel Serres explains:

> Le monde n'est plus à distance, il est à proximité, comme tangible […]. Savoir n'est pas voir, c'est prendre contact, directement, avec les choses: et d'ailleurs elles viennent à nous.[22]
>
> [The world is no longer in the distance; it is nearby, tangible […]. Knowledge is not seeing, it is entering into contact, directly, with things; and besides, they come to us.]

Similarly, Jane Bennett describes Lucretian perception as 'the crash-mixing of (1) bits of free-floating primordia and (2) the primordia (temporarily) congealing as our body'.[23] With such accounts of Lucretian perception, the distance to Simondon is not insurmountable.

Watching *La Vallée close* is a processual experience, rather than an atomistic one. When Rousseau refuses montage, he seeks to escape the subject-object dichotomies that make the film director an origin; instead, he attempts to adjust to the role as an 'individu-milieu'. We might say that William James, one of the key influences on Simondon's work, brings together this processual experience and the refusal of montage. He explains that 'whatever we distinguish and isolate conceptually is found perceptually to telescope and compenetrate and diffuse into its neighbours. The cuts we make are purely ideal'.[24] In this sense, montage – the cut (a term that James uses without reference to film) – belies the ecological nature of existence. Cuts are not only an aesthetic mistake, but also an ontological mistake, and it is this mistake that Rousseau seeks to avoid. He seems to work, instead, from

20 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 107.

21 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 106.

22 Michel Serres, *La Naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce: fleuves et turbulences* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), 134; *The Birth of Physics*, trans. by J. Hawkes (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), 107.

23 Jane Bennett, 'De Rerum Natura', *Strategies* 13.1 (2000), 9–22 (16).

24 William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. by E. K. Suckiel (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 49–50.

the principle that 'matter is a *form-taking activity*' (as Brian Massumi writes about Simondon's ontology),[25] and that the filmmaker's role is to carry this activity to spectators until they experience the form-taking of *le saisissement*.

Beauty and mental ecology

Having presented the major strands in the film (the metafilmic, the autobiographical, the cosmological, and the perceptual), and having insisted on the ways in which these strands combine to produce an 'individual as environment' (bringing it together, letting it disperse, including the spectator in the process), it is clear that Rousseau's film moves in a territory that recalls Félix Guattari's theorisations of interconnected ecological spheres. Guattari names three of these: the mental (including artistic and technological invention), the environmental, and the sociopolitical. The various 'ecologies' mentioned earlier in this chapter do not need to be excluded from Guattari's systematisations. Thinking Rousseau in relation to Guattari brings out two important points about *La Vallée close*.

The first is a point of contrast: Rousseau is much less concerned with politics than Guattari. *La Vallée close* explores intimate relations between Alain and the filmmaker, and it uses the geographical textbook to reflect laconically on the building of societies, but there is no mention of politics in the more conventional sense of the word. While it can be said that the film presents a vision of the non-separability of individuals and the world, and that such a vision necessarily has a political dimension, the political is subsumed within the 'poetic' in the sense of *poiesis*, creation.

The second is a point of similarity: Rousseau and Guattari share a strong attentiveness to the ways in which subjectivity is produced, and to the role that art plays in this ongoing production. In *La Vallée close*, this interest connects to the semi-autobiographical: we often see and hear the director, we see the woman whom we presume to be his mother, and we get the sense of a love story. Guattari similarly focusses on art and the production of subjectivity, describing art as 'un foyer de production ontologique [a hub of ontological production]'.[26] At the end of *Chaosmose*, he explains:

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25 Brian Massumi, Arne De Boever, Alex Murray, and Jon Roffe, '"Technical Mentality" Revisited', in *Gilbert Simondon: Being and Technology*, ed. by A. De Boever, A. Murray, J. Roffe and A. Woodward (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 19–36 (31).

26 Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que l'écosophie?*, ed. by S. Nadaud (Paris: Lignes, 2013), 169–70; 294.

> L'œuvre d'art, pour ceux qui en ont l'usage, est une entreprise de décadrage, de rupture de sens, de prolifération baroque ou d'appauvrissement extrême, qui entraîne le sujet vers une recréation et une réinvention de lui-même.[27]
>
> [The work of art, for those who use it, is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subjects itself.]

But against which criteria do we measure this creative process, this production of subjectivity?

How do we ensure that the artistic process leads to a reinvention rather than a reification of subjectivity? Putting this question to Rousseau's film, two ideals emerge. The first is the commitment to what Lucretius, Bergson and Simondon present as incessant movement. This movement is intensified in the potentially misleading term *saisissement*, a moment that crystallises and *overflows* the individual human, thereby keeping the processes of subjectification open. The second ideal that governs the production of subjectivity sounds more romantic: Rousseau promotes *beauty*. Like Elaine Scarry, he suggests that beauty can help to reorganise the world in less anthropocentric ways.[28] He explains that 'la beauté ne se voit que dans la contemplation, jamais dans l'observation. Elle ne s'observe pas. Elle ne se détaille pas [beauty can only be contemplated, never observed. It cannot be kept in check. It cannot be broken into distinct parts'].[29] This means that beauty is *non-objectifiable* insofar as it is never the *object* of a gaze – it works on us: 'la beauté […], l'art […], c'est plutôt quelque chose qui se subit [beauty […], art […], is, rather, something that is undergone]'.[30] The beautiful images that seize the filmmaker (and the spectator) are presented as a rupture, and 'cette rupture, c'est être transporté dans le vide [this rupture is to be transported into empty space]'.[31] One could therefore argue that Rousseau's two ideals – process and beauty – are one and the same: beauty is propulsive, throwing us through empty space until we come together in new constellations. With this understanding of

27 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmose* (Paris: Galilée, 1992), 181; *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by P. Bains and J. Pefanis (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 131.

28 'When we come upon beautiful things […] it is not that we cease to stand at the center of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us'. Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 110–12.

29 Yon and Rousseau, 'Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Rousseau', 24.

30 Yon and Rousseau, 'Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Rousseau', 24.

31 Yon and Rousseau, 'Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Rousseau', 29.

beauty, we are invited to conclude that for Rousseau an artistic experience – an encounter with beauty – is almost by necessity an ecological experience. It is a chance to experience what it means to be an *individu-milieu*. It is a chance to sense, in a *saisissement* which is simultaneously embodied and disembodying, that we are always already *individus-milieux*.

Conclusions: art as ecology

The present discussion of Jean-Claude Rousseau's *La Vallée close* has attempted to make two general points. On the one hand, it has argued for the ecocritical potential of Simondon's concept of the *individu-milieu*. One way to present this concept is to stress how Simondon invites us to avoid the connector *and* (as in 'man *and* environment'), and to prefer the connector *as*; how the prefix *inter-* (between) is marginalised by the prefix *trans-* (through); how Simondon, through such shifts of balance, steers us away from dialectic investigations of the relationship between man and environment, suggesting that man – and other environments – might best be understood as *une certaine phase de l'être* [a certain phase of being]. Although Simondon's notion of the *individu-milieu* is part of a theory of individuation (rather than an eco-theory in a narrow sense of the term), it is obvious that – with this emphasis on the non-separability of man and environment – the individu-milieu anticipates forms of thinking that crystallise around the notion of the Anthropocene.

Inspired by Guattari, the present chapter furthermore sought to address the question of how art (*La Vallée close*) can be situated in relation to ideas about the *individu-milieu*. My argument was that Rousseau's art (but not only his) is a fundamentally ecological experience. As explained in the latter stages of the chapter, Rousseau's film is concerned with beauty. Beauty allows the experience of the *saisissement*, and the *saisissement* is coextensive with the realisation of being an *individu-milieu*. Beauty, then, is not about harmonious landscapes; rather, it is – as Scarry suggested – associated with the experience of being removed from the centre of our own world. But Rousseau's art is not only about the *saisissement*. It is equally important to remember that filmmaking – and art in general – is a hands-on activity. The way in which Rousseau shoots, records and assembles the images and sounds for his film – that is to say, Rousseau's *praxis* – complicates all form-versus-matter and subject-versus-object dichotomies. Putting the film together step by step – whether this happens through the process of recording and assembling the footage, or through the activity of viewing the film – allows us to experience how we are caught up in the world. This is not an argument about media specificity – filmic, linguistic

and mental images invite us to conclude (as the passages from Bergson/Lucretius, Simondon and Guattari suggested) that the world is a thick, multilayered universe from which no disentanglement is possible. Images and artworks – perception and imagination – bring us right into the hyphenation of Simondon's *individu-milieu*.

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Part VI
Twenty-First-Century Natural Limits

Anaïs Boulard

Writing (on) Environmental Catastrophes: The End of the World in Éric Chevillard's *Sans l'orang-outan* and Michel Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île*

Abstract: As a result of industrialisation and modern ways of living, today's world has seen many changes. According to geologists, such changes are so significant that our current geological epoch, the Holocene, has given way to another one, the Anthropocene. This scientific hypothesis gives rise to the sense that the world has entered the last stage of a global disease, with human activity threatening the very survival of the planet. As the world faces overwhelming environmental issues, western literature addresses the possibility of the end of the world through the description of catastrophes. The idea that our planet has reached its limits is a trait of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres that have become mainstream in North American literature. Arising from an eschatological anxiety related to an era of ecological phenomena, this literature, which is read by the general public as much as academics, invokes images of natural and urban destruction, human misery and loneliness. This chapter focusses on the writing of environmental catastrophes and the end of the world in two French novels: Michel Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île* [*The Possibility of an Island*] (2005) and Éric Chevillard's *Sans l'orang-outan* [*Without the Orangutan*] (2007). These contemporary texts imagine the world before and after one or several catastrophes, making the narrative oscillate between pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic times. The description of a world threatened or destroyed by an environmental catastrophe uses common images, such as the destruction of cities and nature, or the extinction of animals and humans, but this chapter demonstrates that a particularity emerges from the narratives themselves in the form of elaborate diegesis and aesthetics. The originality of these two texts lies in the writing itself, which is notably enriched by the distance between the plot and the narrators, between seriousness and irony, between reality and dreams.

Literature of, and in, the Anthropocene: representing the 'sense of an ending' in contemporary fiction

Many scientists agree that human activities have so significantly marked the Earth that we have entered a whole new geological period – the Anthropocene. Environmental issues have become all-important in today's world; no-one can ignore the urgency and the seriousness of our ecological crisis. As a species, we are polluting the natural and urban spaces in which we live. Our industrial activities

and consumption of fossil fuels have resulted in contaminated water supplies, less breathable air, increasing atmospheric temperatures, and rising sea-levels that, in the long term, threaten to flood our cities. Such issues have found vibrant expression in cultural texts that explore the theme of the Anthropocene in light of contemporary climatic challenges.

Ecocriticism actively studies environmental issues as they are represented in cultural production. Having emerged in the United States towards the end of the twentieth century, ecocriticism continues to grow, and is constantly redefining itself. A network of influential researchers, writers and intellectuals – connected through the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) – has helped to promote the analysis of literary texts through an environmental lens. Lawrence Buell, a key figure in the founding of the ecocritical movement, states that 'climate change anxiety' has recently become a very important object of study.[1] Ecocriticism often focusses on literary works that are described by Buell as 'environmental literature', and by Christian Chelebourg as *écofictions*[2] – texts in which a view of an ecological crisis is presented, or in which environmental issues are explored from a variety of perspectives. Although studies of environmental issues in literature have their roots in North America, the movement has recently become more global.

In France, ecocritical approaches are a recent phenomenon, as Stephanie Posthumus has noted.[3] Scholars such as Chelebourg, Nathalie Blanc, Pierre Schoentjes and Alain Suberchicot have emerged as pioneers in reading literary texts from an ecological perspective.[4] French philosophers such as Catherine Larrère, Bruno Latour and Michel Serres have developed models for thinking ecologically about

1 Lawrence Buell, 'Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends', *Qui Parle* 19.2 (2011), 87–115 (111).

2 Christian Chelebourg, *Les Écofictions: mythologies de la fin du monde* (Brussels: Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2012). It should be noted that Chelebourg includes many forms of fiction in his definition of 'écofiction', such as documentaries and Hollywood films – his terminology is not exclusive to literary narratives.

3 Stephanie Posthumus, 'État des lieux de la pensée écocritique française', *Ecozon@* 1.1 (2010), 148–54; 'Penser l'imagination environnementale française sous le signe de la différence', *Raison publique* 17 (2012), 15–31.

4 Nathalie Blanc, *Les Formes de l'environnement: manifeste pour une esthétique politique* (Geneva: Mētis, 2016); Pierre Schoentjes, *Ce qui a lieu: essai d'écopoétique* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2015); Alain Suberchicot, *Littérature et environnement: pour une écocritique comparée* (Paris: Champion, 2012).

humans' relationships to the environment.[5] At the University of Angers, the nascent ÉcoLitt programme (2014-) is investigating the close ties between ecological issues and non-anglophone literature in a large corpus of literary works, including children's fiction.[6]

Over the last thirty years, concern about the environment has been addressed in fictional works that draw from an eschatological imaginary.[7] In *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode explains the deep fascination with an apocalyptic imaginary at the end of the twentieth century, and the beginning of the twenty-first.[8] According to Kermode, our fascination with images of destruction reflects the resurgence of a collective trauma related to the horrific historical moments of the last century in the West (especially two World Wars, numerous natural disasters, and increasing ecological concerns). It thus seems important to address anxieties caused by our alarming situation, and narratives describing the end of the world are among the most common works of environmental fiction. Such works usually describe the world after a catastrophe, which is often directly related to human actions. The narrative of catastrophe, whether natural or artificial, serves to epitomise concerns about what could happen to our planet in the near future.

This theme frequently appears in North American depictions of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic worlds. Films such as Franklin J. Schaffner's *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) illustrate our systematic exploitation of the world and its irreversible consequences. Speculative fiction has emerged as an evolving genre that deals with scenarios of what could happen to the world, and a very rich imaginary of the environmental crisis has emerged in North America. In novels such as American writer Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–13), the narrative centres on environmental disasters and their aftermath. According

5 Catherine Larrère, *Les Philosophies de l'environnement* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997); Bruno Latour, *Politiques de la nature: comment faire entrer les sciences en démocratie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999); Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992).

6 ÉcoLitt, 'ÉcoLitt ou l'empreinte de l'écologie dans la littérature', *Université d'Angers* (19 February 2015), <http://ecolitt.univ-angers.fr/fr/index.html> [accessed 26 May 2016].

7 I use 'imaginary' to translate the French *imaginaire*, which refers to a collection of images epitomising one historical and social group's concerns or interests, as well as the mental and verbal representations at the heart of these images.

8 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1967).

to sociologist John Wiley Nelson, 'apocalyptic [discourse] is as American as the hot-dog'.[9]

Some French novels explore the idea of an environmental catastrophe entailing the destruction of the world. Since René Barjavel's masterpiece *Ravage* [*Ashes, Ashes*] (1943),[10] which describes a futuristic world in which the catastrophic event is the disappearance of electricity, several French novels have appeared that revolve around a catastrophe.[11] This raises the question of whether (post)apocalyptic[12] writing and fiction in France has its own set of specific traits, or whether it is an imitation of the North American tradition. For clarification of the matter, let us turn to two contemporary French novels that imagine a catastrophe followed by a number of other disasters: Michel Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île* [*The Possibility of an Island*] (2005) and Éric Chevillard's *Sans l'orang-outan* [*Without the Orangutan*] (2007). The depiction of catastrophe and post-apocalyptic chaos in these books provides an important commentary on climate change and the radical modification of humankind, and the two narratives shed light on the specificity of French fictional representations of future environmental catastrophes.

Unfathomable catastrophes

It is important to ponder why authors such as Houellebecq and Chevillard, who are French writers of general fiction (as opposed to fantasy or science fiction), decide to dedicate a novel to the question of environmental change in an eschatological context. A focus on the worst possible outcome can be seen as a way of emphasising 'the sense of an ending' that is so present in our contemporary social imaginary. Insisting on chaotic, frightening possibilities for our world can be a way of dealing with the many traumas described by Kermode, and writing about

9 John W. Nelson, 'The Apocalyptic Vision in American Popular Culture', in *The Apocalyptic Vision in America: Interdisciplinary Essays on Myth and Culture*, ed. by L. P. Zamora (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), 154–82 (179). See also Ian McEwan, 'The Day of Judgment', *The Guardian* (31 May 2008), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/may/31/fiction.philosophy> [accessed 25 May 2016]

10 René Barjavel, *Ravage* (Paris: Denoël, 1943).

11 Literary works such as those by Pierre Boulle (1912–94), Pierre Bordage (1955-) and Jean-Marc Ligny (1956-) are classified as science fiction. This chapter will not discuss the complex question of genres; instead, it will focus on two novels that are not normally associated with science fiction.

12 The term '(post)apocalyptic' is used in this chapter as a way of defining catastrophic narratives that include contemporaneous time (apocalyptic) and subsequent time (post-apocalyptic).

life on Earth being threatened can be reassuring for a writer and a reader. In *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* [*The Principle of Responsibility*] (1979), philosopher Hans Jonas recommends: 'in dubio pro malo [when in doubt, expect the worst]'.[13] Jonas suggests that we should focus on the possibility of the worst outcome, rather than the best, and this is precisely what the fictions of Houellebecq and Chevillard do: they invent a fictional world that represents one of the worst possible scenarios for our future.

In Houellebecq's and Chevillard's novels, the narrative alternates between two settings: before the catastrophe, and the aftermath of the event. In *La Possibilité d'une île*, three characters narrate the plot: Daniel1, from the current era, and two clones of him from 3000 years in the future, Daniel24 and Daniel25 – who are 'neohumans'. Such a setup splits the fictional temporality into two very distinct segments. The first temporality is one of imminence, as a major disaster appears to be impending. Daniel1 is the perfect illustration of this declining world: a sexist, racist and misanthropic character, he symbolises the social and political deviances of Western society. Such a depiction can be interpreted as a message about the more general degradation of the world. The second temporality, which is narrated by Daniel24 and Daniel25, shows the consequences of the catastrophe following the death of Daniel1.

Chevillard's narrative in *Sans l'orang-outan* begins with Albert Moindre's dismay after the death of the last two orangutans on Earth – Bagus and Mina. Albert – an employee at the zoo where Bagus and Mina died after contracting a cold – has a feeling of foreboding that this tragic extinction will trigger further cataclysmic changes. He is right: in the second segment of the novel, the narrative voice (which might not pertain to Albert, since it uses 'nous [we]' instead of the first part's use of 'je [I]') describes an unbalanced post-apocalyptic world directly resulting from the primates' death. Houellebecq's and Chevillard's narratives thus describe the start and the aftermath of the catastrophes.

The catastrophe initiates the disruption of the world and the transformation of humankind, yet it is difficult to grasp. Unlike Laurent Gaudé's *Ouragan* (2010),[14] which describes the catastrophe of hurricane Katrina, Houellebecq's and Chevillard's novels do not insist on the catastrophe as a concrete and unique event. For Albert Moindre, the death of Bagus and Mina signals the end of the world: 'on va réagir avant d'en arriver là, je me disais, à ce désastre, à cette apocalypse,

13 Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1979), 74 [unreferenced translations are mine].

14 Laurent Gaudé, *Ouragan* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010).

il existe certainement un moyen [we are going to react before such a thing happens, I was thinking, before this disaster, this apocalypse; there has to be a way]'.[15] The character defines the death of the primates as the ultimate disaster. For him, such a tragedy is not just a catastrophe, but '*la* catastrophe [*the* catastrophe]' (*C* 196 [my emphasis]) that will lead to the end of the world. The use of the definite article suggests a hierarchy in catastrophes: the death of Bagus and Mina is the most tragic and serious of all. The seriousness of this disaster is measured in the second part of the novel, in which the narrator describes a world of misery and destruction, but factual details of the events that led to total chaos are missing from the narrative, and we never know why and how the death of two primates precipitated the end of the world. The catastrophe remains unfathomable, impossible to grasp. In *La Possibilité d'une île*, several serious catastrophes happen shortly after human cloning techniques are developed by the Elohimite cult, in which Daniel1 passively participates, but we lack clarification about the reasons for the catastrophes, their nature, and – most importantly – how they happened. Although we understand that a general devastation of the planet by humans is responsible for the catastrophes, the exact context of their occurrence is never specified. The disastrous events are not included in the narratives: they are inexplicably absent, and their temporality alternates only between *before* and *after*. The objective of the two novels is to focus on the ubiquity of fear and a sense of apocalypse, rather than the catastrophe in itself.

Describing post-apocalyptic worlds: traditional images of catastrophe

Chevillard's and Houellebecq's catastrophe narratives – more precisely, about everything apart from the catastrophes – include themes often used in post-apocalyptic novels. A harsh post-apocalyptic environment is an important theme in such narratives. The world of the aftermath is generally hostile to humans: the new environment is so disturbed and unbalanced that it is not a safe habitat. In addition, humans are constantly threatened by further devastating environmental disasters.

In *La Possibilité d'une île*, the neohumans recount the many environmental disasters that have re-shaped the face of the Earth since the death of Daniel1, and the beginning of the apocalypse. Daniel25 states that 'le début de l'effondrement des civilisations humaines fut marqué par des variations thermiques aussi soudaines

15 Éric Chevillard, *Sans l'orang-outan* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), 9 [hereafter *C*].

qu'imprévisibles [the collapse of human civilisation was marked by temperature variations that were as sudden as they were unpredictable],'[16] and Daniel24 mentions events such as the 'Grand Assèchement [Great Drying-Up]' (*H* 114; *B* 95) – the capitalised adjective and noun evoke a geological period.[17] In *Sans l'orang-outan*, Albert Moindre and the other survivors have to live in near arctic conditions after the primates' death: 'comment ne pas déraper sur cette banquise? […] La glace brûle. Nous cuisons à petit feu en tremblant de froid [how not to slip on this floe? […] The ice burns. We are slowly cooking while shivering of cold]' (*C* 86). The ice on which they have to walk is so cold that it produces a burning sensation. Such extreme weather is life-threatening – the narrator states that it can petrify human bodies, turning them into statues: 'si nous ne réagissons pas aussitôt, nous mourons pétrifiés en quelques secondes, nous augmentons le nombre de statues qui forment la population majoritaire sur les terres abandonnées [if we do not react quickly enough, we die from petrifaction in a few seconds; we add to the number of statues that form the biggest population on the abandoned lands]' (*C* 86). In both novels, the world is too cold and too warm, too dry and too wet for the human species. This raises the issue of the effects of drastic atmospheric changes, one of the main themes of post-apocalyptic literature.

The catastrophes lead to a post-human world, in which the human species has nearly disappeared, and a different kind of humanity has emerged. In Chevillard's novel, humans have not been fully decimated, and the survivors are condemned to live 'sur les terres abandonnées [on the abandoned lands]' (*C* 84). In Houellebecq's novel, the neohumans live in sealed individual cells, beyond which roam *les sauvages* [the savages] – humans who have not benefitted from genetic manipulations, and who are consequently portrayed as a repellent, barely surviving *residue* of humanity. The neohumans, by contrast, embody the ideal posthuman creature, a better version of humanity. Though humans have not completely disappeared from the planet, it is obvious that the tenets of humanity have.

Surviving in a destroyed and hostile world is difficult for the characters in both stories. Sometimes, the fear of dying is superseded by a deep feeling of nostalgia, triggered by the survivors' dismay in the face of a world in which they no longer belong. Even Daniel25 experiences it: 'je me surpris une fois de plus à être saisi par un accès de nostalgie en songeant aux fêtes, aux banquets, aux réunions de famille

16 Michel Houellebecq, *La Possibilité d'une île* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 447 [hereafter *H*]; *The Possibility of an Island*, trans. by G. Bowd (London: Phoenix, 2006), 389 [hereafter *B*].

17 The disruption of human life on Earth by climatic malfunctions is a leitmotif in eschatological contemporary novels, one so important that it has its own sub-genre – 'climate-fiction', or 'cli-fi'.

qui devaient se dérouler là bien des siècles auparavant [I found myself once again seized by a fit of nostalgia as I thought of the parties, the dinners and the family reunions that must have taken place there many centuries beforehand]' (*H* 445; *B* 389). The experience of nostalgia on the part of the neohuman – programmed to be emotionless – suggests that such a deep feeling is somehow encoded in human (thus posthuman) DNA. In *Sans l'orang-outan*, Albert is nostalgic about the time when orangutans lived on the planet: 'cette perte […] nous a laissés à jamais inconsolables [this loss […] has left us forever inconsolable]' (*C* 71). The yearning is for the world before the apocalypse, even though it was already ruined:

> Ainsi nous l'aimions, ce monde anéanti qui nous semblait pourtant inhabitable, dont nous ne cessions de déplacer les pierres: au moins n'était-il pas frappé d'un deuil irrémédiable. (*C* 64)
>
> [Thus we loved it, that devastated world, even if it seemed uninhabitable to us, that world whose rocks we wound not stop moving: at least it was not affected by a sense of irreversible loss.]

The survivors do not pine for an idealised world, but for the very damaged one in which we live today.

Along with this deep feeling of nostalgia, the characters feel a profound *ennui*, resulting from the lack of purpose in their survival amid a devastated world. The neohumans' only occupation is reading and commenting on Daniel1's autobiography, and on previous clones' commentaries. The lack of excitement explains Daniel25's decision to leave his cell. In Chevillard's work, the survivors are consumed by boredom: 'l'ennui s'abat sur les villes et les campagnes indépendamment des contingences et des circonstances du jour [*ennui* is assailing the cities and the lands without regard for the contingencies and the circumstances of the day]' (*C* 64).

The worlds described by Houellebecq and Chevillard are dystopian. In both novels, the environmental catastrophes coincide with the establishment of oppressive governments or forms of authority: in *Sans l'orang-outan*, Albert briefly mentions an oppressive army; in the post-apocalyptic world of Houellebecq's novel, the neohumans are obliged to stay in their cells, taking orders from the mysterious and repressive 'Sœur Suprême [Supreme Sister]' (*H* 424; *B* 370) and 'Sept Fondateurs [Seven Founders]' (*H* 424; *B* 370), about whom the reader learns practically nothing.

These themes often appear in environmental catastrophe narratives in North America, and the translation of an American imaginary into French fiction is not surprising on a thematic level. Such imitation does not mean, however, that uniqueness is not found in French apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels. Let us consider the formal and structural elements of the novels by Chevillard and Houellebecq in order to identify their specificities.

Challenging narratives: the originality of French writing

When analysing French novels about environmental catastrophe, attention should be drawn to the diegesis[18] and the aesthetics of the writing. In the novels by Houellebecq and Chevillard, these formal elements reveal the richness of French writing about possible catastrophes.

The diegesis in both novels challenges expectations in terms of narrative structure because the narrating voice is frequently unidentifiable. In the opening pages of *La Possibilité d'une île*, the very notion of 'I' is questioned, when the mysterious narrator states: 'quand je dis "je", je mens [when I say "I", I am lying]' (*H* 14). This warning encourages us to question the narrative and its authenticity, and illustrates the fact that the novel distances itself from typical (post)apocalyptic narratives. In Houellebecq's text, the post-catastrophe period is narrated by the neohumans, who do not experience the world directly (unlike Daniel1). Their life is one of testifying and commenting from a sealed cell. The description of the world after the environmental catastrophe is thus undertaken by beings whose only purpose is to comment on their human ancestor's autobiography, rather than creating their own story – their perspective represents a second degree of storytelling, a commentary on the story told by Daniel1. The neohumans are narrators and commentators, rather than true characters, and this distinction implies that the reader should interpret their narrative with caution. The same prudence is necessary when reading the post-apocalyptic part of *Sans l'orang-outan.* If we accept Albert Moindre as the narrator of the first and last parts of the novel, the second part is thrown into relief because it is narrated by a mysterious voice using 'nous' in reference to all of the survivors of the catastrophe. The systematic use of the plural, which shifts the focus away from Albert Moindre, is somewhat confusing because it is unclear who is recounting the humans' survival in the post-apocalyptic world.[19] The unidentified voice of narration, which sometimes switches back to 'I' without explicitly referring to Albert Moindre's identity, promises to describe the new world with 'ce scrupule de greffier [a court clerk's scruples]' (*C* 122). Like the neohumans, the voice takes responsibility for narrating the story.

18 I use the term 'diegesis' to refer to the way in which the story is told.

19 This narrative shift in both novels can be interpreted as a symptom of one of the most important consequences of the catastrophe, which is to insist on humans as a species, and to make individuals less relevant within a group of beings with no distinct individual identities. The use of 'nous [we/us]' in the works of Houellebecq and Chevillard expresses the loss of individuality and subjectivity that is characterises a post-human world. The neohumans epitomise this depersonalisation because they are clones.

This kind of metanarrative is a way for Houellebecq and Chevillard to distance their novels from typical (post)apocalyptic narratives. Such a structure reminds us that the narratives of Albert Moindre and the neohumans are purely speculative.

The novels challenge (post)apocalyptic narratives by using a parodic tone. The appearance of post-apocalyptical stereotypes, such as images of New York's devastation after environmental disaster, becomes untrustworthy. In Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île*, Marie23 – another neohuman – lives in the ruins of New York 'en plein milieu de ce que les hommes appelaient Manhattan [in the very heart of what men used to call Manhattan]' (*H* 202). But her part in the narrative is hard to justify, as there is no Marie in Daniel1's temporality, and she lives on a continent that has little to do with the plot. Her presence in the novel can be construed as an attempt to include a particularly common stereotype of post-apocalyptic fiction; given the dark humour of Houellebecq's writing, such an element cannot be taken as genuine. In *Sans l'orang-outan*, the insistence on the fatality of the orangutans' death seems too great to be sincere. The cause-and-effect relationship between Bagus and Mina's demise and the end of the world is something of a stretch,[20] and Chevillard's exaggerated narrative has the air of mocking the gravity of (post) apocalyptic narratives. According to Guilhem Menanteau, the tragic tone of *Sans l'orang-outan* is so overstated that it can be read as a 'pastiche d'apocalypse [pastiche of apocalypse]'.[21] The sudden shift from the first part – Albert Moindre's long lament over the death of Bagus and Mina – to the second part – the suffering of degraded humans in a post-apocalyptic landscape – is almost too radical to be taken seriously. Chevillard – who has called the *post-exotic* (post-apocalyptic) writing of Antoine Volodine (1950-)[22] a 'magistrale plaisanterie [a magisterial joke]'[23] – could be using this type of writing as a playful exercise.

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20 Carole Allamand argues that the setup, which might appear to be a 'loufoquerie [folly]', is a means of revealing the seriousness of the orangutan's death because – given that the animal's identity is so close to our own – such a tragedy announces humans' disappearance from the planet. Carole Allamand, 'Du sommaire au moindre: l'humanité en fuite', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 16.4 (2012), 517–24 (519–20).

21 Guilhem Menanteau, 'Éric Chevillard, *Sans l'orang-outan*', *Lelitteraire.com* (2 October 2012), <http://www.lelitteraire.com/?p=2936> [accessed 26 May 2016].

22 All of Volodine's works depict a strange, oppressive post-apocalyptic world. Antoine Volodine, *Des anges mineurs: narrats* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); *Dondog: roman* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

23 Éric Chevillard, 'L'Humour du désastre', *Le Monde des livres* (5 January 2012), <http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2012/01/05/l-humour-du-desastre_1625806_3260.html> [accessed 26 May 2016].

These narrative layers suggest that Houellebecq and Chevillard do not intend to focus primarily on environmental issues. Their speculations about a potential environmental disaster have more to do with the process of writing than with raising awareness about the ecological crisis. Such writing represents an opportunity to experiment with the aesthetics of fiction.

Both novels initiate a game with the reader by insisting on the oneiric aspect of the narrated reality. In *Sans l'orang-outan*, Albert Moindre's portrait of the post-apocalyptic world seems to arise from a post-traumatic delirium or a dream. At the end of the novel, Albert's hope to revive the extinct orangutan species by inseminating his friend Aloïse with Bagus's sperm does not appear realistic or rational. Such an ending makes us doubt the truthfulness of Albert Moindre's words. Beyond this strange reality, the novel gives rise to a sense of uncanniness akin to magical realism. Albert Moindre confuses us by saying that survivors are lost in a city that they used to know perfectly: 'on se perd dans la ville trop connue. D'aucuns ont essayé d'en dresser le plan [we get lost in the overly well known city. Some have tried to draw a map of it]' (*C* 77). The paradox is stated so casually that we sense tensions in the apparent realism of the narrative because such a subtle, yet tangible, distortion of reality calls into doubt the verisimilitude of the account. Sometimes, the limit between reality and dreams is blurred, as Albert Moindre mixes both: 'si l'obscurité nous soulage un moment de l'éternelle vision du désastre, la réalité nous rattrape dans nos rêves, le sommeil nous réveille en sursaut [if darkness relieves us for a moment from the constant view of disaster, reality catches up to us in our dreams, slumber wakes us with a start]' (*C* 69). The idea of being awakened *by* slumber is absurd, and the mix of reality and dreams is confusing. Is what the character describes a nightmare, rather than reality?

La Possibilité d'une île initiates doubt as to the reality of the narrative in the opening pages, which are not assigned to a character, as we encounter the possibility that reality is a dream, and vice-versa: 'la séquence suivante aurait pu être un rêve [the following sequence could have been a dream]' (*H* 13). The use of the conditional perfect – functioning akin to the pluperfect subjunctive – suggests that the sequence is a dream. Although the works of Houellebecq and Chevillard are largely realistic, the credibility of each narrative is challenged by the idea of dreams and delirium corrupting the account. The two novels are not mere imitations of North American environmental post-apocalyptic novels because they are less straightforward, and more open to the imagination.

Such creativity represents a way of overcoming the overwhelming anxiety of environmental catastrophe narratives. The novels of Chevillard and Houellebecq draw on stereotypical images of post-apocalyptic environments in order to inspire

hope that the world will not end in utter collapse. In *Sans l'orang-outan*, the survivors dedicate a whole week to art, aptly called 'la semaine des tentures [the week of tapestries]' (*C* 150). Their efforts to revive one of the most hopeful, vivid aspects of humankind help to overcome adversity, and the post-apocalyptic world is not completely hopeless. In *La Possibilité d'une île*, the neohumans show a surprising sensitivity that inspires them to write poetry. The novel includes a dozen poems in verse that express the neohumans' keen awareness of their surroundings. Marie23's poem reveals a heightened ecosensitivity:

> Et la mer qui m'étouffe, et le sable,
> La procession des instants qui se succèdent
> Comme des oiseaux qui planent doucement sur New York,
> Comme de grands oiseaux au vol inexorable. (*H* 384)
>
> [And the sea that suffocates me, and the sand,
> The procession of moments that follow each other
> Like birds soaring gently over New York,
> Like great birds in inexorable flight.]

Marie23's lyricism in relation to natural elements (the sea; the sand) and living beings (the birds) epitomises the neohumans' creativity and a somewhat startling closeness to the environment. The presence of poetry serves two purposes: first, it shows that the post-apocalyptic world can be re-enchanted because the neohumans feel a connection to the environment which the humans of the Anthropocene thought had been lost forever; second, it affirms our capacity for reinvention because the mix of verse and prose loosens the generic constraints of the novel. Houellebecq has expressed satisfaction about the integration of poetry into the novel: 'pour la première fois, j'ai réussi ici à intégrer de la poésie au milieu de la prose. Ça fait sens. Je suis satisfait de ce livre, comment dire, physiquement [for the first time, I managed to incorporate poetry in the middle of prose. It makes sense. I am satisfied with this book – how to put it – physically]'.[24] He recounts his interest in working on the form of the novel as much as its content: 'ce qui m'intéresse, au fond, ça n'est pas d'envisager l'avenir, c'est l'écriture. J'accorde plus de prix à la qualité de mes textes qu'à la validité de mes intuitions [what ultimately interests me is not to imagine the future, but to focus on writing. I value the quality of my texts more than the validity of my intuitions]'.[25] Houellebecq suggests that the worth of writing about environmental catastrophes derives from

24 Jérôme Garcin and Michel Houellebecq, 'Un entretien avec Michel Houellebecq: "Je suis un prophète amateur"', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 2129 (25 August 2005), 8–10 (9).

25 Garcin and Houellebecq, 'Un entretien avec Michel Houellebecq', 9.

reinventing literature and challenging form, rather than focussing exclusively on the ecological situation.

Expressions of hope for literature's survival in (post)apocalyptic narratives

Chevillard's *Sans l'orang-outan* and Houellebecq's *La Possibilité d'une île* reveal a careful attention to narrative form and structure that is evident in other French contemporary novels about environmental catastrophes.

The fact that these two authors – seen as writers of 'general fiction' – decided to adapt a narrative so often associated with science fiction is surprising, but their work amounts to more than a mere imitation of a North American tradition. The novels by Chevillard and Houellebecq go beyond their apocalyptic content to experiment with new forms of narrative that are tricky, playful and profound.

The novels challenge the purpose of environmental writing because they are not written to spread an environmental message. Houellebecq has publicly stated his disdain for ecologists,[26] and Chevillard is apathetic about taking on such a responsibility.[27] Both authors question contemporary culture by testing the limits of literature, building on reflections about the contemporary environmental crisis to elaborate speculative narratives about what it could mean for our world.

The 'sense of an ending' in our physical surroundings finds apt expression in contemporary cultural production. It is logical that the endangerment of humanity goes hand-in-hand with the endangerment of literature, since literature cannot survive without human language – spoken and written. The novels of Chevillard and Houellebecq offset such dark ideas by way of the depth and richness of their diegetic complexity, their play on plausibility, and their inclusion of a hopeful message in the post-apocalyptic narrative. Both authors' flair for vividness and creative mischief is shared by authors such as Volodine who address environmental concerns from the viewpoint of formal experimentation. An appreciation of the shifting aesthetics of the text is thus fundamental to understanding the uniqueness of French fiction about environmental catastrophes.

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26 Grégoire Leménager, 'Houellebecq: les écolos sont les collabos de l'islamisme', *BibliObs* (5 April 2011) <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20110405.OBS0791/houellebecq-les-ecolos-sont-les-collabos-de-l-islamisme.html> [accessed 26 May 2016].

27 Blanche Cerquiglini and Éric Chevillard, 'Éric Chevillard: "la littérature commence avec le refus de se plier aux faits"', *Critique* 767 (2011), 305–14 (311).

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Hannes De Vriese

On the Meaning of Being Alone with Nature: Sylvain Tesson's Ecocritical Sincerity and Ecopoetic Sensuality in *Dans les forêts de Sibérie*

Abstract: In the 2011 travelogue *Dans les forêts de Sibérie*, Sylvain Tesson relates a six-month retreat on the banks of Lake Baikal in Siberia. This autobiographical piece of literary nonfiction – motivated by a disgust with Parisian society that is considered to be morose and artificial – celebrates the beauty of pristine nature, and describes the benefits of a humble life in the wilderness. In view of the genre, themes and general configuration of Tesson's text, a filiation with Thoreau's *Walden* (to which Tesson refers) is obvious, yet there are marked differences in Tesson's narrative: the seasons have little influence on the activities of the narrator, and there is no account of efforts to work the land, or of any engagement with natural cycles. Instead of depicting a vision of independence and harmonious co-existence with nature, the book indulges in hedonic exoticism and sensuality that arise from contact with the wilderness. The ecocritical dimension of Tesson's text centres on the revelation that the narrator's retreat is more of an ecopoetic parenthesis than an ecological utopia. Although Tesson ponders the relations of man towards animals and nature, his experience of the wild – designated as provisional and unstable – is subject to irony and criticism, reflecting what may be a typical French suspicion towards ecological thought, as critics including Alain Suberchicot and Pierre Schoentjes have observed in the works of thinkers (Luc Ferry) and writers (Jean-Christophe Rufin). This chapter broaches the subject of how French literature responds to ecocritical thought and writing that has – until quite recently – been associated with the anglophone world.

Key critics of the representation of environmental preoccupations in French literature attest that the North American origins, methods and ideological commitments of ecocriticism have hindered its uptake in France. Pierre Schoentjes notes that 'l'écocritique peine à trouver une place en France. Plusieurs obstacles se présentent [ecocriticism encounters difficulties in finding a place in France. Several obstacles present themselves]'.[1] Schoentjes distinguishes between different causes, some practical – most major works of ecocriticism have not been translated into French – and others that result from deeper cultural and theoretical

1 Pierre Schoentjes, *Ce qui a lieu: essai d'écopoétique* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2015), 22 [unreferenced translations are mine].

divides, particularly from the general suspicion of the French academic world with regard to cultural studies.[2] Another obstacle to the proliferation of the environmental humanities has been identified by Lawrence Buell, who speaks of critics dismissing ecocriticism due to 'the suspicion that it might not boil down to much more than old-fashioned enthusiasms dressed up in new clothes'.[3] In the field of French literary studies, a critic who undertakes the analysis of nature-writing might be seen as simply replicating studies conducted on, say, landscapes in the work of Julien Gracq (1910–2007), Provençal nature in the writings of Jean Giono (1895–1970), or the Romantic *sentiment de nature*.

French scholars interested in ecocriticism are confronted with the lack of a clearly defined French corpus.[4] American literary studies, on the contrary, recognise *nature writing* as a genre with a prestigious lineage originating with Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), and including several successful contemporary authors such as Barry Lopez (1945-), Gary Snyder (1930-), Annie Dillard (1945-) and Wendell Berry (1934-).[5] Environmental writing as a genre is largely absent from French publishing, and most major publishers do not offer collections of fiction (or creative non-fiction) about environmental concerns. In 2013, Seuil (Paris, 1935-) founded a new collection, 'Anthropocène', with an environmental scope.[6] To date, works published in the collection include pieces relating to the humanities and the social sciences, but lacking a literary dimension. Certain publishers, including Wildproject (Marseille, 2009-) and Gallmeister (Paris, 2006-), specialise in environmental fiction, but their catalogues chiefly consist of American authors translated into French.

Recent publications seek to fill this gap in the French critical landscape. An issue of *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* [*Critical Review of Contemporary French Fixxion*] from 2015 attests to an increasing interest in environmental questions in contemporary French literature and criticism. In the issue, some critics offer a new approach to well-known authors – Michel Houellebecq;

2 Schoentjes, *Ce qui a lieu*, 23.

3 Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 2–3.

4 Pierre Schoentjes, 'Texte de la nature et nature du texte: Jean-Loup Trassard et les enjeux de l'écopoétique en France', *Poétique* 164 (2010), 477–94.

5 Alain Suberchicot, *Littérature américaine et écologie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); *Littérature et environnement: pour une écocritique comparée* (Paris: Champion, 2012).

6 Christophe Bonneuil, ed., 'Anthropocène', *Seuil* (10 October 2013) <http://www.seuil.com/collection/collection-618> [accessed 26 May 2016].

Philippe Jaccottet; Michel Deguy[7] – while others examine the environmental writing of forgotten writers, such as Pierre Gascar.[8] The majority of the collection deals with a younger generation of writers – Marie-Hélène Lafon; Marie Darrieussecq; Éric Chevillard; Hubert Mingarelli[9] – in a way that heralds an important place in literary studies for French environmental writing. As I argue in my contribution to the issue,[10] it is possible that French literary criticism will follow a path similar to American literary criticism[11] in affording more careful attention to francophone environmental writing.

Despite the fact that an increasing number of French authors reflect upon nature and environments in their work, texts rarely engage in political reflection; French literature thus tends to demonstrate little ecological and political commitment. This could be the result of a certain reluctance within French society, which is arguably mistrustful of political environmentalism. Philosopher and politician Luc Ferry perfectly embodies French scepticism with regard to ecological thought. In *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique* (1992), Ferry criticises various aspects of environmental ideology, highlighting historical connections between environmentalism and totalitarianism (Nazism; Stalinism).[12] Throughout the book, Ferry expresses disapproval about certain forms of ecological thought, directing strong criticism towards deep ecology.

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7 Emily McLaughlin, 'The Practice of Writing and the Practice of Living: Michel Deguy's and Philippe Jaccottet's Ecopoetics', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 38–48.

8 Sara Buekens, 'Pour que l'écologie supplante le nationalisme: l'esthétique de Pierre Gascar', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 49–59.

9 Stephanie Posthumus, 'L'Habiter écologique et l'imaginaire paysan chez Marie-Hélène Lafon et Michel Serres', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 100–11; Thangam Ravindranathan, 'Un hérisson peut toujours arriver', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 71–80; Marie Cazaban-Mazerolles, 'La Poétique écologique profonde d'Éric Chevillard', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 60–70; Sylvie Vignes, 'Hubert Mingarelli: nostalgie et quête d'une eau de source', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 28–37.

10 Hannes De Vriese, 'Écritures antillaises entre géopoétique et écopoétique: sur la nature des cataclysmes chez Patrick Chamoiseau et Daniel Maximin', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* 11 (2015), 16–27.

11 Ursula K. Heise, 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 121.2 (2006), 503–16.

12 Luc Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique: l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 35.

In the spy novel *Le Parfum d'Adam* (2011), Jean-Christophe Rufin echoes Ferry's critique of environmentalism, cautioning the reader against ecological terrorism, which is considered as an extreme of deep ecology.[13] Rufin sheds a negative light on environmental activism, which Ferry disdainfully calls 'la nébuleuse écologiste'.[14] In *Le Parfum d'Adam*, American secret agents work to thwart a group of terrorists planning to eliminate the entire Third World population by spreading a new cholera virus. Utilising the characters and codes of a Hollywood thriller, Rufin shows the dark side of ecologism.

Contemporary French fiction does not roundly condemn environmentalism. Alice Ferney's *Le Règne du vivant* (2014) offers a fictionalised biography of the environmental activist Paul F. Watson (1950).[15] Ferney paints a laudatory portrait of Watson's controversial personality in the guise of Magnus Wallace, the central character, who starkly contrasts with Rufin's Ted Harrow, also meant to represent Watson, but in the mode of a dangerous fanatic who acts as a mercenary for the wealthy super-villain Allistair McLeod. By presenting two opposing portraits of Paul Watson, French fiction becomes a forum for debate. Alice Ferney opts to use fiction as a means for expressing political engagement:

> Je rends hommage à des militants controversés et je leur donne raison. On reproche aux 'éco-terroristes' d'être dangereux, mais ce sont souvent eux qui sont assassinés. À travers ce livre, je m'engage à leurs côtés.
>
> Je n'ai pas une âme de militante. Dans la vie, je me tais; mais un livre, c'est une voix. Je joue le jeu.[16]

> [I honour controversial activists, and I agree with them. 'Eco-terrorists' are criticised for being dangerous, but it is often them who are killed. With this book, I take up their cause.
>
> I do not have the soul of an activist. In life, I keep quiet; a book, however, is a voice. I play the game.]

According to Ferney, the novel is a space for activism. Her position resembles the views of certain Francophone authors:[17] Patrick Chamoiseau does not hesitate to

13 Jean-Christophe Rufin, *Le Parfum d'Adam* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

14 Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique*, 33.

15 Alice Ferney, *Le Règne du vivant* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014).

16 Alice Ferney and Chloé Thibaud, '"Je rends hommage aux éco-terroristes": entretien avec Alice Ferney', *BibliObs* (20 November 2014), <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20141119.OBS5507/alice-ferney-je-rends-hommage-aux-eco-terroristes.html> [accessed 26 May 2016].

17 Jean-Loup Trassard is different because he outlines his political views in press articles, and reserves fiction for portraits of a rural humanism without an explicit political commitment. Jean-Loup Trassard, 'Arrêtez le massacre', *Le 1* 95 (24 February 2016),

give voice to political, historical and ecological commitments in fiction,[18] as well as in essays and pamphlets.[19] Environmental literature is becoming a key genre in contemporary French literature, potentially appealing to a larger readership.[20]

After Walden Pond, Lake Baikal

Given the increased attention that ecocritical writing and thought is garnering in French literary studies, Sylvain Tesson's travelogue *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* (2011), relating a six-month retreat on the banks of Lake Baikal in Siberia, is a particularly promising text. Tesson, motivated by disgust with a Parisian society that he considers gloomy and artificial, writes the piece of autobiographical nonfiction to celebrate the beauty of pristine nature, and describe the benefits of a humble life in the wilderness. The genre, themes and general structure of Tesson's text suggest commonality with Thoreau's *Walden*, and American nature writing more generally. The passage of time has little influence on the activities of the narrator, though, and the author makes no account of working the land or engaging with the cycles of nature (despite the changing seasons structuring the narrative). The book, instead of depicting an ideal of autonomy and a life in harmony with nature, indulges in hedonistic exoticism and sensuality that arises from contact with the wilderness.

The ecocritical dimension of Tesson's text merits scrutiny because the narrator's retreat is less an ecological utopia than an ecopoetic parenthesis. In her contribution to the ecopoetically themed issue of *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* from 2015, Stephanie Posthumus offers an overview of two modes of analysing representations of nature and environments: ecocriticism adopts an explicitly ecological politics to analyse matters ranging from corporeal issues to toxic landscapes;[21] ecopoetics emphasises the aesthetic and formal dimensions

<http://le1hebdo.fr/numero/95/arrtez-le-massacre-1469.html> [accessed 26 May 2016]; *L'Homme des haies* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

18 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Biblique des derniers gestes: roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002); *Le Papillon et la lumière* (Paris: Rey, 2011); *L'Empreinte à Crusoé* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

19 Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant, *L'Intraitable Beauté du monde: adresse à Barack Obama* (Paris: Galaade, 2009)

20 For an observation of a similar trend in British literature, see Jamie Doward, 'Hawks, Butterflies, Coasts And Footpaths: How Nature Writing Turned to Literary Gold', *The Guardian* (22 March 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/22/nature-writing-literary-gold> [accessed 26 May 2016].

21 Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Lawrence Buell, 'Toxic Discourse', *Critical Inquiry* 24.3 (1998), 639–65.

of literary and artistic representations of nature.[22] Posthumus rightfully asserts that 'la position de la critique littéraire n'est jamais neutre, jamais désengagée',[23] and Tesson's work points to a tension between these two positions that requires further attention.

The incipit to Tesson's novel closely resembles the beginning of *Walden*, suggesting a debt to the Thoreauvian project:

> Je m'étais promis avant mes quarante ans de vivre en ermite au fond des bois.
>
> Je me suis installé pendant six mois dans une cabane sibérienne sur les rives du lac Baïkal, à la pointe du cap des Cèdres du Nord. Un village à cent vingt kilomètres, pas de voisins, pas de routes d'accès, parfois une visite. L'hiver, des températures de -30 °C; l'été des ours sur les berges. Bref, le paradis.[24]

> [I had promised myself that before turning forty I would live as a hermit in the depths of the woods.
>
> I settled for a six-month period in a Siberian cabin on the shore of Lake Baikal, at the tip of North Cedar Cape. The nearest village is seventy-five miles away, no neighbours, no road access; now and then, a visit. During winter, temperatures below 30 degrees Celsius; during summer, bears on the shores. In a word, paradise.]

Similar reasons are given in the first paragraph of Thoreau's work:

> When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there for two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.[25]

Both writers begin by explaining how their writing is meant to be an account of their retreat. Before reflecting on the experience, both men identify the geographical terms of their seclusion: Thoreau resides in the woods a little over a mile from the town of Concord; Tesson is miles from any form of civilisation. Akin to Thoreau, Tesson chooses a cabin situated in a landscape composed of trees and water, echoing the desire of the modern man who wishes to escape from society, as Yi-Fu Tuan observes in *Topophilia*:

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22 Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe, 'Littérature & écologie: vers une écopoétique', *Écologie & Politique* 36 (2008), 17–28 (21); Daniel A. Finch-Race and Julien Weber, 'Editorial: The Ecocritical Stakes of French Poetry from the Industrial Era', Dix-Neuf 19.3 (2015), 159–66 (161–3).

23 Posthumus, 'L'Habiter écologique', 101.

24 Sylvain Tesson, *Dans les forêts de Sibérie: février-juillet 2010* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 9 [hereafter *F*].

25 Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (New York, NY: Dover, 1995), 1.

> Today the cabin in the forest clearing remains a powerful lure to the modern man who dreams of withdrawal. Three other natural settings have, at different times and places, appealed strongly to the human imagination. These are the seashore, the valley, and the island.[26]

In the pocket edition of *Dans les forêts de Sibérie*, the cover image makes another connection with Thoreau's legacy by showing a photograph of the Russian cabin, which is very similar to iconic representations of the cabin in which the American author resided. Tesson's project presents itself as a re-enactment of Thoreau's retreat, but is a more radical experience, as shown by the incipit that emphasises increased remoteness and extreme temperatures. Tesson opts for his retreat from civilised life to be an exotic adventure, whereas Thoreau's project had a more domestic undertone.

The similarities between the sojourn near Walden Pond and the one on Lake Baikal are striking; it seems that Tesson models his retreat and story on the writing of the man considered by many to be the founding father of ecological thought in America. *Walden* is part of Tesson's 'liste de lectures idéales composée à Paris avec grand soin en prévision d'un séjour de six mois dans la forêt de Sibérie [list of ideal reading material, very carefully drawn up in Paris for the purpose of a six-month stay in the forests of Siberia]' (*F* 33). In this respect, *Dans la forêt de Sibérie* appears to be a model of French ecocritical nonfiction.

Out of the world

Tesson's travels to Russia represent an escape from modern consumer society. A scene in a Russian supermarket at the beginning of the book symbolises the reasons that have led Tesson to leave the civilised world for the Russian wilderness: 'quinze sortes de ketchup. À cause de choses pareilles, j'ai eu envie de quitter ce monde [fifteen kinds of ketchup. Such things have driven me to want to leave this world]' (*F* 21). The needless variety of the Heinz brand, mentioned twice on the same page, comes to represent the pervasive influence of global consumerism, which extends from great conglomerations such as Paris and New York to the smallest towns of the Russian tundra. Tesson responds to this uncomfortable truth with disgust and disillusion.

Tesson's worldview is a Manichean one, divided between the pristine Siberian wilderness (where events take place over the course of the narration) and landscapes that have been altered and disfigured by human society and industrial

26 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 115.

activity. Throughout the book, Tesson compares and contrasts memories of his urban life with his time on the untouched and lonesome shores of Lake Baikal. The following list enumerates several reasons for his departure:

> RAISONS POUR LESQUELLES JE ME SUIS ISOLÉ DANS UNE CABANE
> J'étais trop bavard
> Je voulais du silence
> Trop de courrier en retard et trop de gens à voir
> J'étais jaloux de Robinson
> C'est mieux chauffé que chez moi,
> à Paris
> Par lassitude d'avoir à faire les courses
> Pour pouvoir hurler et vivre nu
> Par détestation du téléphone
> et du bruit des moteurs. (*F* 118)

> [REASONS FOR WHICH I HAVE ISOLATED MYSELF IN A CABIN
> I was too talkative;
> I wanted silence;
> Too much late mail and too much people to see;
> I was jealous of Robinson;
> It's better heated here than at my place
> in Paris;
> I was tired of having to shop;
> In order to be able to yell and live naked;
> Because I hate the telephone
> and the noise of engines.]

The author describes his feelings of disgust and alienation when he was in the city. He not only needs to flee consumerist profligacy, but also superficial social niceties, noise and pollution. The civilised world is associated with degradation and decay.

Tesson aligns himself with Arne Næss's thesis that overpopulation is a major strain on the earth's ecosystem. In *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique*, Ferry passionately criticises the position of the father of deep ecology, which he considers to be a form of *anti-humanism*.[27] Likewise, Rufin highlights the possible abuses of ecological Malthusianism.[28] Tesson, on the contrary, takes the side of deep ecology, not by referring directly to Arne Næss, but by quoting the speech made by Claude

27 Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique*, 157.
28 Rufin, *Le Parfum d'Adam*, 407.

Lévi-Strauss upon receiving the Premi Internacional Catalunya in 2005.[29] The problem of human demographical growth surfaces when Igor, a Russian friend of Tesson, confides his distress because he and his wife cannot conceive. The narrator considers fertility problems to be an advantage from an ecological viewpoint:

> Je n'ose le consoler en lui disant que la termitière humaine est pleine à craquer. Que Claude Lévi-Strauss désignait comme des 'vers à farine' les milliards d'humains entassés sur une sphère trop étroite et constatait que nous étions en train de nous intoxiquer. Que le vieux maître, inquiet de voir la pression démographique mettre la Terre sous tension, 's'interdisait toute prédiction sur l'avenir', lui qui était né dans un monde six fois moins peuplé. (*F* 233–4)
>
> [I do not dare to comfort him by saying that the human termite mound is more than full, that Claude Lévi-Strauss used the term 'mealworms' for the billions of humans crowded together on a too narrow sphere, or that he noted how we are poisoning ourselves. Nor dare I say that the old master, worried when observing how demographic pressure has become a strain for the Earth, 'forbade himself to make any prediction for the future'; he who was born in a world six times less populated.]

In line with Lévi-Strauss, Tesson's pessimistic worldview – the globe is overpopulated and on the edge of environmental collapse – suggests that bearing children is not a good idea.

Portraying the planet as a sort of human termite mound not only leads to practical considerations about food supply and waste production, but also induces an aesthetic malaise, at which Tesson hints in the passage about his disgust regarding Heinz ketchup. It is the proliferation of human beings that contributes to the expansion of bad taste:

> La ruée des peuples vers le laid fut le principal phénomène de la mondialisation. Pour s'en convaincre il suffit de circuler dans une ville chinoise, d'observer les nouveaux codes de décoration de La Poste française ou la tenue des touristes. Le mauvais goût est le dénominateur commun de l'humanité. (*F* 29)
>
> [The rush of the masses toward ugliness was the main characteristic of globalisation. It becomes evident when moving through a Chinese city, when observing the new design code in French postal offices, or tourists' clothing. Bad taste is humanity's common denominator.]

If globalisation and its tendency to standardise the tastes of the masses offend the author's aesthetic sensibilities, Tesson is doing no more than restating the kind of

29 Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'L'Etnòleg enfront de les identitats nacionals', *Generalitat de Catalunya* (30 March 2005), <http://web.gencat.cat/web/.content/03_GENERALITAT/PIC/documents/pdf/discurs_levi_strauss.pdf> [accessed 27 May 2016].

dissatisfaction with industrialisation that can be found in the work of David H. R. Lawrence (1885–1930). After reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), the narrator criticises industrial (and post-industrial) societies that, because of their obsession with progress, lose something vital: 'c'est l'agonie du monde. "L'Angleterre industrielle *efface* l'Angleterre agricole". Constance sent une sève monter dans sa chair; elle comprend que le progrès désubstantialise le monde [the world is in agony. "Industrial England blots out agrarian England". Constance feels lifeblood running through her veins; she understands that progress alters the world's substance]' (*F* 121). Tesson yearns for a place where he can be true to himself, and free from society. He wants to express his disenchantment with contemporary society, and rediscover the essence of the world, away from landscapes disfigured by mankind.

Only the empty mountain landscapes of Lake Baikal allow Tesson to reconnect with what can be considered the cosmic order of the world. He proposes to divide global space into two narrow categories – inhabited or untouched:

> Ces montagnes n'offrent rien qu'une profusion de sensations à éprouver sur-le-champ. L'homme ne les bonifiera jamais. Dans ce paysage sans promesse, écartelé de grandeur, les calculateurs en seront pour leurs frais. […] Aménageur, passe ton chemin, regagne la Toscane! Là-bas, sous les ciels tempérés, les paysages attendaient que l'homme les façonne en campagne. Ici, dans cet amphithéâtre, les éléments règnent pour l'éternité. Il y eut des luttes dans les temps magmatiques, à présent, le calme. Le paysage, repos de la géologie. (*F* 282)

> [These mountains offer nothing but an abundance of sensations to be felt in the moment. Man will never improve them. In this landscape without promises, wide open with magnificence, every plot or plan is defeated. […] Move on, developer, return to Tuscany! There, under temperate skies, landscapes wait to be moulded by mankind. Here, in this amphitheatre, the elements reign for eternity. There were struggles in magmatic times; at present, calmness. The landscape is geology's rest.]

As far as Tesson is concerned, even beautifully shaped bucolic landscapes are to be considered part of modern society's wrongdoings. He does not admire Tuscan landscapes, entirely developed by man, and seeks pristine landscapes that contain the possibility of a mystic experience of nature.

Wilderness and transcendence

Having the potential to provide a mystic experience is the basis of another opposition between Paris and Lake Baikal: the civilised world is profane; the wilderness holds the possibility of transcendence. Tesson writes: 'j'ai quitté le caveau des villes et vécu six mois dans l'église des taïgas [I left the urban vaults and lived for six months in the church of the taiga]' (*F* 228). By transforming the Russian mountains into a church, Tesson thinks of nature and landscape in religious terms.

Tesson's preoccupations go beyond the practical considerations of pollution, social obligations, and the lack of good taste of the masses. He engages with a more spiritual way of thinking about nature, which is, as John Gatta explains, a fundamental feature of contemporary environmental thinking:

> The current ecological crisis must be understood, I think, not as an array of technical problems but as a genuine crisis of spirit and imagination. Since religion deals in ultimate questions, while our culture's literature embodies its deepest hopes and fears, an interfusion of both disciplines should cast light on this major issue of our time.[30]

According to Gatta, the search for transcendence in nature writing reveals the complexity of the environmental crisis, which is more spiritual than it may appear. Religious motifs in Tesson's book echo this idea.

Gatta observes that American nature writing – his main object of study – maintains a strong interest in the sanctity of wilderness, even though completely untouched landscapes have become extremely rare. This is even more true in a European context. In *Recours à la 'nature sauvage'* (2007), Robert Hainard cites comparable examples of unspoilt landscapes in Europe – the list is extremely short:

> La Suisse possède encore quelques hectares de forêt vierge, mais je les connais surtout en Yougoslavie. Ce sont des forêts de montagne, évidemment. Elles sont de parcours faciles, mais toujours dans des endroits difficiles et vallonnés. Je connais aussi celle de Białowieża en Pologne. En France on trouve des forêts de fayards dans le Massif central, et quelques forêts très sauvages dans les Pyrénées, comme celle du Soussouéou en haute vallée d'Ossau.[31]
>
> [In Switzerland, a few hectares of virgin forest subsist, but I know more of such things in Yugoslavia. They are mountain forests, obviously. They encompass easy routes, but always situated in difficult and hilly terrain. I also know the forest of Białowieża in Poland. In France, there are beech forests in the Massif Central, and some very wild forests in the Pyrenees, such as the Soussouéouan forest in the upper Ossau Valley.]

An avid alpinist, Tesson well knows how rare untouched nature is in Europe. As an author living in western Europe, it is necessary for him to travel in order to encounter natural landscapes that are not embedded, as a sort of shrine, within civilised territory. A key trait of nineteenth-century nature writing, this fascination with the 'wild' continues to influence contemporary authors. Despite the rareness of untamed landscapes – perhaps because of it – writers assign sacred value to the wilderness. As Gatta explains:

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30 John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), viii.

31 Robert Hainard, *Recours à la 'nature sauvage'* (Bats: Utovie, 2007), 36–9.

> Although virtually nothing we encounter on the planet can now be regarded as outside the sphere of human influence, one can at least identify organisms and processes that seem relatively 'wild' – that is, beyond immediate human control. The sacred, too, traditionally names a reality apart from workaday culture, a category of existence outside the bounds of human control and rationalization.[32]

Tesson experiences transcendence only in the forests around Lake Baikal; he thus reproduces a traditional trope that is part of the heritage of American nature writing.

The travelogue is marked from the beginning by a transcendental desire. Tesson starts the novel by staging the journey to the lake as the inauguration of a life-altering experience: going to Lake Baikal means 'changer de vie [changing life]' (*F* 22). The author drives over the frozen lake in order to arrive at the cabin – a dangerous and impressive feat that resembles a ritual of initiation:

> Rouler sur un lac est une transgression. Seuls les dieux et les araignées marchent sur les eaux. J'ai ressenti trois fois l'impression de briser un tabou. La première, en contemplant le fond de la mer d'Aral. La seconde en lisant le journal intime d'une femme. La troisième, en roulant sur les eaux du Baïkal. Chaque fois, l'impression de déchirer un voile. L'œil regarde par le trou de la serrure.
>
> J'explique cela à Micha. Il ne répond rien. (*F* 24)

> [To drive on a lake is a transgression. Only gods and spiders walk on water. Three times, I had the impression of breaking a taboo. First, when contemplating the bed of the Aral Sea. Second, when reading a women's diary. Third, when driving on the waters of Lake Baikal. Each time, I had the impression of ripping a veil, of looking through a keyhole.
>
> I explain this to Micha. He does not answer.]

Whilst going across the lake, Tesson is under the impression that he is usurping a privilege of the gods. He considers his action to be a transgression, a means to unveil a truth – another dimension of reality that should not be known to man. His companion Micha remains silent, underscoring the momentousness of the event.

From then on, the sojourn on the lake's shores is considered a religious retreat; it pleases Tesson to think of himself as a kind of religious hermit. He associates his disgust regarding city life with the *horror mundi* of the Desert Fathers of early Christianity:

> Au IV^e^ siècle, les Pères du désert devenaient fous de solitude: ils ne supportaient plus la moindre intrusion. Ils refluaient au fond des déserts, s'enfouissaient dans les grottes. Leurs réserves d'amour se vouaient à un monde vide de leurs semblables. Dans les banlieues, parfois, un type tire une volée de plombs dans un groupe de jeunes, au pied d'une tour. Il finit en entrefilet dans *Le Parisien*, puis derrière les barreaux. (*F* 45–6)

32 Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred*, 9.

> [In the fourth century, the Desert Fathers became obsessed with loneliness: they could no longer withstand the slightest intrusion. They withdrew far into the desert, and confined themselves in caverns. Their reserves of love were vowed to a world lacking their kin. From time to time, a guy in the suburbs shoots at a group of youngsters in front of a housing building. He ends up being briefly mentioned in *Le Parsien* [*The Parisian*], then in jail.]

The stress and the discomfort of living in a crowded society lead to a *coup de folie* – a resentful act of madness such as murder. For Tesson, seclusion brings peace, understanding and spiritual fulfilment.

Tesson's retreat is, however, an extremely fragile endeavour, easily disturbed by the slightest sign of human activity. When fishermen playing loud music pass nearby, the religious motif emerges again, as the narrator takes the integrity of his retreat to have been undermined. He compares his situation to the experience of monks forced to guide tourists around a place that is supposed to be a haven of calm and serenity:

> Ce que je suis venu fuir s'abat sur mon îlot: le bruit, la laideur, la grégarité testostéronique. […] Je pense à ces reclus bénédictins contraints de guider les visites touristiques – ces religieux venus enfermer leur foi dans des cloîtres se retrouvent à détailler la règle de saint Benoît à des foules indifférentes. (*F* 45–6)

> [What I have been hiding from invades my island: noise, ugliness, testosteronic gregariousness. […] I think of those Benedictine recluses who are forced to guide tourists – those monks who intended to seal their faith in cloisters end up explaining the Rule of Saint Benedict to unconcerned crowds.]

Religious imagery recurs throughout the book: the stove that heats the cabin is compared to a small divinity – 'un petit dieu qui possède sa vie propre [a small god possessed of its own life]' (*F* 37) – that claims logs as offerings; an ornithological guidebook published by Delachaux & Niestlé becomes 'un bréviaire consacré à l'ingéniosité du vivant, aux infinies subtilités de l'évolution, une célébration du style [a breviary dedicated to the inventiveness of all that lives, to the infinite nuances of evolution; a celebration of style]' (*F* 215), giving credence to the idea of a 'nature bible'.

Disenchantments

Tesson's work shares several traits with environmental nonfiction – recurring reflections on the transcendent nature of beauty; denunciations of consumer society and its impact on the environment; a literary rendering of real events – but his ecological and literary project is substantially problematic. According to Schoentjes, Tesson's work is a site of tensions because it expresses political commitment *and* disengaged contemplation:

> La tension qui s'observe chez Tesson entre un engagement militant en faveur de l'environnement et la volonté de s'inscrire dans une écriture de la sagesse inspirée par la contemplation de la nature est caractéristique.[33]
>
> [In Tesson's work, one finds a characteristic tension between political commitment in favour of the environment, and the desire to comply with a form of literature that seeks wisdom by contemplating nature.]

Schoentjes explains that such contradictions arise because a solitary experience of nature, entailing detachment from any collective responsibility, runs counter to ecological commitment. Tesson does not eschew such inconsistencies; they are a key part of the story's development.

Many of the contradictions of Tesson's ecological project are underscored in the text. When evoking the magic beauty of the lake and the surrounding wild forest, he deconstructs this magic by considering the minimal impact of the panorama on others, especially the Russian inhabitants who have lived there for years:

> J'aurai appris qu'on peut vivre près d'une patinoire géante, se nourrir de caviar, de pattes d'ours et de foie d'élan, se vêtir de vison, aller par les futaies fusil en bandoulière, assister chaque matin, lorsque les rayons de l'aube touchent la glace, à l'un des plus beaux spectacles de la planète, et rêver pourtant d'une vie dans un appartement équipé de toute la robotique et de la gadgeterie high-tech. (*F* 158)
>
> [I will have learned that one can live next to an enormous ice rink, feed on caviar, bear paws and moose liver, clothe oneself in mink, walk beneath the trees with a rifle over one's shoulder, bear witness every morning to one of the most beautiful sights on the planet when the first rays of sunlight strike the ice, and nevertheless dream of living in an apartment equipped with robotics and high-tech gadgets.]

The locals do not share Tesson's enthusiasm for the magnificent view, and his wonder eventually begins to diminish: 'les rives du Baïkal me sont à présent trop familières pour me tirer la moindre larme [at present, the banks of Lake Baikal are too familiar to make me shed a tear]' (*F* 228). As time passes, the adventurer's enthusiasm dries up – the pristine beauty of the scenery no longer moves him.

Tesson's story of adventure and ecological consciousness entails elements of disillusionment. When the author uses mystic and religious references to describe his experience, there is the risk that such description may tip into irony. When he compares the lake to 'une patinoire géante [a giant ice rink]', Tesson attenuates the possible sacredness of the site. The sublime, when glimpsed, is always subject to doubt. Religious language tends to be used to designate trivial objects: Tesson, who loves cigars, compares cigar-smoke to incense (*F* 178). When visitors or

33 Schoentjes, *Ce qui a lieu*, 166.

Russian friends explain their spiritual worldview, Tesson is only able to stomach such 'bouillie spirituelle [spiritual 'nonsense]' because of his childhood religious education: 'un vieux résidu de patience inoculée par dix années d'éducation chez les frères m'aide à supporter la bouillie spirituelle [some residual patience acquired through a ten-year education provided by the brothers helps me to bear this spiritual nonsense]' (*F* 284). As a result of such a religious background, spirituality is kept at an ironic distance.

The multiple discrepancies and dissonances in the text indicate the flaws and contradictions of the author's project. Tesson notes, with a degree of self-derision, that the solitary nature of his endeavour is problematic: 'de mon duvet, j'entends crépiter le bois. Rien ne vaut la solitude. Pour être parfaitement heureux, il me manque quelqu'un à qui l'expliquer [from under my duvet, I hear the firewood crackle. Nothing equates to solitude. In order to be perfectly happy, I would simply need someone to whom I can explain this]' (*F* 160). The lonely retreat in the woods veers dangerously close to disappointment. The project is significantly compromised from the early moment in which Tesson buys large quantities of Heinz ketchup despite being disgusted by the mere presence of the brand in a small Russian town. The Thoreauvian dream of autarchy is jeopardised: Tesson never achieves independence, lives on industrial food (dried pasta, ketchup) brought with him rather than cultivating vegetables, and fails to leave behind modern technology (his laptop and satellite phone).

The retreat appears to be less serious and sincere than Thoreau's undertaking. Tesson's incipit expresses his intention more as a personal challenge than a necessity – the project is based on a vow to live as a hermit in the woods before reaching his fortieth birthday (*F* 9). The solitary adventure seems rather shallow, as do the author's motivations when settling into his cabin. Tesson is inconvenienced by the bad taste of the masses, and shocked by the Russians' poor sense of interior design. Upon his arrival, the author breaks down Formica panels, tears off linoleum surfaces, and throws out all plastic materials (*F* 29). He aims to reveal the cabin's woodwork, coated in materials manufactured by the petrochemical industry, but this moment of redecorating or 'home-making' feels more like a bourgeois reflex, transforming the experience into a privilege afforded to an elite few that David Brooks describes as 'bourgeois bohemians'.[34]

34 David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 11.

Between ecological commitment and ecopoetic aesthetics

As an attempt at ecological commitment, Tesson's project appears to be a failure in many respects. Such a sentiment is expressed by the author:

> Le courage serait de regarder les choses en face […]. La nostalgie, la mélancolie, la rêverie donnent aux âmes romantiques l'illusion d'une échappée vertueuse. Elles passent pour d'esthétiques moyens de résistance à la laideur mais ne sont que le cache-sexe de la lâcheté. Que suis-je? Un pleutre, affolé par le monde, reclus dans une cabane, au fond des bois. Un couard qui s'alcoolise en silence pour ne pas risquer d'assister au spectacle de son temps ni de croiser sa conscience faisant les cent pas sur la grève. (*F* 196)

> [It would be more courageous to face the truth […]. Nostalgia, melancholia and reverie – which fill Romantic souls with the illusion of a virtuous escape – are considered to be aesthetic ways of resisting ugliness, but they are only a loincloth for cowardice. Who am I? A wimp, made distraught by the world, shut away in a cabin in the depths of the woods. A coward who gets drunk in silence because he does not want to risk witnessing the spectacle of his era, or come across his own conscience while pacing on the shore.]

Tesson, blaming himself for ecological shallowness and Romantic escapism, considers his adventure to be an act of cowardliness. Yet, if *Dans les forêts de Sibérie* appears to be a watered-down version of Thoreau's retreat, Tesson's doubts and ironic self-awareness correlate well with Thoreau's 'protopostmodern sensibility', as explained by David Dowling:

> The very essence of the natural process in Thoreau's writing […] bears a distinctly protopostmodern sensibility, from self-referential pastiche to ecstatic, soaring visionary reveries that crash on the rocks of his neighbors' galling capitalist exploitation of the environment. A sense of optimism always edges against the bizarre, even surreal, effects economic sins that reify the environment as property and raids its resources of timber, ice, and fur to feed an insatiable demand of consumer goods.[35]

Regardless of whether Tesson succeeds in experiencing an ecological adventure, his travelogue calls into question modern consumer societies. Tesson's self-derision serves as a mirror for his readers, and he develops an ecologically committed perspective in spite of his own scepticism. For Tesson, being alone with nature is a problematic ecological project: his retreat was temporary, and his actions in favour of the environment seem ineffective. Hedonistic and aesthetic pleasures are more effective: 'je ne sais pas si la beauté sauvera le monde. Elle a sauvé ma soirée

35 David Dowling, 'Fraught Ecstasy: Contemporary Encounters with Thoreau's Postpristine Nature', in *Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversation on an American Icon*, ed. by F. Specq, L. D. Walls and M. Granger (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 234–48 (236).

[I do not know if beauty will save the world, but it has saved my evening]' (*F* 50). Tesson is subject to doubt and melancholy, which he can only capture by describing 'l'intensité esthétique [the aesthetic intensity]' (*F* 214) of nature's display. By writing about the woods, recounting the choreography of butterflies, and remembering the 'ecological sublime'[36] of the mountain views, Tesson produces a work of ecopoetics (in the sense that French literary criticism has given to the term).[37]

Dans les forêts de Sibérie oscillates between an ecopoetic sense of nature's fragile beauty, and an ecological endeavour that is deemed to have failed. This is true of many French literary projects: like Tesson, who chooses to undermine the ecocritical effectiveness of his undertaking, Trassard seeks to separate ecological commitment from fiction. The tension between ecocriticism and ecopoetics is a defining characteristic of contemporary scholarship and thought. Working with different traditions of literary criticism is a productive way of discerning important aspects of environmental writing in French.

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Part VII
Horizons and Prospects

Stephanie Posthumus

Engaging with Cultural Differences: The Strange Case of French *écocritique*

Abstract: Ecocriticism has taken its place on the stage of literary and critical theory in the anglophone world, yet its reception in France has been mixed. In this chapter, I outline the cultural differences that contribute to the slow emergence of a French *écocritique*. Taking my cue from comparative literary studies, I avoid the construction of culture as an unchanging set of clichés and stereotypes, instead exploring diverse linguistic and socio-historical specificities that are useful for framing a 'French' *écocritique*. I take into account approaches such as *écopoétique* and *géocritique* that have emerged in France over the last ten years, and I argue for politically informed ecological readings of French literary texts. I draw on the non-dualistic, nature-culture thinking of Félix Guattari and Michel Serres to articulate the concepts of ecological subjectivity and ecological dwelling. These two concepts are used to develop ecological readings of contemporary fiction by Marie Darrieussecq and Marie-Hélène Lafon. My theorisations of French *écocritique* bring literature and ecological thinking together in the context of the contemporary French intellectual landscape.

In *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique* [*The New Ecological Order*] (1992), Luc Ferry denounces attempts made by environmental philosophy and animal ethics to attribute an elevated status to nature and to animals.[1] Rejecting what he sees as an anti-humanist sentiment, Ferry takes up Immanuel Kant's rational philosophy in order to assert a renewed humanism. Working from the thesis of man as anti-natural, and the notion of a universal human nature, Ferry defends the position of the Moderns as the only foundation on which to build a democratic humanism that can sufficiently address social and political injustices:

> The most fundamental ethical requirement among Moderns, that of altruism, is in its very principle antinatural, since it requires a form of disinterestedness. It presupposes 'good will' and is inevitably expressed in the form of an imperative. But the reference to universality, which is incomprehensible outside of the framework of this new philosophical anthropology, also becomes necessary. For the separation from historical-natural codes, through which man manifests his difference from animal, is still a refusal to allow oneself to be limited to any particularity. It is because he is capable of taking his distances not only from the cycle of his biological life but also from his particular language, nation, and

1 Luc Ferry, *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique: l'arbre, l'animal et l'homme* (Paris: Grasset, 1992).

> culture that man can enter into communication with others. His capacity for universality is a direct function of this distancing.[2]

Given my objective to construct a culturally specific French *écocritique*, why start with a quotation from a philosopher who argues against language, nation, and culture, and in favour of universal humanism?

Despite what was largely a reductive reading of ecological thinking at the time, Ferry's book had a long-lasting effect on environmental philosophy in France. Philosophers avoided subjects related to the environment, fearing that any association with this branch of thinking would marginalise their work. As Catherine Larrère points out, environmental philosophy and ethics as an academic discipline developed largely outside of France: 'ce débat affecte plus particulièrement la communauté de langue anglaise, américaine principalement […]. La France, jusqu'à présent, est restée à l'écart [this debate has principally affected the English-language community, especially in the USA […]. France has, until now, kept out of it]'.[3] In the 1990s, environmentalism was associated with anti-humanist discourse or with a 'less serious' attitude towards the 'deeper' philosophical questions of reality, existence, death, and morality.[4]

To grant so much weight to a single book may seem exaggerated, but Ferry's *Le Nouvel Ordre écologique* embodies a French humanist and republican way of thinking that continues to hold sway in contemporary French society.[5] Conventional, mainstream voices like Ferry's have sidelined the work of thinkers like Michel Serres and Bruno Latour who question nature-culture dualism, and work towards a new ecological politics. Despite Ferry's claim about universal humanism, his reaction to environmental thinking and the reception of his book reveal socio-historically shaped attitudes towards nature and the environment. It is in

2 Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. by C. Volk (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15–16.

3 Catherine Larrère, *Les Philosophies de l'environnement* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 5 [unreferenced translations are mine].

4 In *A Brief History of Thought*, Ferry dismisses concerns related to bioethics and ecology as 'dreadfully reductive, when one thinks of the ideals which were common to all the great philosophers from Plato to Nietzsche'. Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*, trans. by T. Cuff (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011), 220.

5 From 2002–4, Ferry was Minister for Youth, Education, and National Research, and he continues to publish regularly on subjects such as the need for innovation, the history of philosophy, and how to be happy.

this sense that Ferry's book offers a perfect opening for discussing the need for a French ecocritical approach.

Setting the stage: French eco-thought

Ferry's negative influence on environmental philosophy did not hinder efforts to bring ecological issues into the political arena in France. The rise of the *Verts* and the creation of the *Ministère de l'Environnement* in the 1970s show France as an early leader in ecological politics. Thinkers such as Jean Dorst, René Dumont, Edgar Morin, and Serge Moscovici refused to view nature as something outside of the human, and instead developed a coherent political agenda founded on thinking nature and culture together. As Kerry Whiteside explains, 'French green theorists tend to study how conceptions of nature and human identity intertwine. They elaborate green thought more often by *reciprocally problematising* "nature" and "humanity" than by refining the distinction between them'.[6]

Reciprocal nature-culture thinking has been at the heart of Serres's philosophy since *Le Contrat naturel* [*The Natural Contract*] (1990). Twenty years before the term Anthropocene became popularised, Serres carefully outlined the process of historical time becoming imbricated in geological time: 'l'histoire globale entre dans la nature; la nature globale entre dans l'histoire: voilà de l'inédit en philosophie [global history enters nature, and global nature enters history: this is truly a novel situation for philosophy]'.[7] While nature and culture had previously been bound together at the local level, they were becoming inextricably linked at a global level. Our planetary ecological condition does not, however, give rise to a universal environmentalism. Serres acknowledges cultural differences that affect the way in which concerns about the environment are imagined, represented and politicised in different socio-historical contexts:

> Ce mouvement [écologiste] a plusieurs composantes: géopolitiques, économiques, culturelles […]. Occidentale, la bataille oppose l'Europe et les États-Unis dont les sensibilités diffèrent, en raison de l'ancienneté, ici, de la tradition agricole, et là, de son caractère récent et vite industrialisé.[8]

6 Kerry H. Whiteside, *Divided Natures: French Contributions to Political Ecology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 3 [emphasis in original]. For another largely positive analysis of French attitudes towards nature and environment, see Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960–2000* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

7 Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 18.

8 Michel Serres, *Hominescence* (Paris: Le Pommier, 2001), 95.

> [This [ecological] movement has many components: geopolitical, economic, cultural […]. In the West, the conflict arises between Europe and the USA where political sympathies differ because of the former's long agricultural traditions and the latter's more recent and rapidly industrialised practices.]

Serres is careful to distance himself from North-American environmentalism that reduces ecological politics to the preservation of wilderness. In addition, he rejects the expression 'environmental philosophy', and describes his thinking as a *philosophie de la nature* according to which nature is constantly being born anew through and alongside scientific knowledge and social practices.

Without subscribing to linguistic determinism, the English word 'environment' does not have the same history or the same connotations as the French *environnement*. For Serres, the word *environnement* problematically reinforces an anthropocentric perspective because there is necessarily a centre around which the action *environner* takes place.[9] This poses some challenges for translating even the basic idea of ecocriticism, defined as the study of the relationship between literature and environment. Should a French *écocritique* highlight the difference between *écologie* and *environnement*, and opt for a more native term like *écologisme* to build an environmentally oriented approach to literature? Or should the word *environnement* be retained in order to highlight the 'strangeness' of French *écocritique* as a literary theory that did not originate in French literary studies? Bringing awareness to these differences is the first step in developing a French *écocritique.*

In the early stages of my theorisations of a French *écocritique*, I was often asked if the term applied more generally to the critical analysis of environmental discourse and rhetoric. The term *critique* did not have a clear connection to literary studies, and so gave rise to some confusion as to what role literature might play. The English term 'ecocritique' is typically used to refer to a critical analysis of environmentalism;[10] ecocriticism has an uneasy relationship with ecocritique. In *Ecology without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton endorses the latter's alignment with deconstruction philosophy, and criticises the former's 'flogging the dead horse of "postmodern theory"'.[11] While a French *écocritique* can take note of the problematic pro- or anti-theory positions that have marked ecocriticism's past, it cannot solely be an ecocritique. It must work to construct a set of ecological principles and concepts with which to analyze literary and cultural texts on a broader scale.

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9 Serres, *Le Contrat naturel*, 60.

10 Timothy W. Luke, *Ecocritique: Contesting the Politics of Nature, Economy, and Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

11 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 13.

In order to build such a toolbox, I have focussed on ecological thinking that has emerged in France over the last thirty years. In earlier work, I drew on Serres's concept of the natural contract, arguing that his non-dualist, anti-Cartesian approach offers an excellent foundation for such ecological principles.[12] More recently, I have been working to integrate Bruno Latour's 'parlement des choses [parliament of things]'[13] and Félix Guattari's vision of a three-part 'écosophie [ecosophy]'[14] into this political orientation. Even if these different philosophical systems do not perfectly align and form some sort of unified French eco-thought, they point to the necessity of including non-humans in our understanding of social, political and ethical relationships. Moreover, they model a careful analysis of the complex interactions and networks that characterise the contemporary world. Without claiming that these concepts are unique to the landscape of French eco-thought, I posit that the kinds of ecological politics entailed in them must be at the heart of a French *écocritique*.

'L' exception francaise': fact or fiction?

The act of positing the need for a specifically French *écocritique* begs the question of what 'French' means. I will respond to this question by looking at some of the ways in which French cultural differences have been constructed and deconstructed. An obvious example is the notion of *l'exception française*: the reference point for this expression – the *République*; universal humanism; *fraternité*, *égalité*, *liberté* – is not clear, yet it has staying-power, even in today's globalised world. As Roger Célestin, Eliane DalMolin, Marc Dambre, and Richard J. Golsan note, 'the expression is invoked almost incessantly to emphasise the uniqueness or peculiarities of, among many other things, […] a national political and social model that has supposedly run its course'.[15] The idea of cultural and political exceptionalism may not fit with reality, but it continues to give rise to lively debates.[16]

12 Stephanie Posthumus, 'Vers une écocritique française: le contrat naturel de Michel Serres', *Mosaic* 44.2 (2011), 85–100; 'Translating Ecocriticism: Dialoguing with Michel Serres', *Reconstruction* 7.2 (2007), 37 paragraphs, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/072/posthumus.shtml> [accessed 16 May 2016].

13 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), 197.

14 Félix Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies* (Paris: Galilée, 1989), 70.

15 Roger Célestin, Eliane DalMolin, Marc Dambre, and Richard J. Golsan, 'Editors' Introduction', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 12.3 (2008), 317–19 (317).

16 In her careful analysis of the French nation-state, Monica Prasad argues that centralisation and the welfare state have marked France's pragmatic neoliberalism, which differs

In the online version of the European edition of *Time* in November 2007, Donald Morrison published a feature about the death of French culture.[17] The article unsurprisingly gave rise to heated debates in and outside of France, revealing more about the relationship between the United States and France than about the state of French culture.[18] My concern is to look more closely at how the idea of 'culture' is being used: the cover of the magazine version – showing actor Marcel Marceau's famous character Bip wearing a beret, miming sadness, and holding a wilted red flower – illustrates that culture is largely reduced to a set of clichés. References in Morrison's article to French art, cinema, literature, and culinary traditions – in short, to the easily exportable products of French culture – confirm this initial impression. Even the article's hopeful conclusion that French culture will one day 'reclaim its reputation as a cultural power'[19] does nothing to offer a more complex view of culture.

Stereotypical images of French culture – such as wearing a beret, riding a bicycle, carrying a baguette, eating cheese, and drinking wine – are hardly useful for developing a French *écocritique*. In order to avoid such reductionist understandings of culture and cultural differences, it is helpful to consider comparative studies that discuss the specificities of the culture of nature and environmentalism in France: historian Caroline Ford traces the influence of American national parks on the creation of French *réserves naturelles* in colonised Algeria;[20] Jean Viard contrasts Catholic theology, which gave rise to long-lasting agricultural traditions in France, with the Protestant ethics that informed wilderness preservation policies in the USA.[21] These comparative studies can be used to construct an understanding of attitudes towards nature and environment in France, as long as

from a similar economic system in the USA. Prasad does not go so far as to speak of French exceptionalism, but she points to a specific socio-political system that is unique to France and its history. Monica Prasad, 'Why Is France So French? Culture, Institutions, and Neoliberalism, 1974–1981', *The American Journal of Sociology* 111.2 (2005), 357–407.

17 Donald Morrison, 'In Search of Lost Time', *Time* [Europe, Middle East and Africa] (21 November 2007), <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1686532,00.html> [accessed 16 May 2016].

18 Bernard-Henri Lévy, 'American Talk of the Death of French Culture Says More about Them than about Us', *The Guardian* (8 December 2007), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/dec/08/france.international> [accessed 16 May 2016].

19 Morrison, 'In Search of Lost Time'.

20 Caroline Ford, 'Nature, Culture and Conservation in France and her Colonies 1840–1940', *Past & Present* 183 (2004), 173–98.

21 Jean Viard, *Le Tiers Espace: essai sur la nature* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1990).

they are not used to assert rigid categorical differences. As Ford's example shows, environmental policies do not develop in isolation; they are the product of cross-cultural exchanges, even if they play out in different ways.

Comparative studies, if carefully done, avoid generalisations about cultural differences, and argue for a well-defined politics of diversity. In literary studies, Gayatri Spivak asserts the need for a comparative approach that reads texts in their original language, and cultivates a 'care for language and idiom'.[22] For a French *écocritique*, this means paying careful attention to etymologies of words like *nature* and *écologie*. Spivak also points to the need for a 'responsible comparativism' that avoids foregone conclusions through attunement to the ways in which literary texts use language to subvert ideas about nationalist identity.[23] In other words, a comparative approach to themes like nature and environment must be complemented by close readings of texts that complicate any notion of a specific culture of nature. Even when a French literary text speaks of *nature* or *écologie*, it may do so in order to destabilise or trouble commonly held meanings of these words. By focussing on individual texts, comparative literary studies provide a way of charting the muddy waters of culture, nation and language.

Anthropology and ethnography, concerned with carefully navigating these waters, work to expose claims that are used to police cultural boundaries. In 'Writing Against Culture' (1991), Lila Abu-Lughod critiques the normalising effects of anthropological descriptions that project fixed identities onto others' cultural practices. In order to counter this use of culture, Abu-Lughod calls for 'ethnographies of the particular' that do not move towards generalising claims about 'culture'.[24] A French *écocritique* can take heed of Abu-Lughod's warning by focussing on the particular as far as possible. Through close and detailed readings of French literary texts, it can delve into particularities as a way of countering the idea of French culture as a monolithic whole. It can use literature to deconstruct notions of a geopolitically bounded France and a singular French language.

Another way to avoid generalisations is to acknowledge the specific socio-historical and material conditions that have influenced my thinking about French *écocritique*. I have been able to outline such an approach because I am not working strictly within French literary studies, but from a comparative perspective in a

22 Gayatri C. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 19.

23 Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 26.

24 Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Writing Against Culture', in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. by R. G. Fox (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991), 137–62.

Franco-Canadian context. I have had the opportunity to participate in transnational dialogues about ecocriticism, and so have experienced the problems and the possibilities of international (largely monolingual) cultural exchanges. This has made me aware of the political factors that affect how literary studies are taught and practised on each side of the Atlantic.

In the end, *l'exception française* is neither fact nor fiction. It has been used to emphasise cultural difference, occasionally polarising national identity, and occasionally outlining diverse and changing conditions and characteristics. It may have run its course in today's globalised world, but it remains part of how French cultural difference has been constructed. A French *écocritique* does not subscribe to the notion of exceptionalism; instead, it calls for mindfulness of the particularities of the contemporary French context. As an imagined community different from nation and state, and as an evolving *oikos* for language and literature, culture matters in the field of environmental literary studies.

Cultures and climates of literary studies

The case of 'French theory' is a fascinating example of the ways in which systems of thought migrate across cultures without transcending cultural differences. 'French theory', which was almost completely absent from the French intellectual scene in the 1970s, thrived in North American universities, as identity politics drove new feminist, African-American, gay and lesbian approaches, and cultural studies more generally. As François Cusset points out, theorists like Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Michel Foucault garnered much more attention in the USA than in France in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.[25] Even if these thinkers are now more recognised in France, queer studies, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, and gender studies remain largely marginalised.[26] For scholars working in these areas, it has been difficult – at times impossible – to receive recognition within the French institutional world.[27]

25 François Cusset, *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).

26 In terms of the reception of queer theory in France, see Scott Gunther, '*Alors*, Are We "Queer" Yet?' *The Gay & Lesbian Review* 12.3 (2005), 23–5; Claire Boyle, 'Post-Queer (Un)Made in France?', *Paragraph* 35.2 (2012), 265–80.

27 Anne Simon offers a careful comparative analysis of the rise of Animal Studies in North America, in contrast to its development as *la question animale* in France. Anne Simon, 'Animality and Contemporary French Literary Studies: Overview and Perspectives', trans. by C. Maillard and S. Posthumus, in *French Thinking about Animals*, ed. by L. Mackenzie and S. Posthumus (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 75–88.

Given that North American ecocriticism is firmly rooted in political positions and orientations – deep ecology, ecofeminism, environmental justice, or social ecology, to name a few – its reading of texts is necessarily political. While this poses less of a problem in the North American context, it is clear that literary studies in France continue to be constructed along the dividing lines of 'theoretical' and 'political'. In *Petite écologie des études littéraires* [*Brief Ecology of Literary Studies*] (2011), Jean-Marie Schaeffer explains that general theories of reading and fiction need to be kept separate from more applied, 'practical' approaches such as feminist studies, post-colonial studies, etc.[28] While other French scholars dismiss such 'studies', Schaeffer recognises their value, but reduces it to the classroom; in other words, to a pedagogical value. So where does this leave a French *écocritique*?

Ecocriticism came to France by way of American and English Studies departments. Americanists working on nature writing by poets, authors and thinkers like Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard and Rick Bass first introduced ecocriticism to a French readership.[29] This is not that different from the spread of ecocriticism in places outside North America. What was specific to the reception of ecocriticism in France was the careful distancing that took place with respect to what was considered solely an American phenomenon. In their 2005 introduction to a collection of ecocritical articles about American nature writing, Tom Pughe and Michel Granger explain that the environmental imagination arises from 'des préoccupations logées au cœur de l'histoire culturelle américaine [preoccupations lodged at the heart of American cultural history]'.[30] It is true that nature writing as a genre does not have an exact equivalent in the French literary tradition.[31] The understanding of ecocriticism as solely the study of nature writing meant that this critical approach was seen as having very little to do with French literary studies.

28 Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Petite écologie des études littéraires: pourquoi et comment étudier la littérature* (Vincennes: Marchaisse, 2011).

29 The attitude towards American nature writing can take a slightly condescending tone; Catherine Larrère describes the genre as 'le récit de ce-que-j'ai-vu-dans-la-forêt'. Catherine Larrère, 'Éthiques de l'environnement', *Multitudes* 24 (2006), 75–84 (80).

30 Tom Pughe and Michel Granger, 'Introduction', *Revue française d'études américaines* 106 (2005), 3–7 (4).

31 Bertrand Guest argues convincingly that Élisée Reclus's writings are similar in tone and genre to those of Henry David Thoreau in that they combine the essay (*essai* is difficult to translate; 'non-fiction' might be a fitting rendering), natural history and a strong ecological political orientation. Bertrand Guest, 'L'Essai, forme-sens de l'écologie littéraire naissante? Humboldt, Thoreau, Reclus', *Romantisme* 164 (2014), 63–73.

Literary representations of place and landscape have given rise to critical approaches in France that avoid taking an explicitly eco-political stance. Bertrand Westphal's *La Géocritique* [*Geocriticism*] (2007) calls for a return to the real in its emphasis on actual places (largely urban) named in literary texts,[32] but remains silent on how such an approach may be brought to bear on the environmental crisis. In *Pour une géographie littéraire* [*Towards a Literary Geography*] (2014), Michel Collot provides an overview of space and place in contemporary French literary studies, but does not name *écocritique*.[33] In an earlier article, Collot speaks of bringing together literature and geography in order to understand literary representations of space: 'l'espace semble ainsi profiter de la crise du récit et de la psychologie traditionnelle pour occuper une place croissante dans la fiction contemporaine [space seems to benefit from the crisis of narrative genre and traditional psychology, taking up a growing place in contemporary fiction]'.[34] He cites a number of French contemporary 'récits d'espace' that call into question the centrality of the Cartesian subject, and explore the representation of place by experimenting with literary form. In the end, though, Collot retreats from an engagement with place as a physical reality that has formed – and transformed – human culture and civilisation.

The situation is different in the case of *géopoétique* – an approach that places an 'emphasis on developing a body and mind relationship to the earth'.[35] Geopoetics, founded by Kenneth White (a bilingual writer, traveler and philosopher who is Scottish by birth, but who has lived in France for many years), has spread quickly into an archipelago of different research centres, institutes and groups, only some of which have homes in academic settings. The main goal of geopoetics is to develop practices of reading and writing that cultivate more careful and attentive relationships to the physical world. White explains:

> Un monde, bien compris, émerge du contact entre l'esprit et la Terre. Quand le contact est sensible, intelligent, subtil, on a un monde au sens plein de ce mot, quand le contact

32 Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique: réel, fiction, espace* (Paris: Minuit, 2007).

33 Michel Collot, *Pour une géographie littéraire* (Paris: Corti, 2014).

34 Michel Collot, 'Pour une géographie littéraire', *Fabula-LhT* 8 (2011), 34 paragraphs, <http://www.fabula.org/lht/8/collot.html> [accessed 16 May 2016], paragraph 30. Interestingly, Collot uses a similar term – 'crisis' – but does not venture beyond cultural representation, steering well away from the political territory of ecological crisis.

35 Rachel Bouvet and Stephanie Posthumus, 'Eco- and Geo- Approaches in French and Francophone Literary Studies', in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. by H. Zapf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 385–412 (393).

> est stupide et brutal, on n'a plus de monde, plus de culture, seulement, et de plus en plus, une accumulation d'immonde.[36]
>
> [A world, well conceived, emerges from a contact between Mind and Earth. When the contact is sensitive, intelligent, subtle, you have a world in the full sense of the word. When the contact is stupid and brutal, you have nothing like a world, nothing like a culture, only, and increasingly so, an accumulation of refuse, including a lot of 'cultural products'].

At the heart of geopoetics is a transdisciplinary approach that aims to improve understanding of the relationships between humans and diverse environments. Geopoetics and ecocriticism follow parallel paths, but have developed in distinct linguistic and intellectual communities.

An ecologically informed view of literature and cultural texts is similarly adopted in the case of *écopoétique*. In the article 'Littérature & écologie' ['Literature and Ecology'] (2008), Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe define an *écologique* that dislodges the author or artist as the source of meaning, instead looking to the material conditions and the reception of a work of art. They prefer the term *écopoétique* to *écocritique* because it provides the possibility of distinguishing a more aesthetically oriented approach to themes of place and environment in art.[37] Although key ecocritical texts such as Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1996) are summarised,[38] and the urgency of the environmental crisis is acknowledged, ecological politics take a backseat to ecological aesthetics. In this way, Blanc, Chartier and Pughe offer a rethinking of ecocritical concerns within the context of the French literary tradition, which has always paid careful attention to the role of form and structure.[39]

If *écopoétique* is doing the work of analyzing nature and environment in French literature, and working towards a more general theory about a literary *éco-logique*, why continue to assert the need for a French *écocritique*? While it is true that *écopoétique* engages with the questions of aesthetics and poetics, it tends to sidestep the issue of political engagement that is at the heart of ecocriticism. Given the

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36 Kenneth White, 'Le Grand Champ de la géopoétique', *Institut International de Géopoétique* (2015), 18 paragraphs, <http://institut-geopoetique.org/fr/textes-fondateurs/8-le-grand-champ-de-la-geopoetique> [accessed 25 May 2016], paragraph 9.

37 Nathalie Blanc, Denis Chartier and Thomas Pughe, 'Littérature & écologie: vers une écopoétique', *Écologie & Politique* 36 (2008), 17–28.

38 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1995).

39 For further discussion in this regard, see Pierre Schoentjes, *Ce qui a lieu: essai d'écopoétique* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2015).

importance and originality of ecological politics in France, such a move misses an excellent opportunity to bring together two spheres of knowledge: literary texts and ecological thinking. While French literary critics may be hesitant to make such a move, thinkers like Latour and Serres are already doing so, calling for new narratives about our current geo- and eco-conditions.[40]

Key concepts for a French 'écocritique'

Rooted in theories of place, space and landscape, *écopoétique*, *géocritique*, *géopoétique*, and *géographie littéraire* have their place alongside a French *écocritique*. They contribute to a better understanding of how literature represents the ways in which humans imagine the world and their relationship to it. They also offer a viewpoint for understanding the particular climate of French literary studies. Yet there needs to be more work on ecological thinking as an essential component of analyzing literary representations of space, place and landscape. One French scholar who has been working to fill this gap is Alain Suberchicot. In his first book, *Littérature américaine et écologie* [*American Literature and Ecology*] (2002), Suberchicot adopts a position similar to that of other Americanists in France, presenting ecocriticism and nature writing as strictly an American phenomenon.[41] However, in his second book, *Littérature et environnement* [*Literature and Environment*] (2012), Suberchicot works with three national literatures – American, Chinese, and French – as he analyzes literary texts in which environmental themes are raised.[42] While I applaud Suberchicot's call for a comparative ecocritical approach, his study looks for similarities across different national literatures, leaving less room for the specificities of the cultural contexts under consideration.

My own approach draws inspiration from the work of Verena Andermatt Conley, who outlines the important contributions that French thinkers have made to ecological thinking in the last fifty years. In *Ecopolitics* (1997), Conley examines a wide array of thinkers, from Claude Lévi-Strauss to Michel de Certeau, from Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers to Hélène Cixous and Luce

40 In 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', Latour ends by asking how we can tell the stories of all sources of agency on Gaia, not only those of the Earthbound (humans). Bruno Latour, 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', *New Literary History* 45.1 (2014), 1–18.

41 Alain Suberchicot, *Littérature américaine et écologie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

42 Alain Suberchicot, *Littérature et environnement: pour une écocritique comparée* (Paris: Champion, 2012).

Irigaray.[43] Post-structuralism constitutes, according to Conley, a deconstruction of an anthropocentric view, and a shift towards an ecological view of differential processes in a material world. In *Spatial Ecologies* (2012), Conley illustrates that the 'spatial turn' in French contemporary thought comprises a political ecology in the sense that it asks what makes place habitable.[44] Unlike Collot, Conley works to close the gap between ecological thinking and the spatial imagination. She does not, however, include the analysis of literary texts in her book, and so creates an opening for an *écocritique* that brings together ecological thinking, political reading, and French literature.

I will briefly outline two of the critical terms and theoretical concepts that I am developing for a French *écocritique*: ecological subjectivity and ecological dwelling.[45] Given the number of contemporary French thinkers who are redefining human and non-human relations, my choice of Félix Guattari and Michel Serres may appear restrictive, but the concepts that I am articulating are not taken solely from their work. They are the result of reading these thinkers alongside the fictional works of two contemporary French authors: Marie Darrieussecq and Marie-Hélène Lafon. The general concepts of French ecological thought become entangled with the particularities of each story-world, complicating the relationship between philosophy and literature so that neither has precedence in a French ecocritical approach.

Ecological subjectivity

In response to the anthropocentric thinking of neoliberalism and consumer capitalism, ecocriticism has adopted what has occasionally been a categorical and problematic anti-anthropocentrism. The environmental text had been defined as one that gives centre stage to the natural world,[46] yet much literature continues to be driven by human-derived plots and characters. Even in nature writing, the central lens for describing the physical world continues to be the human I/eye, and

43 Verena A. Conley, *Ecopolitics: The Environment in Poststructuralist Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997).

44 Verena A. Conley, *Spatial Ecologies: Urban Sites, State and World-Space in French Cultural Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

45 For a more in-depth engagement, see my *French 'Écocritique': Reading Contemporary French Theory and Fiction Ecologically* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

46 See Buell's definition of the environmental text in *The Environmental Imagination*, 6–8.

human language is the central tool. A French *écocritique* begins with the premise that the human subject cannot be so easily dissolved into the environment.

Without rehabilitating Cartesian dualism or a subject/object binary, Félix Guattari builds a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which subjectivity takes form within environments, and apart from them. In *Les Trois Écologies*, Guattari describes the material processes of subjectification and desubjectification taking place in mental, social and environmental ecologies.[47] These three ecologies form the basis of Guattari's ecosophical thinking that remains hopeful about, yet wary of, the possibilities made available by new media and technologies. By carefully attending to subjectivities as dynamic, transforming and relational processes, Guattari offers a way of defining ecological subjectivity as something other than a set of practices or characteristics (such as 'environmentally friendly'). In addition, Guattari turns to literature and the arts for examples of a new 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm' that works to undo the hold of advanced capitalism on the contemporary imagination.[48]

The act of pairing Guattari's ecosophy with Marie Darrieussecq's novels *Bref séjour chez les vivants* [*A Brief Stay among the Living*] (2001) and *Le Pays* [*The Country*] (2005) illustrates the literary imagination's contribution to (re)thinking the processes of subjectivity that emerge in and from a material world.[49] In her novels, Darrieussecq explores the state of flux in which the subject is caught as she – Darrieussecq's main characters and narrators are all female – struggles against and with language to express and explode the limits of being and becoming. Subjectivity is always embodied in Darrieussecq's novels, and necessarily involves a set of ecological conditions that change as the character inhabits different places and times. In the end, ecological subjectivity is a tenuous, fragile affair that terminates in death as often as it gives birth to new life.

Darrieussecq's emphasis on processes of female subjectification and de-subjectification is also a way to counter Guattari's lack of attention to gender differences in his theorising about ecosophy. While refusing to self-identify as a feminist, Darrieussecq speaks out against French gendering of pronouns where the *masculin* always dominates the *féminin*.[50] Darrieussecq's concern about how language informs our perception of the world is complemented by a desire to use language

47 Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies*, 32–53.

48 Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies*, 67–8.

49 Marie Darrieussecq, *Bref séjour chez les vivants* (Paris: POL, 2001); *Le Pays* (Paris: POL, 2005).

50 Marie Darrieussecq, 'Je est unE autre', in *Écrire l'histoire d'une vie*, ed. by A. Oliver (Santa Maria Capua Vetere: Spartaco, 2007), 106–20.

to create new worlds. Darrieussecq's novels are deeply engaged with what it means to be a living being in a material, vegetal, animal world. She explains that her aim is to expose readers to the materiality of the world on a microscopic level:

> Le monde est aussi fait d'électrons, de microbes, d'ondes, de planètes… bientôt sans doute de clones, d'OGN, de nouveaux sons, de nouvelles odeurs… etc… Je participe au mouvement permanent des défricheurs. Je veux ouvrir des yeux sous les yeux des lecteurs, des oreilles sous leurs oreilles, une nouvelle peau sous leur peau.[51]
>
> [The world is also made up of electrons, microbes, waves, planets… and soon, no doubt, clones, GMOs, new sounds, new smells… etc… I am part of the ongoing movement of discoverers. I want to open the eyes that are underneath the readers' eyes, the ears underneath their ears, the skin underneath their skin.]

By exploring Darrieussecq's fictional world, the reader discovers the embedded and embodied nature of subjectivity in a world composed of local, regional landscapes, as well as global connections and technologies. As Guattari notes, literature – and art more generally – can bring about change, not because of an inherent political message, but by placing the reader in the position of co-creating new worlds, new subjectivities and new practices.

Ecological dwelling

Ecological dwelling, the second concept that I am developing, raises the question of the ways in which we create connections to a place that we call home. In *Ecocriticism* (2011), Greg Garrard defines dwelling as the 'long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work'.[52] He examines models of rural dwelling in georgic literature, and calls ecocritics to explore the inflections of this model in today's contemporary culture.[53] Responding to this call, I articulate the notion of ecological dwelling in terms of the particular context of the *paysans* who have all but disappeared from the landscape in France today. But where Garrard emphasises 'long-term imbrication', I underline continued change and transformation. I define ecological dwelling as a set of practices that evolve with respect to new socio-historical and material conditions.

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51 Marie Darrieussecq, Becky Miller and Martha Holmes, 'Entretien réalisé par Becky Miller et Martha Holmes en décembre 2001', *The University of Arizona* (2001), <http://darrieussecq.arizona.edu/fr/entretien-réalisé-par-becky-miller-et-martha-holmes-en-décembre-2001> [accessed 16 May 2016].

52 Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2011), 117.

53 Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 145.

In this larger sense, ecological dwelling emerges in multiple places, and at multiple times, without simply reiterating previous modes of living.

The notion of the rural continues to mark the French cultural imagination. Jean-Pierre Le Goff notes in *La Fin du Village* [*The End of the Village*] (2012) that 'dans l'imaginaire national, la France reste encore associée à un univers rural et villageois [in the national imaginary, France remains linked to a rural, village setting]'.[54] But rather than lament the end of rural life as Le Goff does, I examine the ways in which the *paysan* can be framed in terms of a larger transformative moment in French culture. According to Serres, the reduction of the French farming population over the last sixty years represents a dramatic and destabilising change.[55] Yet he takes up the figure of the *paysan* as a way of outlining a more general relationship to knowledge and the world. In *Les Cinq Sens* [*The Five Senses*] (1985), he examines the kinds of landscapes that traditional farming has created – patches and bits, sewn together *pagus* by *pagus* – and asks how we can extend this model of dwelling.[56] This does not mean that we all become farmers; rather, it means that we learn to cultivate knowledge piece by piece, and always only contingently, according to specific experiences, activities and practices.

In addition to using the variegated countryside as a symbol for thinking contingently about the world, Serres also adopts the figure of the *paysan* as a way of thinking about ecological dwelling on a global scale. Without romanticising a lost way of life, Serres works to imagine an ecological relationship with the land that takes into account the contemporary realities of GMOs, global warming, and advances in biotechnology.[57] He speaks of a *paysannerie généralisée* that translates into caring and managing the world on a global scale, all the while knowing that nature's power goes far beyond our own. Serres asserts that a relationship of symbiosis, not parasitism, must emerge if we hope to continue to call the earth our home. In this way, the *paysan* becomes a symbol for our constantly transforming relationship to the land; one that takes on a global scope in the contemporary world.

Much like Serres's writing about the *paysan*, Marie-Hélène Lafon depicts rural life as a story of loss and transformation in her novels *Les Derniers Indiens* [*The Last Indians*] (2008), *L'Annonce* [*The Advertisement*] (2009) and *Les Pays* [*The Countries*]

54 Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *La Fin du village: une histoire française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 11.

55 Serres, *Hominescence*, 89–91.

56 Michel Serres, *Les Cinq Sens* (Paris: Grasset, 1985), 259–80.

57 Michel Serres, 'Peut-on dire encore le pouvoir spirituel?', *Critique* 726 (2007), 803–29. In *Détachement*, comparing farming practices in France and China, Serres discusses the ways in which agricultural practices have informed cultural practices. Michel Serres, *Détachement: apologue* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986).

(2012).[58] They reveal a similar need to articulate a crucial turning point in terms of the ways in which relationships to the land are imagined in France. While Serres focusses on the emergence of global ecological problems as the moment of change, Lafon draws attention to individual stories and experiences as they play out in local places, specifically in the Cantal. Lafon's characters develop intimate, but not harmonious, relationships with objects and beings. *Intense* might be a better word to describe the characters' experience of a world that is very present, and includes kitchen tables, chairs, silverware, cows, dogs, storms, and trees. In other words, *rural* does not mean *nature* in Lafon's novels. Her rural world offers the body a sense of intense presence, but can also stifle connections and interactions with others. It is when the rural becomes a place of transformation capable of integrating others and adopting new modes of living on the land that it illustrates ecological dwelling.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to comment on the subtitle of my chapter, with its echoes of Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).[59] I am certainly not suggesting that a French *écocritique* follows acceptable social conventions by day and then performs murderous, violent acts by night. I am using the adjective 'strange' in the etymological sense of *external* or *outside* since the very word *écocritique* – a neologism created from the English term 'ecocriticism' – contains traces of an 'elsewhere'. The combination of the English adjective and the French noun gives rise, moreover, to a sense of linguistic dissonance, as it brings together two unlike things to form a bilingual hybrid that sits between different literary traditions and histories. This linguistic dissonance forces a reader to reflect on the ways in which language performs culture in the area of ecology and environment. In addition, it reveals an in-between position that is highly productive for formulating, exploring and experimenting with new ecological concepts and approaches. Emerging outside the 'governing bodies' of French literary studies, a French *écocritique* can continue to challenge commonly held notions of 'nature', 'ecology' and 'environment', as well as references to 'representation', 'mimesis' and 'aesthetics'.

There is not a universal set of ethics and politics that a French *écocritique* seeks to apply to literary and cultural texts. The meaning of the adjective 'ecological'

58 Marie-Hélène Lafon, *Les Derniers Indiens* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 2008); *L'Annonce* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 2009); *Les Pays* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 2012).

59 Robert L. Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886).

is constructed and deconstructed through the interpretive process, revealing a micro-politics of diverse encounters and orientations. This does not mean that there is no passage from the micro-politics of an ecocritical reading of the text to the macro-politics of ecological thinking. But this passage very much resembles the one described by Serres in *Le Passage du Nord-Ouest* [*The Northwest Passage*] (1980): singular, transitory, time- and space-dependent, full of obstacles, yet extremely enriching. In the end, it is this transitory passage that brings the reader to the real world, one which is 'frangé de sommeil et de songes [fringed with sleep and dreams]', 'plongé dans la démence et la beauté [immersed in madness and beauty]', 'concret, flottant, solide, fragile, précis et fondu, résistant ou sans prise [concrete, flowing, solid, fragile, sharp and blurred, steadfast, or slippery]'.[60]

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